

Diasporic Literature

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Editorial...

Dear Readers,

In the pages of “Diasporic Literature,” we embark on a profound journey of understanding, empathy, and cultural exploration. Through the the One Day National E-Conference on Diasporic Literature organised by Department of English, Mahatma Phule Mahavidyalaya, Kingaon we delve into the diverse and rich tapestry of human experience, transcending geographical boundaries and bridging the gaps between cultures. Within these pages, you will encounter stories that resonate with the struggles, triumphs, joys, and sorrows of individuals navigating the complexities of displacement, identity, and belonging.

Many of the researches have put the light on migration and exile to narratives of cultural hybridity and resilience, each work within this collection offers a unique perspective on the diasporic experience. As an editor, my aim is not only to showcase the literary brilliance found within diasporic literature but also to spark meaningful conversations about the universal themes that unite us all. Through these stories, we hope to foster a deeper appreciation for the beauty of diversity and the power of storytelling to transcend barriers.

Dr. Prabhakar Shivraj Swami

Message

Dr. Prabhakar Swami's edited volume will prove to be highly useful for researchers and students of both Diasporic and Post colonial Literature. This book will be Arts and merits a high recommendation as an addition to library collections of Diaspora as well as literary and cultural studies.

Dr. Baban Bodke

Principal

Mahatma Phule Mahavidyalaya, Kingaon

Member of Academic Council & Board of Studies (Hindi)

Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded

Diasporic Literature is a major contribution to the literature field. Contributors from diverse geographic affiliations took an important new step in reasoning the usefulness of Diaspora as a theoretical framework because of the comparative approach. It will become an important reference for students and scholars.

Dr. Mallikarjun Karajgi

Director, National Service Scheme

Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University Nanded &

Associate Professor & Head Department of English

Smt. Sushiladevi Deshmukh Senior College, Latur

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Diasporic Perception in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason and The Glass Palace*

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Abstract

India has produced many talented writers who serve as a source of inspiration to the imminent generation. The writers give us a picture of Indian society and they also cover different issues including the various problems faced by Indian people. The scattering of populations and cultures across various geographical places and spaces examines the diasporic study. The global Indian diaspora today plays a significant role in the socio-economic and political sphere of the host countries. The International Organization for Migration provides a broad definition of Diaspora as "members of ethnic and national communities who have left, but maintain links with their homelands". The term Diaspora conveys the idea of transnational populations, living in one place, while still maintaining relations with their homelands. The research paper emphasizes the diasporic view through the characters in the novel. Amitav Ghosh highlights the dislocation of people because of depression and existential rootlessness in his debut novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986). The disturbed mental condition of the displaced immigrants weaved throughout the novel. The characters in the novel are forced to accept the cultural displacement, but the state of migrants remains problematic as they are just not able to delete the memory of their native land from their mind. Amitav Ghosh undertakes a journey of exhuming reasons for the diasporic consciousness of human beings through his novels. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh writes about the predicament of migrants. The novel covers the sad episode of the last king of Burma and his doomed family that is exiled to Ratnagiri in

India. The family of kings and queens were left with no other alternative but to live with and among commoners. With the outbreak of a plague and less money to maintain servants there was no other alternative but to allow the villagers to build a village around the compound of Outram House. Thus the deported Royal Family was forced to mingle with the commoners. This new way of life for the Royal Family may be summed up as follows: "The sense of exile results in a deep feeling of loss, ache, separation, yearning for recuperation and restoration" (Shukla 7). Migration proves to be a curse for these people while the same migration proves to be a blessing for Rajkumar, a face of colonizer in the guise of the colonized. Rajkumar succeeds in getting a major teak contract to a railway company. In the case of Rajkumar, migration transforms his character as he rises from coolie to a timber merchant. Migration becomes an important theme of his novel as each journey serves to impact the identity of the traveller or the migrant.

Keywords: Diaspora, Amitav Ghosh, Migration, Identity,

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Nostalgia, Cultural dislocation, Cultural diversity, homeland.

The first novel *The Circle of Reason*, travels across the border, from a small village in Bengal, moving via Kerala to a fictitious state in the middle east, reaching in denouncement the Sahara desert. The novel symbolically deals with three phases of human life: “Satwa”- symbolizes the search for wisdom, “Rajas”- symbolizes the life of passion and “Tama”- stands for darkness and destruction. This journey unites all the characters in various places. It is not an ordinary journey, rather a voice of the eternal reformer with a compassionate insight. Each journey of self-understanding originates in a physical voyage. Migration and travel dislocates a person from his homeland physically but psychologically they cherish old memories and culture from which their living style has emerged.

Ghosh shows how a number of lower middle class people ferry across the Indian Ocean towards Al-Ghazira in order to earn livelihood. One of the major tropes in Ghosh’s fictional oeuvre revolves round the displacement, dislocation that affect their sense of identity. The characters in the novel are forced to accept the cultural displacement, but the state of migrants remains problematic as they are just not able to delete the memory of their native land from their mind. Migration, displacement, dislocation and diasporic experience impact individual identity in a globalized world. There are two important aspects of any migratory experience—material condition and cultural interaction. The migrants may not always find their new place of habitat materially advantageous, for the dislocated people often are forced to lead life in abject poverty. The migrants may be in danger in foreign countries because of the various laws and restrictions imposed upon the entry of people. Ghosh depicts the painful life of the migrants, particularly dislocated women in the novel *The Circle of Reason*. The conflict- torn life at home, exploitation of all sorts, economic depravity forces women like Zindi, Karthamma, Kulfi, to migrate to Al-Ghazira. These women suffer from lack of economic resources resulting in their exploitation. The plight of these migrants problematizes the discourse of globalization that looks upon migration as an innovative way of being in the world. While the world witnesses gradual dispersal of people in this globalized age, Ghosh seeks to focus his attention on this traumatic aspect of migratory life for the dispossessed, deprived and minority people. However Ghosh also shows the possibility of change and prospect of better future for some diasporic people and migrants who exploit the prevalent socio-cultural condition in their favour. The point I wish to make here is that Ghosh presents multi-dimensionality of migratory experience as lived by dislocated people in different points of time. He portrayed life of a boy whose name is Alu who was staying in India. He had to face some acute circumstance and due to this, he had to leave the domicile in India and preferred to run away to other country i.e. Middle East. During this adventure period, he came across different people of other countries too. Of course, consequently he bears some unknown challenges and digests the cultural displacement and alienation which he could not share it with others ungrudging. Amitav Ghosh has personally undergone these circumstances. He has incorporated this in his fiction through the fictional characters and endeavored to evoke feeling of readers while reading this novel. No doubt the novel *The Circle of Reason* focuses on the migration and displacement as also the loneliness. As Alu wanders in various countries due to the accusation of Balram’s murder. As he says,

“Foreign places are similar in that they are not home. It would have made no difference where that bit of land was al -Glazira or Antarctica the journey was within. (266)

Amitav Ghosh through this novel explained that a man had to face so many problems due to the migration. He has to suffer the alienation, self identity, displacement, etc. The writer enunciates the role of Alu in this novel. He has on personal level undergone these circumstances and travelled through various countries and it derived him immense benefit as he learnt a lot from these countries. But still sometimes he feels deadly disappointed due to the nature of migration and he could not get stable with migration

identity. Again we come across cultural displacement in this fiction as he enunciated,

“What does it matter whether it is Gangajal to be used for cleaning the place where Kuli’s dead by is to be placed of carbolic acid?” (P. N. 411).

It is thus interpreted that a lot of cultural disputes cropped up consequently upon the drastically undesired migration.

They had to habituate the use of Gangajal on the demise of a person whereas; some persons criticize on the traditional way while they do not believe in it. As such, naturally, there has been cultural disintegration and displacement. Hence, Amitav Ghosh tries to explain feeling of the migrated people living in other countries whereas they could not share their feelings but conscientious person can easily understand their inner emotions. This dejectedness was spread all over in his novel. Somehow he focuses on the universal citizenship in which a person should be free from all the restrictions, botheration and laws from the man-made rules and regulation. There should be no barriers to go here and there everyone has a right to go to the desired destination as also any country in the world. Naturally his novels come under the influence of diasporic nature.

Amitav Ghos’s *The Shadow Lines* published in the year 1988 deals with varied issues related to diaspora and history. The structural division of the novel in two parts, Going Away and Coming Home symbolizes displacement as the ambivalent meaning of home. The glorious memories of Calcutta and Dhaka are beautifully pictured by the characters longing for their homeland. The novel is has the background of the Second World War, the partition of India (of Bangladesh), the communal conflict in Bangal and Calcutta in 1964. The novel focuses on the political decision taken by then government in India and the aftermath of it. The novel also has nationalistic concerns. Various stories in the novel are representative of the theme of diaspora, nationalism and partition. The past home memories act as a recurring background throughout the novel.

Amitav Ghosh problematizes the issue of identity by offering a migrant perspective through which the characters who suffer geographical and cultural displacement negotiate their affiliation. No wonder the vision that emerges from Ghosh’s works is diverse, multi- dimensional. In *The Shadow Lines* which critiques the monolithic concept of nationalism. Ghosh shows how spatially and culturally displaced people perceive their identity. Two important characters Ila and Thamma look upon their identity from the perspectives of migrants/diaspora. Ila, daughter of an Indian diplomat consciously chooses to settle in England precisely because her spatial movement from her homeland, India to the metropolitan England will, she believes, ensure her freedom. During an altercation with the narrator and his uncle Tridib at a nightclub in Calcutta where she is debarred from dancing with a stranger, Ila explains the reason for her migration to England: ‘Do you know why I chose to settle in England. It’s because of you to enjoy freedom’ (88-89). Understandably the claustrophobic patriarchal culture that imposes the burden of sexual purity on women drives Ila to England. Since her migration is impelled by conservative ambience at home, she tries to relocate her home in a new metropolitan space. She tries to acquire English identity by joining with her classmates in different programmes and by taking part in different movements. But Ila fails to strike her root in the alien place because the rhetoric of exclusive nationalism operative in England ‘otherizes’ her for her racial status. Ghosh suggests that the formation of identity is not just determined on the basis of one’s subjective perception of one’s location in the world. It is on the other hand equally the notion others hold about one. In other words the perception of the world has a strong hold upon the sense of identity one holds. Ila’s desire to assimilate with the English is not fulfilled because her racial identity as an Asian immigrant prevents her from being accepted by her English classmates. She thus becomes a victim of racist attack and her dashing boyfriend Nick Price whom she subsequently marries avoids her company in the public for fear of being seen with an Asian. What we see in Ila is that Ila’s immigrant status stands in the way of

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attaining the identity she covets so much. Ila's case illustrates the pangs of the first generation immigrant who can neither completely abandon her older identity nor embrace new identity. Despite her radical desire to get rid of Indian patriarchal morality, she does not altogether reject it. She confides to the narrator her sexual purity—something she inherits from her cultural upbringing and something for which she cannot accept Nick wholeheartedly after the latter's sexual promiscuity is revealed. Consequently Ila has to lead a life of compromise with her husband who leads a parasitic life upon the wealth of Ila's father. Ila hovers between two cultures—the culture of her ancestral homeland she rejects and the culture of the land of her relocation that rejects her. She remains incarcerated within the confused state and cannot resolve the crisis in her identity. Ghosh's presentation of Ila critiques the discourse of globalization and cosmopolitanism that sometimes seeks to elide the pangs of life as lived in diasporic space.

Thamma on the other hand fails to construct a stable sense of her identity. This is because of the geographical and cultural displacement she has suffered as a result of the Partition. After the death of her husband she comes to Calcutta in search of job and remains confined within her nation that is 'messily at odd with her birthplace'

(152) following the partition. No wonder people like Thamma who experience displacement because of the partition of the subcontinent, cannot construct an unproblematic identity for themselves. This is because their sense of identity is severely fractured by the displacement imposed upon them by history. Ghosh critiques the nationalist discourse that emphasizes upon the rigidity of territorial borders by problematizing the notion of home as perceived by Thamma. Home as the fixed coordinate of one's identity is disrupted in the conceptual framework of the displaced people like Thamma. Her rigorous emphasis on the discreteness of national borders may have been inspired by the nationalist rhetoric that seeks to construct separate spaces along the border. But even though she tries to construct her identity in consonance with the nationalist discourse, she cannot align herself completely with her national identity. In fact Ghosh critiques the exclusivist nationalist discourse by positing characters like Thamma who perceives deep fissure in her sense of belonging to the land. Her censorship of Ila and the latter's migration to a place she does not belong to stands counter-productive as she herself becomes a foreigner in the land of her birth. No wonder her visit to Dhaka is marked by a strange feelings of unfamiliarity and she constantly searches for all those traces of her earlier Dhaka. Tridib punctures the nationalist discourse by pointing out the deep contradiction as a result of which one becomes a foreigner in one's place of birth. Thamma cannot unproblematically subscribe to the dominant notion of nationalist identity since she is the victim of history that does not grant her the middle class dream of having a neat symmetry between home and nationality. James Clifford offers a perceptive comment on the problematic of identity for people like Thamma by suggesting that people whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be cured by merging into a new national community' (307). No wonder, people like Thamma cannot have any sense of homeliness. In other words she is never at home in her new home in Calcutta. For people like Thamma therefore there is 'no home but in memory'.

The author expressed his painful sentiments through the character of Jethamosha who was staying in the Dhaka country. He is not willing to migrate to the other country from his own. He suggested to his children to go away from it. But he is not agreed to sacrifice his motherland where he has borne and lived from the birth. Here it shows that thought of migration does not change his intention to save his life, while Jethamoshai opposes all restrictions and gets ready to fight all circumstances. Here we find the term 'diasporic' which shows the sentiments of migration from their native country, which is but natural, which, nobody can explain in words. This obscure feeling always attacks in

the minds of other characters and thus contributed to the enlargement of the fiction.

The novel spans over three decades and has three generations of characters. So the novelist has a lot of scope for the free movement in terms of time and space. This novel captures perspective of time and events that bring people together and hold them apart. In this novel Ghosh explains the sufferings of Tridib through the unnamed narrator. The distance draws him even closer and the homeland is elevated to a higher pedestal. He uses personal stories to shed light on the social, political and historical. The characters keep turning back to the homeland—its sacredness, rituals, culture, and thus adopt various families' symbols to help them freeze the image of the homeland in their being. This novel is considered to be a successful novel which stands for its powerful imagination.

Conclusion

In the study of Ghosh's novels *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* we can say that Amitav Ghosh mentions the different diasporic vista in the early Indian diaspora. The main aspect of these novels is the loss of the homeland, national and cultural identity and subaltern consciousness because of the migration, how the labourers try to find a new identity in a foreign land. Thus Ghosh is a prolific Indian Bengali writer belongs to the Diasporic community. The dislocation in the characters explains the great sense of diasporic sufferings. The immigration and alienation as a fact holds a great place in diasporic writings. His novels explore the sense of nostalgia. The haunting effect of losing homeland is considered to be the main aspect of diasporic writings.

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