

QUO VADIS - INDIAN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

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Diaspora, a Latin derivative from dia - two and spora - tracts of land, stands for a person having two Domiciles - the one native and the other acquired. In the British India, the concept of dual citizenship was some what like this. The Indians were citizens of Indian dominion, on one hand and of the large British Empire on the other. Diasporic literature is what great minds of such dual loyalty have thought and expressed in a particular language under the surroundings of a particular climate, culture and country. Thought is free and great ideas and sincere passions can dwell in common and neglected person also. That is why John Keats remarks:

Perhaps the self same song. That found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien Corn ;¹

In the twenty first century, when globalisation has become the talk of the day, it is in the Indian soil only that diaspora can be said to exist, for the nearest word synonymous with diaspora is the Hindi term *ijnd h*, even today one calls one's native place to be the *oru* (country) and the place where one has gone to earn one's bread and butter is termed as *ijnd* (alien country). The post cards received at the places having a money order economy such as distant rural areas of Bihar and Jharkhand and Kumaon and Garhwal hills are replete with crudest epistolary method of diasporic literature in Indian sub-continent.

In cultural context also the keystone of the arch of diaspora is exile at least in India. Lord Rama was asked to spend fourteen years as an ascetic in the Sylvan land of the Middle and Southern India. What went on between him and Sages is the diasporic didacticism of literature. As a result of defeat in the game of dice, Yudhishtira and the Pandavas had to lead a life of exile in the forest and one year exile incognito (*vKkrokI*). It was that sage Vyasa and other hermits used to come and meet him; some gave sermons to attain divine weapons from Lord Shiva as in *fdjkrktuh; e-*; similarly there is the tale of Nala and Damayanti, which, incidentally, had been translated by Sir Edwin Arnold into English also. These are some of the earliest fragments of Diasporic literature in India.

Exile and diaspora were not unknown to Europe and Carolingian Christendom also. The earliest example is the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament. The emergence of Hebrews in the Palestine, after having crossed the Euphrates river is also not unknown. This popular change of dwelling place brought the scriptures of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Kings, Proverbs and Ezra etc. John Simpson in the *Oxford Book of Exile* further enumerates the list on a wider plain :

The world in existentialist terms absurd and indifferent towards one's needs. In such a situation one cannot help but feel like an outsider. Therefore, it is well agreed that exile is the part of human experience. Any Shakespearean play has in it exile in terms of banishment and it dates back even before the time of Pericles of Athens. As for writers of yore there is Ovid whose hyperbolic lamentation on being exiled from Rome for publishing an obscene poem forms the part of his *Tristia*. There is Virgil whose Aeneas leaves Troy by the ghost of his wife thereby displaying the writer's predicament².

So far as William Shakespeare has been concerned it is in *As You Like It* that the Sylvan and Pastoral environment is prevalent in the Forest of Arden. The Duke Senior has been banished, while Duke Frederick had usurped the Dukedom.

Even in *The Tempest* Antonio had usurped the Dukedom of Milan and Prospero has been exiled to the magic island, formerly under the governance of Sycorax and Caliban. Gonzalo gives the Utopian idea of an ideal commonwealth. The concept of the Brave New World is also in the undertone of diasporic expressionism. The reference to the Great Globe itself is an advance prognostication of globalisation. Ovid had written *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, in which Venus teaches her own son Cupid the art and aesthetics of coitus and erogenous Zones in the body of a woman. The book was banned and the author was exiled. All this explains that there is a cultural foundation of diasporic literature also.

The diasporic productions of cultural meanings occurs in many areas such as contemporary music, film, theatre and dance, but writing is one of the most interesting and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global and problematize national, racial and ethnic formulations of identity³.

Apart from the external exile, what is significant is the internal exile, which is synonymous with the concept of internal conflict in a tragedy. The protagonist feels that, though he is claimed to be possessed by several persons as his own, nobody in totality is

ready to accept his existence, if he is not helpful to them in the achievement of their selfish motives. He suffers from a schizophrenic attitude, i.e. he creates a world of his own and starts living in it, totally abandoned by the outer world.

Internal exile is another form of exile that many writers face. Perhaps it is the most damning of all exiles for in this case the exiles stay in their own country and yet are alienated. The Russian writer Dostoevsky looks back in his autobiography on the effect of his Siberian sentence thus, 'I had been out off from society by exile and that I could no longer be useful to it and serve it to the best of my abilities, aspirations and talents'⁴.

Finally, it remains to determine the carpet path for Indian diasporic literature, for all the roads lead not to Corinth. The history of Indian diasporic writing is as old as diaspora itself. The first Indian writing was Dean Mohammad who was born in Patna and after working for fifteen years in the Bengal Army of the British East India company, migrated to nineteenth century Ireland and then to England in 1784.⁵ His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was published in 1794. V.S. Naipaul is the master of the art of characterisation. His characters like Mohun Biswas from *A House for Mr. Biswas* or Ganesh Ramsuman from *The Mystic Masseur* are examples of individuals who are generations away from their original homeland India, but their heritage gives them a consciousness of the past. In this way the diasporic literature has become a unique tradition with T.S. Eliot, who declared that present emerges from the past and the past has to carve a niche for giving place to present.

The girmittias of Africa, the brain drains of U.S.A. the architects of the Middle East harp on the same tune. Wherever the diasporic writers may be, the Indianness never leaves them. It is expected that while returning from the heptamarine terra incognita they should sing once at least with Sir Walter Scott.

This is my own my native land. (Patriotism).

WORK SITED

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2. Simpson, John (ed). *The Oxford Book of Exile*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.
3. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*. London: Routledge, 2002.
4. Simpson, John (ed). *The Oxford Book of Exile*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995.

5. *Kumar, Amitava (ed.) Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate, New York: Routledge, 2004.*