

Diaspora in Consciousness: A Brief Study of Indian Literature

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Abstract

The study of "Diaspora Space" has revealed a rich array of observations regarding identity development, the rise of disparities, and the diverse influence of physical, psychological, and social dispositions on forming personal identities. The scope of this journey transcends personal experiences, encompassing the profound transformations that individuals have experienced in their ties with their homelands in recent decades. The formerly stable relationship has transformed as immigrants have taken on a new identity as global citizens, navigating the boundaries between their countries of origin and their host nations.

This study encompasses a comprehensive analysis of the diverse factors that influence the formation of an individual's identity. This analysis aims to deconstruct the complex interaction between cultural heritage, the prevailing values of the host nation, and individual experiences to understand the complicated formation of a distinct personal identity. This study goes beyond the passive observation of identity and instead explores the active role of the physical environment, mental moods, and social interactions in developing and forming the self.

Keywords: Diaspora, diverse identities, cultural heritage, host nation, interactions, personal identities, etc.

The developing relationship between immigrants and their homelands is of great interest. The previously established stability has been replaced by a contemporary narrative in which immigrants adapt to the demands of global citizenship. This redefined association fosters a novel comprehension of how an individual's origins can harmoniously coexist with the acceptance of other cultural influences, resulting in a distinctive fabric of belonging. Nevertheless, amidst the diverse range of diaspora experiences, the study does not hesitate to acknowledge the presence of inequity. Developing one's identity is not consistent for every individual; rather, it is characterized by variations that arise from social standing, cultural stratification, and institutional prejudices. These discrepancies shed light on the intricate

interplay of various factors that influence the outcomes of individuals in the Diaspora. Every individual inside the narrative represents the broader diaspora encounter, endeavouring to establish a distinct space that aligns with their sense of self (Lahiri, 2010). However, as the storylines progress, it becomes evident that success is not universally achieved. The journey towards establishing a sense of rootedness is characterized by a multitude of paths, as evidenced by the various trajectories of the characters. These trajectories are shaped by their distinct techniques, individual motives, and the obstacles they encounter in their quest for belonging.

Within the context of Diaspora, the quest for a sense of identity and belonging is not a homogeneous progression but a harmonious composition of distinct individual paths. The study acknowledges that individuals in the diaspora area strive to find their place and establish themselves inside the host country. The outcome is a dynamic assemblage of storylines, distinguished by their individualistic tones and nuances (Safron, 1991).

Meaning of Diaspora

The study on Diaspora offers a valuable chance to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of identities within the diaspora context. This perspective provides an advantageous position from which one can watch the process by which identities form and solidify, as well as the complicated dynamics involved in reshaping differences. Through an examination of the intricate aspects of identity difficulties associated with Diaspora, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted influences that mould our identities and their intricate intersections with the global context is attained.

Throughout human history, the need to find food, shelter, and other basic needs has led our species to travel over a large part of the world. Since the beginning of society, our ancestors tended to move around a lot. It gave them the names wanderers and food gatherers. They couldn't afford to stay in one place for long because they needed to keep looking for resources to stay alive. As time went on, the way people lived changed. The standard of living went up, and more complicated social systems grew. This change also led to the creation of states and the drawing of borders, which kept people in certain places and gave them the identity of being subjects of their own countries. The rise and fall of civilization eventually led to a time when people moved across national lines and started new lives in other countries. This is what we now call Diaspora.

People moving and migrating from one place or country to another comprise the features of diaspora. The idea includes national and international immigration, which shows how easily people move worldwide. Over time, the word "diaspora" has come to mean many different things, each showing a different part of this complex process. It has been tied to important historical events, like the migration of Jews, the horrible experience of slavery, and the migration of enterprising people and young professionals looking for new opportunities. People have gone on journeys that cross countries and cultures, taking them through the human experience. Migration trends in the modern world make a complicated picture. Rich countries like the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Australia act like magnets, drawing people from all over the world who are drawn by the promise of chance and wealth. At the same time, developing countries like India, Pakistan, China, and other Asian countries are sending and receiving large numbers of migrants.

The idea of travel has been a big part of stories since ancient times and has taken on new meanings in modern writing. The word "diaspora" helps us understand and study the complicated ways people move around the world. The word "diaspora" in today's language makes people think of personal journeys, cultural exchanges, and how the human experience always changes in a world where everything is linked. As the pages of history keep turning, the human story remains one of constant movement and change (Lal, 2007). Through the lens of Diaspora, we can see how identity and geography, heritage and ambition, and the never-ending search for a better life work together. The word "diaspora" is a testament to the strength of the human spirit, which has always found a place in new places while still holding on to its roots.

The word "diaspora," as used in this passage, refers to a group of people who have either been forced to leave their home country or have left on their own to live in another country. But just moving doesn't make someone part of a community. To be considered diasporic, migrants must have certain traits, as shown, such as a strong desire and longing for their native homeland even after they have settled in a new country. There has been a lot of intense discussion in academia about diasporic themes, which have been discussed in many different fields. This has been written about writing written in many different languages and styles, from old classics to new works. In English poetry, prose, novels, theatre, and other forms of storytelling, diasporic topics and characters have been vividly shown. People move for many reasons, including political, economic, social, and religious ones. Political reasons could cause someone to leave their home country. In contrast, economic reasons could

include a lack of opportunities in their home country and the allure of opportunities in the host country. Migration within a community can be planned or happen by accident, depending on the situation (Iyengar, 1995).

In the 20th century, most people moved because of economic reasons. In the 19th century, most people moved because of political instability. Technology like the internet, cell phones, and plane travel have changed the diasporic experience in a big way. These tools make it easy to talk to family members back home, which helps ease the mental stress of being apart. So, the pain and anxiety that used to be associated with Diaspora have decreased a lot compared to how people felt a decade or more ago.

The fact that the word "diaspora" has changed over time shows how changeable it is. In the past, it was only for Jews who were forced to leave Jerusalem and go to Babylon around 587–86 B.C. But people today use the word in a way that includes a wider range of people and events. This reflects how the ways people move and connect are changing. The word "diaspora" describes a complicated mix of historical context, emotional links, and transnational experiences. Its importance has grown over time, and it now helps us understand the complexities of movement, identity, and the changing relationship between people and the places where their ancestors lived.

The arrival of migrants from diverse cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and national origins has resulted in a significant cultural transformation of the host countries, leading to multicultural societies. The Indian Diaspora, like other diaspora communities, has had an impact on the demographic makeup of the nations in which they have settled. The issue of Diaspora is a significant global concern in the contemporary world, characterized by the ongoing evolution of immigrant, refugee, and exile crises (Cohen 1997). Non-Resident Indians have gained significant usage in India to denote those relocated to developed nations such as America, Canada, or Australia and many others. In their essay "**Indian Diaspora: Locations, Histories, and Negotiation Strategies,**" Ruchi and Sandhya Saxena distinguish between Diaspora with an uppercase 'D' and Diaspora with a lowercase 'd'. The former term refers to the dislocation experienced by the Jewish population, whilst the latter term encompasses all other displacements that have occurred in more recent times. The utilization of the term 'diaspora' with a lowercase "d" has become prevalent due to the antiquity and end of Jewish displacement.

Diaspora in Indian Consciousness

The concept of Diaspora within the context of the Indian Diaspora is not one of isolated populations, but rather it encompasses a range that spans ancient and modern migrations. Over time, the old Diaspora has merged with the new through remigration, where communities, such as Fiji Indians relocating to Vancouver or Trinidadian Indians to Toronto, experience further transformations. This categorization recognizes a preceding and definitive migration phase, signifying the confluence of historical and contemporary movements. Within Indian English literature, writers of the Diaspora can be classified into two main groups: first-generation and second-generation immigrants. The first-generation immigrant writers embody those who have spent a significant portion of their lives in their country of origin and then embarked on a journey to acclimate to their new surroundings post-migration. Conversely, second-generation immigrant writers encompass the descendants of the initial wave of migrants. Renowned figures in the realm of diasporic Indian English literature include Amitav Ghosh, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Meena Alexander, Suniti Namjoshi, Alka Saraogi, Vikram Chandra, Neil Mukherjee, and Hari Kunzru. Notably, the portrayal of Indian immigrants within fiction crafted by female diasporic Indian writers is often characterized by a heightened sense of delicacy and sensitivity. These narratives capture the nuances of the immigrant experience through a distinctly empathetic lens, reflecting the complexities of identity, cultural adaptation, and personal relationships. This distinct perspective brings a unique depth to the literary landscape of the Indian Diaspora.

Thus, the Indian Diaspora is a multifaceted phenomenon that stretches across time and generations. It has given rise to many voices, each contributing to a diverse tapestry of narratives that explore the trials, triumphs, and transformations of those who have traversed borders and cultures. These literary works not only shed light on the experience of the Diaspora but also serve as mirrors reflecting the universal themes of human mobility, change, and the pursuit of belonging.

Migration and immigration have become prevalent in the Indian context in recent years. Globalization and technological advancements have heightened individuals' awareness of cultural diversity and migration dynamics. English education, which took root during the colonial period and extended into the postcolonial era in India, holds immense value for most Indians. Consequently, diasporic Indian English literature has emerged as a pivotal vehicle for conveying the experiences and mindsets of the Indian Diaspora to readers of English literature.

Diasporic Indian English writers and their organizations and global conferences provide platforms for these literary voices to engage in discourse, critique, and the evolution of their creative works. This collaborative environment fosters growth and encourages the exchange of ideas and experiences. The shared experiences of the Indian Diaspora are poignantly reflected in diasporic Indian English literature. The challenges of assimilation, prejudice, identity crises, the interplay of multiple cultural identities, nostalgia, and feelings of alienation resonate deeply within these narratives (Vinoda et al, 2002). Remarkably, the Indian Diaspora is the world's second-largest Diaspora, second only to the Chinese Diaspora. This term encompasses individuals of Indian heritage who have migrated to various countries. The roots of Indian emigration are traced back to ancient times, with historical evidence suggesting that trade has always been a driving force behind Indian migration.

The trajectory of the Indian Diaspora is divided into three distinctive phases. The ancient phase encompasses the movement of labourers, craftsmen, and religious missionaries, driven by the quest for exploration and discovery. The medieval phase unfolded predominantly during British colonial rule. During this time, Indian migration escalated, driven by indentured labour and contractual arrangements, leading Indians to cross borders and establish communities in various British colonies. In the modern age of the Indian Diaspora, which began in the latter part of the 20th century, a surge in emigration occurred. This phase was marked by a significant influx of Indians to industrialized nations like the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, and various Gulf countries, seeking new opportunities and better lives. Thus, the tapestry of the Indian Diaspora is woven with historical threads of labour, trade, and exploration. It reflects the multifaceted journey of a people traversing time and space, each phase contributing to the rich mosaic of Indian diasporic experiences.

The surge of widespread migration, immigration, and emigration provided the fertile ground from which diasporic literature emerged onto the global literary stage, coinciding with the postcolonial era and often intertwining with postcolonial literature. While it may be assumed that a diasporic writer is an immigrant, differing perspectives within the literary community contend that being an immigrant isn't a prerequisite. Instead, the critical focus is on whether the writer engages with the actual experiences and mentalities of a diaspora. This emphasis on addressing diasporic concerns transcends the personal immigration status of the writer.

Diasporic Narratives in the Indian Context

The defining characteristic of diasporic writing is its foundation in personal experiences rather than abstract theories or philosophies. These narratives are woven from the threads of immigrants' lives, sharing their physical and emotional struggles and offering a haven of empathy for fellow diaspora members. Common threads running through diasporic literature encompass themes such as discrimination, cultural disorientation, reverse cultural shock, challenges of adjustment and integration, orientalism, identity crises, feelings of alienation and displacement, perplexity, depression, hybridity, and generational gaps (Jain, 1998).

In the contemporary landscape, migration has evolved into a global phenomenon of great significance. Immigrants, those who relocate to foreign lands intending to establish permanent residence, play a pivotal role in shaping this evolving landscape. A diaspora signifies a collective of individuals who dwell outside their original homeland and share common experiences stemming from their displacement. The literary output these immigrants produce is often referred to as diasporic or immigrant literature.

In recent decades, diasporic Indian English writing has gained substantial recognition within universal diasporic literature. Within this literary domain, diasporic Indian English fiction holds a significant place, serving as a potent vehicle for portraying the multifaceted aspects of the Indian Diaspora on a broad canvas. The genre skilfully captures the nuances of the Indian diaspora experience, presenting a tapestry of narratives that reflect this community's diverse challenges, aspirations, and triumphs.

Thus, the rise of diasporic literature is intrinsically linked to the evolving dynamics of global migration and cultural interaction. Through immigrants' personal accounts and experiences, this literary form brings to light the shared human experience of navigating new cultures, confronting challenges, and searching for a sense of belonging (Jayaram, 2004). In this context, diasporic Indian English writing not only resonates with the Indian Diaspora but also contributes to the universal discourse on migration, identity, and the interconnectedness of human narratives worldwide.

The challenges of dislocation, hostility, rootlessness, fragmentation, racial bias, marginalization, identity crises, cultural clashes, and numerous other difficulties inherent in the experience of migration and Diaspora are prominently depicted in contemporary Indian writing in English (Bhabha, 1994). However, the phenomenon of migration from India has a historical depth that extends back to the 17th century.

V.S. Naipaul's early works, *The Mystic Masseur* and *The Mimic Men*, provide a window into the yearning and aspirations of individuals uprooted from their homelands due to forced labour and subsequently seeking to reconnect with their origins (Anand, 2004). These narratives underscore the complex emotional landscape of those who experienced dislocation and the longing for a sense of belonging after such upheaval. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a considerable number of people were displaced to serve the interests of the British Empire across various regions of the world. These forced migrations often kindled a sincere desire for political autonomy among the displaced, reflecting their yearning for freedom and independence (Iyengar, 2002).

For various reasons, the 20th century witnessed significant migration from India to different parts of the world. During this era, many individuals, including Hindus, Muslims, and primarily Punjabi Sikhs, ventured to Canada seeking employment as lumberjacks in sawmills. Their experiences were marked by labouring for lower wages and facing racial prejudice and discrimination due to ethnicity. These hardships ignited a sense of unity and collective resistance among the Indian Diaspora in Canada, culminating in forming the 'Gadar Party.' This political entity emerged as a formidable advocate for India's struggle for independence from colonial rule.

In *Maluka-1997*, Sadhu Singh Dhami chronicles this period, shedding light on the experiences of those who confronted adversity and fought for justice in the face of oppression. This literary work captures the essence of the Indian Diaspora's resilience and determination, underscoring their vital role in the broader context of historical and social change. Migration, dislocation, and Diaspora narratives are complex and multifaceted, spanning centuries and continents. They illuminate the individual struggles and the collective movements that shape history. Through literature like *Maluka-1997*, the profound impact of migration on individuals and societies is etched onto the canvas of human experience, reminding us of the enduring resilience and fortitude of those who forge new paths across the globe.

In the post-independence era of India, a new facet of refuge life emerged, wherein individuals from the 16th and 17th centuries embarked on journeys to developed nations to escape political or financial challenges in their homeland, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "brain drain." This migration continued over time, marked by motivations ranging from seeking better opportunities to contributing expertise in various fields. Regardless of the

motivation behind migration, immigrants in new countries often experience a sense of belonging and mobility, shaping their identities in complex ways.

Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Man from Nowhere* are among the earliest novels to vividly depict diasporic Indian characters. These narratives illuminate how racial prejudice against Indians in the United Kingdom during the 1960s exacerbates the characters' isolation and dislocation. Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife and Jasmine* delve into the experiences of Indians in the United States, capturing the lives of both legal and illegal immigrants in a pre-globalization context.

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* employs magical realism to explore the metaphor of migration, delving into the intricate layers of displacement and belonging. In Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Mistress of Spices*, the protagonist Tilo embodies the enigmatic pain of migrants, delving into the complexities of their emotional journey. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* delves into the profound rootlessness experienced by characters born and raised in foreign nations, underscoring the layers of disconnection that can permeate their identities. Amit Chaudhary's *Afternoon Raag* offers a glimpse into the lives of Indian students in Oxford, capturing the intersection of cultural landscapes.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, born in Kolkata in 1956, embarked on a journey to America, where she emerged as a prominent female writer in diasporic Indian English literature. Her acclaimed novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), unfolds the story of an Indian girl employed in a spice shop in Oakland, California. Through the mystical power of spices, she aids fellow immigrants in resolving their challenges, infusing her narrative with themes of magical realism. This captivating tale was even adapted into a film of the same title.

Ahmed Aesop, an India-born South African novelist, presents a thought-provoking account in *The Emperor* (1984) that utilizes irony and satire to address South African apartheid and challenge the dictatorial rule. His collection of stories, *Hajji and Other Stories* (1978), earned him the Olive Schreiner Prize from the English Academy of Southern Africa. Bechu, a Bengali enslaved in Guyana, portrayed overbearing and biased administrators critically. Ismith Khan, an Indo-Trinidadian writer, adds to this landscape with his work *The Jumbi Bird* (1961), delving into the internal conflicts within Kale Khan's family, who harbor negative feelings toward India and Trinidad. Samuel Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952), his debut and most dramatic novel, transforms the local vernacular into a language of consciousness in the West Indies.

Shiv Naipaul's novel *Fire Flies* (1970) offers a glimpse into the post-indenture culture, while his second novel, *The Chip-Chip Gatherers* (1973), narrates the story of plantation settlements. K.S. Maniam's semi-autobiographical novel *The Return* (1993) engages with the Indian Diaspora in Malaysia, exploring the prospect of reunification. In his work *Haunting the Tiger* (1996), he distinguishes two types of diasporic narratives: "the tiger's way" and "the chameleon's way." The former symbolizes a nationalistic consciousness, while the latter represents the multifaceted, selective, and hybrid nature of the "new diaspora," devoid of nationalist fervour. V.S. Naipaul stands as a monumental figure in old plantation diaspora literature. His seminal work, *A House for Mr Biswas*, stands out as a complex, expansive pseudo-epic—tragic and humorous, capturing moments of brilliance amid sorrow. This text encapsulates the transience inherent in diasporas, where pathos intertwines with the symbolic function of space. Naipaul's impact remains profound, his writing serving as a benchmark for evaluating literature within the context of the old Diaspora.

Anita Desai, a prominent diasporic female Indian writer, was born in 1937 in Dehradun, India, and later immigrated to England and America. Her novel *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) delves into the experiences of immigrants as they grapple with the quest for identity in a foreign land. This work offers insights into the perspectives of young immigrants, addressing themes such as discrimination, cultural divides between the East and West, disappointment, and the pervasive sense of loneliness that often accompanies the immigrant experience within a postcolonial context.

Gupta's *A Sin of Colour* (1998) portrays the dilemmas and isolation faced by Indian immigrants as they navigate the challenges of a new environment. Within these literary works, the advantages of dislocation are also explored. Living as a migrant provides a unique dual perspective, enabling individuals to engage with diverse cultural forms and navigate various societal norms. This advantage often aids diasporic Indians, particularly those of the second generation, in managing the complexities of dual identities. However, this dual existence can also create existential turmoil, as the ambiguity inherent in straddling multiple cultural worlds leads to a profound internal struggle.

Thus, these literary narratives offer a poignant insight into the multifaceted nature of migration and Diaspora. They capture various experiences, from the challenges of dislocation and prejudice to the benefits of dual perspectives, revealing the rich tapestry of emotions and

identities woven within the lives of those who venture across borders to pursue a better life and a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Writers within the realm of diasporic literature often strive to portray their characters' struggles as they endeavour to establish their unique space within various settings. Right from the outset, the domestic space, encompassing cultural practices and customs associated with the interior of the house, is a bastion preserved by characters in all three novels. Throughout these narratives, authors consistently paint vivid descriptions of Indian cuisine, clothing, religious rituals, and other facets of Indian culture.

Upon delving into the selected texts, a common theme emerges the struggle of all diasporic individuals to carve out a distinct niche in their host country, each forging their distinctive path. Through the lens of these novels, it becomes evident that all characters expend their utmost efforts to anchor themselves firmly in unfamiliar territory, yet not everyone succeeds.

What ties the writings of these authors together is their shared diasporic identity and multicultural background. Each character's perspective on home, hometown, and space diverges from the others; their views on America and India are unique. This interplay between American and Indian cultures eventually gives rise to a third, undefined 'cultural place' that fills the void, often called the 'third space.' This 'third space' evolves into a dynamic, creative realm where new cultural expressions emerge.

To conclude, the diasporic Indian English novel is a crucial genre that encapsulates the experiences and essence of Indian immigrants in its broadest sense. It serves as a platform for discussions surrounding overseas Indians and extends emotional support to the diaspora community. Female writers within the Indian Diaspora particularly can captivate readers of Indian English literature through their empathetic, unassuming narrative style while effectively conveying the universal essence of the immigrant experience. Furthermore, diasporic Indian-English fiction bridges writers to India and the global community, contributing to the rich tapestry of literary and cultural exchanges.

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