Diaspora and Transnationalism

Gender, Race and Narratives

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Edited by

Dr. Sarita Jain

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Diaspora and Transnationalism
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Foreword

'Diaspora' and 'Transnationalism', the two interrelated terms have occupied prominent place in today's academia at global level. The term 'Diaspora', long used only to describe the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world, has in the last few decades educed an unique interest and has attracted attention beyond the academic world and has came into such generalized use as to be applied to all forms of migrations and dispersion of the people. The discourse on 'Diaspora' and 'Transnationalism' rests at least on two critical proportions- the first is the issue of naming i.e. whom to call diaspora and transnational and the second is the different theories for studying multiple forms of diasporic and transnational migrations.

The juxtaposition of diaspora and transnationalism studies is important because it helps to identify points of intersections and divergence of these two concepts. Such conceptual framework provides the background for the better foregrounding of specificities of transnational activities and manifestations of diasporic perception and the developing of new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing the World.

Today, diaspora and transnational studies are closely linked to globalization studies, migration studies, literature and cultural studies. Generally, diasporic literature deals with estrangement, dislocation, despair, restlessness, nostalgia, identity crises and some of existential issues. It offers an inquiry of the issues related to incorporation or degeneration of different cultures and projects the experiences of immigrants that come out of their settlement. The immigrants,

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whatever their reason for migration be, no matter whether they migrated on financial, social, religious or political grounds, or as guest workers in search of better alternative or opportunities have to share some common things as well as differences which are based on their conditions of migration and stay in the adopted land. This evolves their cultural assimilation in which an ethnic minority adopts the beliefs, languages, and customs of the dominant community, losing their own culture in the process. As like theory of 'melting pot' or 'salad bowl', after assimilating culturally, immigrants and their children have to incorporate to social groups, assume an identity, change their attitudes and behaviors, and become engaged in civics of host society. The diaspora and transnational studies offer us a wide range of such cultural assimilations, pains and problems of immigrants and leads us to rethink on traditional notions of nation, political community and sovereignty, and to re-examine the meaning of diaspora and transnationalism and of the relationship between political and cultural frontiers.

The present book *'Diaspora and Transnationalism: Gender, Race and Narratives'*, edited by Dr. Sarita Jain comprises 20 articles by authors who are from different subjects and disciplines and discusses what the two concepts ('Diaspora' and 'Transnationalism') have in common and what distinguishes them and how they can be fruitfully used.

The book offers different meanings and interpretations of diaspora and transnationalism, highlighting the relevance of diasporic and transnational ties in the everyday lives of the immigrants and compares how different social, cultural and political theories explain the formation of diasporas and the emergence of transnationalism and also assesses what weight these phenomena are given in broader theoretical accounts of change in contemporary society. In it, the authors argue that the study of transnational citizenship and diasporic identities can be seen as complementing each other, rather than as providing alternative interpretations for the same phenomena. A wide range of themes and complex issues such as ethnic conflicts, gender, race, international relations,

generational change, entrepreneurship and the comparative studies of diaspora and transnational community make this book worthy for the interdisciplinary reading.

The book provides some theoretical reflections on concepts regarding transnationalism and diaspora and presents several core arguments which help to organize our understanding of nation, identity, and globalization in today's world and a further elaboration of these concepts, a broad understanding of all the forms and implications that derive from the vast movements of populations, ideas, technologies, that have come to shape the world we live in today.

This is definitely another important scholastic addition by Dr. Sarita Jain and a very valuable contribution to the understanding of the Diaspora and Transnationalism phenomenon. It is my firm and ardent belief that the readers will benefit by keeping a copy of this book of their own as well as in their library and the book will prove to be a substantial contribution to Diaspora and Transnationalism studies. I wish all the best to Dr. Sarita Jain, and all contributors.

Thanks

Dr. Arvind Nawale

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Preface

Diaspora literature is a very vast concept and an umbrella term that includes in it all those literary works written by the authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with native culture and background. Writers of the Indian Diaspora have been at the centre stage in the last decade chiefly because of the theoretical formulation being generated by their works They write in relation with the cultures of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land.. Diasporic literature has its roots in the sense of loss and alienation which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation ,displacement, existential rootlessness ,nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement. However, looking at the diasporic literature in a broader perspective it is seen that such literature helps in understanding various cultures, breaking the barriers between different countries, glocalizing the globe and even spreading universal peace. It occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures.

Dr. Poonam Rani Gupta in her paper *Migrant Conditions and Feeling of Alienation in Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay* attempts to portray migrant predicament and resultant loneliness. It also tries to capture the poignant moments of suffering and oppression that seems to crush the spirit of the immigrants. It also gives a graphic picture of the theme of immigration and alienation of the uprooted

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individuals. Dr. Ashish Kumar Gupta in his paper *Diasporic Trauma of Indenture Labourers (Girmitiyas) : A Despicable Act of Colonial Atrocious Cruelty* deals with Indian Diaspora at length and captures the theme of migration. It dwells upon voluntary or involuntary migration of indentured labourers ,socio-economic and political condition in host land, displacement from native land, their isolation, nostalgia and homesickness.it also highlights the reasons behind the mass movement of the people from one place to another. The paper of Dr. Rashmi Bhatnagar *Diasporic Consciousness in Bharti Mukherjee's Wife and Jasmine* focus on the phenomenon of migration and status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates and Indian Women and their struggle.

Dr. Sunita Yadav's paper *Diaspora- Through the prism of K S Maniam's Oeuvre* reflect an overriding sense of dispossession and displacement- dispossession of language and culture, plight of immigrant Indians in Malaysia, but also the forfeiture of the opportunity for soul-sharing which has its roots in past mythologies and, equally as importantly the earth itself. Dr. Tamishra Swain and Ms. Surbhi Vijyavargeeya in their paper *Diasporic Consciousness in Amitav Ghosh's The Circle Of Reason* tries to analyse migratory experiences and especially the experiences of those who get settled in a new country, adhering to the habits, ideologies, rituals of the country they originally belong to and also at the same time adapting the culture of the host country, hence creating a new hybrid identity altogether. Sarita Chanwaria in her paper *Nina McConingley's Cowboys and the East Indians : A study through Diasporic Lens* skillfully depicts the immigrant characters, their personal problems, cultural dilemmas and social conflicts. It sagaciously examines what it meant to be "the wrong kind of Indians living in Wyoming".

Mr. Vinay Kumar Dubey in his paper *Alienated Self in Shashi Despande's A Matter of Time* explores the theme of alienation. The novel presents the story of three generations. The female protagonists are women with a strong personality

who do not surrender before the tragic odds in their lives and finally redefine their selves. *Voicing the Unvoiced : Women Alienation and Trauma in what the Body Remembers* a paper by Dr. Keshav Nath and Dr. Yashoda Kumari examines the double marginalization of Sikh women in the partition phase torn apart between political and personal and the attempt towards self integration and self identity were futile. It also exposes stereotyping agencies working within women themselves. Dr. Shefali Barthonia's paper *Nepali Diaspora in India* dwells on the reason for the emergence and spread of nepali Diaspora in India, its historical perspective and friendship and cooperation of ruling dynasty of Nepal with the British.

Dr. Manju Sharma in her paper *Thinking Indian Diaspora for our Times* outlines three general meanings of diaspora which have emerged in recent literature. It appeals for a recognition of the combined workings of the structural, conscious and non-conscious factors in the reconstruction and reproduction of identities and socio-cultural institutions among groups outside of some place of origin. Ms. Urvashi Madhu in her paper *Contextualising Diaspora: A Bird's eye-view* deals with the emergence of Indian Diaspora, chief characteristic features of diasporic writing and describes Indian diasporic writers at length. Dr. Parul Agrawal in her paper *Identity Crisis in Jhumpa Lahiri's A Real Durwan* highlights struggle and inner conflicts of the displaced protagonist who represent not a single individual but multiple displaced people who struggle to find their identity in a new land.

Ms. Anoopama Yadav in her paper *Breaking of Patriarchal Norms : A Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress of Spices* explores the resistance projected by female characters in search for their own voice and identity as opposed to the identity granted by patriarchy. It reflects the beliefs, desires, longing and enervation of the immigrants residing in the host land. *Social Resignation, a Metaphor for freedom in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain* by Dr. Tamishra Swain and Surbhi Vijayvargeeya analyses the

continuous struggle of the Indian woman to find her own space or individuality. A complete withdrawl from the man's world comes out to be the final repose. *Cultural Hybridity and Identity Crisis in Manjushree Thapa's Season of Flight* by Shalini Shah attempts to analyse the cultural in-betweenness of the protagonist in the novel. The constant bubbling of the fractured 'self' is seen where the chances of repairing descend and the pavement emergence as rescue of identity.

Dr. N. Gunasekaran and K. Mekala's paper *Reconfiguration of Women's Identity in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe* portrays gender which ranges from old generation to new generation and represents the various situations in woman's life, her struggle for identity that needs support structure in and outside the family to enable her to survive. It explores the reconfiguration of women's identity by analyzing six female characters. *Rumination on Diasporic Consciousness in Mistry's Such a Long Journey* by Rajshree Ranawat provides an intriguing account of the Parsi community, their trials and tribulations, anguish and their home Bombay in general and Gustad Nobel in particular. Poonam Rani Gupta in her paper *Seduction to the West: An analysis of Expatriate Trends in the poetry of A. K. Ramanujan* attempts to explore the cultural cross current i.e. the fusion of the East and the West or seduction to the West in Ramanujan's poetry. The difficulty to conjoin the two contrasting cultures is manifested explicitly.

Bollywood and Indo-American Diaspora –a paper by Ms. Anjana Yadav stresses the role of Bollywood movies in constructing and maintaining the Indian culture among Indian American diaspora. *Contextualizing Diasporic identity: Implications of Time and Space on Telugu immigrants* by Dr. Sarita Jain dwells on Telugu immigrants depicting their social, political and religious life. Each stream of emigrants varies from the other in so far as the socio-economic and educational background from which they emigrated from India and also their location in the host societies.

I acknowledge the scholarly contribution of all the contributors and extend my heartfelt thanks to them. I also thank Akhand Publishing House, Delhi for efficient printing of this anthology.

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Migrant Conditions and Feeling of Alienation in Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*

Dr. Poonam Rani Gupta

The treatment of the migrant conditions in literature produced by diaspora writers is the most engrossing topic exciting intellectual debate. The postmodernist world has seen the emergence of interdisciplinary and cultural studies as the major thrust areas of academic exploration. As Elleke Boehmer states, "The postcolonial and migrant novels are seen as appropriate texts for such explorations because they offer multi-voiced resistance to the idea of boundaries and present texts open to trans-progressive and non-authoritative reading" (243). Literature on diaspora attempts to project multi dimensional experiences of the emigrants and diverse issues that perturb the inner psyche of such people.

Diaspora is primarily concerned with emigration and settlement of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland due to socio-economic or political reasons. Diaspora may be explained as the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their home land into new regions.in this regard Bijay Kumar Das opines–"It has been rightly said that one can take a person out of his

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country but not the country out of his mind" (47). It is a legitimate fact that, when a person is forced out of his homeland by oppression or such other cruel circumstances, a sense of panic and misfortune coupled with a separation from one's ancestral tradition and culture prevails. Emigrated group maintains its separateness from the host country based on common ethnicity or nationality, yet maintains attachments related to culture to the home country. Though the group is physically or geographically displaced, they retain their social and cultural position of the culture which they have inherited. Diaspora continues to pose questions related to its fluidity and writers interpret the multiple issues that are inherent. Migration is a pertinent phenomenon that dominates human perceptions.

Thus, in a world where identity, origin, existential problems and truth are seen in postmodernist diasporic terminology as structureless assemblages, identity crisis, loneliness etc., the writer Anita Desai appears as a very good example in that regard. Anita Desai has similar themes but in a different perspective in her novels. It might be her mixed parentage or she would have seen people suffering from the worst experiences of immigration, which led to write novels with diasporic temperament. Desai's mother was a German Christian and her father was a Bengali Indian. Her mother, Antoinette Nime, could trace her origin to France, and her father, Dhiren Mazumdar's native place was Dhaka (now in Bangladesh) but he had settled in New Delhi. This mixed parentage of complex origin gives Anita Desai the advantage of having double perspective when writing about India and Indians and as well as about migrants in India and Indian migrants to the West. She is both an outsider, if seen from her mother's side, and a native, if seen from her father's side. Desai has enjoyed her unique

position living in India for a considerable part of her life after which she went to Girton College, Cambridge, UK, followed by her shift to Massachu- setts Institute of Technology, USA. Becoming a global citizen has chiseled her perspectives still further and also made her explore the condition of the Diaspora in her fiction in a better way.

Among the writers who wrote about alienation, Anita Desai has a major role in writing about immigrant experience. Anita Desai is one of the most remarkable women novelists, whose novels are concerned mainly with social and political themes of the East-West encounter. Her serious concern is with the cross-cultural consciousness of her characters. Desai has dealt with a group of diasporic Indians in Britain of the late 1960s in her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1969); she has also dealt with the character of a migrant Austrian Jew in India in her novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). In the novel, *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), she has shown an Egyptian acculturated in India along with an Italian spiritual seeker in the subcontinent. Finally, she has also shown the predicament of a lonely Indian, Arun in USA, in her novel *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). Present paper is an attempt to portray migrant predicament and resultant loneliness in the *Baumgartner's Bombay*. This paper also tries to capture the poignant moments of suffering and oppression that seem to crush the spirit of the immigrants.

Anita Desai's fiction generally offers existentialist studies of individuals and hence background, politicality, historicity, social settings, class, cross-cultural pluralities are all only incidental. But being incidental does not mean that they are essentially extraneous. The solitude that Desai depicts in her characters is a result of the inner psyche of the characters as also their external circumstances.

Loneliness is a manifestation of both inner and outer conditions and hence, its sense can be evoked even in the middle of society. She gives a graphic picture of the theme of immigration and alienation of the uprooted individuals in her novel *Baumgar- tner's Bombay*. Hugo Baumgartner the protagonist of the novel becomes victim of these feelings of alienation. Hugo Baumgartner has constant identity crises and suffers from exile, alienation and humiliation largely on account of racial and cultural prejudices throughout the novel. The following statement of Dr. Susmita Banerjee, who quotes Edmund Fuller is very relevant. It is that "man not only suffered from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but also from inner problems like despair, isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his existence"(32).

It is a commonly accepted fact that migrants from one country to another face alienation. Anita Desai in *Baumgartner's Bombay* successfully portrays the life of a German-Jewish refugee from the Holocaust who ends up in India. Alienation is essentially a sociological concept developed by several classical and contemporary theorists and is a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment. The disdainful treatment and ostracism meted out to him and his family in Germany, subject to his Jewish origins, has stunted his personality. He nurses a perpetual fear of being exterminated. His translation into a quiescent and neutral disposition is due to the destructive forces working incessantly around him. Hugo's life is one of chaos, as he is heaved and lugged by the political fluctuations. In Calcutta, the environment is one of looming absurdity and insanity, in the name of religion. Isolation and alienation is an intrinsic reality of life.

Stephen Koff asserts that, "a number of scholars from various disciplines have given overt and\or tacit recognition to alienation as one of the central features of existence. .....it is generally acknowledged that alienation involves estrangement,..... one can be estranged from family, friends, church, an economic organisation, a government, or even from oneself..... certain social (including political) conditions will produce alienation in almost all persons, regardless of their individual personality traits..... alienation is a syndrome of related feelings. It includes a range of attitudes from extreme pessimism to hopelessness, from cynicism to despair" (272).

Anita Desai is careful in portraying the diasporic sensibility through the character of the protagonist Hugo. Though the novel vividly represents emigrant situations, and the treatment of different issues related to diaspora, it significantly contributes to diverse interpretations that are characteristic of the postmodern era. The post-colonial phase of the Indian diaspora differs from the earlier forms of migrations. The migrants are from middle-class families, highly skilled and are attracted by favorable opportunities in abroad. Problems of the modern man reflect the injuries, frustrations and the identity crisis that an uprooted individual undergoes. Hugo is apathetic towards the goings-on in India. He lacks the political information and therefore, does not participate in any of India's movements or revolutions. He withdraws and remains unconcerned. Hugo suffers from the predicament of powerlessness and meaninglessness. He is powerless, in that, he is incapable and incompetent of influencing the decisions in the political and social arena, although they lend a powerful impact on his life. He does not comprehend the details of the forces which loom large in his society. Therefore, this originates in him a sense

of meaning- lessness. Hugo feels mercilessly ensnared by the existing political and social forces.

Anita Desai, an expert in delineating the lacerated psyche. In the novel she very vividly portrays the insecurity, alienation, anguish of the uprooted individual i.e. Hugo. The problems of alienation, isolation, immigration, and expatriation can be understood by two related terms, exile and home. Home is not merely a habitat, but it is the one where an individual belongs to and gives them cultural and self-identity. It is the one which gives shelter for an individual, and hence called as motherland, native soil Social Alienation and a security. Exile is one's enforced or regretted absence from their native land. Postcolonial India has witnessed the migration of many educated Indians who were attracted to the West. It was seen as an escape from the economic and communal chaos which was prevalent in India. But adapting the alien culture was very difficult for them. Thus the theme of exile, immigration and alienation is common in the twentieth century literature scene. Lost, lonely, isolated, estranged characters which march toward the point of meaningful relationship can be seen in the literature of this period. Political, cultural, social, economical and geographical dislocations have made man exile. Cultural alienation has become a universal phenomenon. The concept of immigration is as old as the history of civilization. The Book of Genesis tells the story of alienation and exile. The motivation behind modern migration may vary. Whatever the reason is, the impact of cultural shift will affect individual psyche as it did to our hero.

The Jew, Hugo Baumgartner in the novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* had spent his childhood in his native Germany with his parents. Even as a child a sense of loneliness gnaws at his being and is evoked at his crucial moments of triumph. On his first day at school

when his mother comes to fetch him with a cone of bonbons for him, he holds up his prize for the others to see but already "the other children were vanishing down the street" and "no one saw his triumph". He accuses his mother for being late and complains: You don't look like everyone else's mother" (Desai 33). Hugo's loneliness as a child, in the midst of society comes because of the lack of identification. Even when he is not neglected he feels the same loneliness as is evident from the Christmas incident in the school when all his classmates were sent gifts by their parents to be distributed to them by their teacher. Hugo longs for the red glass globe that adorns the top of the Christmas tree. When the teacher makes it up as his gift he instinctively realizes that his parents have not sent any gift for him and he stubbornly disinclines from accepting it even though goaded by his classmates to take it. It is perhaps this sense of loneliness experienced by the Jewish community in Germany that helped Hitler fuel his Aryan myth and transform loneliness into fear.

Long before Hugo has a literal displacement after the suicide of his father, he has experienced a displacement whereby he has not literally moved but the world around him has moved or rather changed. So when Hugo has a physical displacement and migrates as a teenager to India, he already harbors the sense of loneliness. Thus, it seems that the change in location is only incidental to his sense of solitariness. But the circumstantial changes also help to aggravate one's solitude and hence it is not merely incidental and this fact is quite apt in consideration with the estrangement that Hugo suffers from his mother. That Hugo's mother stayed back in Nazi Germany and her highly censored letters only bear the curt statement that she was well and it provides no comfort to Baumgartner. The memory of his mother in Germany is a constant deterrent against