Diasporic Identities in Literature

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Edited by
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Preface

'Migration is considered one of the dominant phenomena that characterize our modern times on a global scale' (Clifford, & Cohen: 302:338). It is evident that almost every culture has experienced immigration from different cultures and countries. This rapidly evolving culture of migration usually affects the country of adoption and the country of origin. There are multiple reasons of their migration such as the need, persecution, socio-economic, religious or political reasons etc. The seeds of Diaspora were germinated in the traumatic exile of Adam and Eve from Paradise to Earth from there on migration and exile became the synonym of pain, sufferings, trauma, loneliness, alienation, and hope for association with the homeland. Among various significant genres, Diaspora literature is one such significant area portraying the agony, displacement, exile and the feeling of homelessness of those writers or people who move to the other countries leaving their homelands.

Diaspora is rather an incessant state of reexamination of the existence of home and homelessness that is synonym of the terms like migration, exile, homelessness and trauma. This very concept of Diaspora has fascinated many writers to write about the poignant themes of loneliness, alienation, loss

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of identity, linguistic alienation etc due to exile and migration. They are V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Kovid Gupta, Agha Shahid Ali, and Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who are the luminaries with a vast range of their experiences of migration and exile in their works. Salman Rushdie in Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism said that, "Our Identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools." (Rushdie 15)

(Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Vintage Books, 2010.)

In many literary and academic platforms it is mentioned that in coming years, diaspora literature will be vanished from the canvas of World Literature. Do we really see this coming? We have been looking at the migration and exile at the global level. It is the time now when we need to look beyond and within the boundaries of our countries where exile and migrations have been taking place at every single moment due to political, social, religious and economic reasons. The exile of Palestinians, migrants of Tibet, Kashmiri Pandits are few examples. This concept has transformed from Insider/outsider to Insider/Insider. This kind of migration is more painful as they have nowhere to return. Diaspora is an umbrella term and it has many categories. Therefore, this book is a sincere attempt to record the various dimension of diaspora both in theory and in literature.

The first chapter *African diaspora in medieval Indian history: Contextualizing the political presence of Sidi and Habshi tribes in India* by Ms. Lubna Irfan enquires into the historical realities of Abyssinian (Sidis and Habshis) in the Indian subcontinent in the medieval times, and with that information the paper also tries to

locate the social placement of this group in India. Furthermore tracing from the medieval times, since the beginning of the arrival of Habshis to Indian Subcontinent to the current times it also analyses the relative extent of power as exercised by this tribal group in the past and the change in the form of power's accessibility and scope in the present scenario. It also includes the anthropological relations and assimilation of the Habshi and Sidi tribes in the Indian population over time.

Dr. Adit Dev Deol in her *Answering God's Call: Analyzing Lifestyle Migration in The Journey Home* by Dr. Aditi Deol tries to analyses the facets of lifestyle migration embedded in the lifestyle quest recounted in Radehnath Swami's The Journey Home. The analysis would investigate questions of belongingness, displacement and homeland imubed in such a venture or shall we say adventure.

The next chapter *Impact of dislocation on the life of a woman with reference to Monica Ali's Brick Lane* by Sweta Verma focuses on the migratee's condition that is no worse than that of a moth that is surrounded by a shell of fate, religious hypocrisy, racial discrimination and a male-dominated society as portayed in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Since already being a victim of economic and social transaction which later on functions as a sole apparatus in keeping with collective interest, the protagonist of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* serves as the mouthpiece of the author.

The next chapter *Longing to Belong: The 'Home' in Taslima Nasreen's Homecoming: Phera by* S.N. Kiran is an attempt to showcase the dark shadows of displacement that ushered in grief and despair in the lives of the exiled through The novel *Homecoming: Phera* (2005) which maps the journey of the protagonist to her natal house in Mymensingha in Bangladesh from

Calcutta, where she is now exiled, after thirty years of separation.

The next chapter *Autobiographical Shades of Exile in Vladimir Nabokov* by Dr. Kaushal Kishore Sharma tries to present how Nabokov expresses the emotions of his own self in his works by showing that how the characters, forced into exile, always strive to reclaim their faith in life. This chapter is an attempt to showcase how Nabokov turns the tragedy of his own exile into what Humbert Humbert calls the "durable pigments of art (*Lolita* 309) and his achievement in *Lolita*, *Pnin* and *Pale fire*, where the condition of exile becomes the human condition discernible and distinguished.

The following chapter *Networking the Past - A Saga of Migration & Alienation in the Novel- In An Antique Land* by Dr. Meetu Bhatia Kapur presents another shade of Diaspora through Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land***.** It is an attempt to present the modern man in the contemporary scenario who is facing the ghost of alienation in a different context and how a foreign nation remains a foreign land for them; no matter how hard they try they cannot break away from their roots back home.

The next chapter You are What you Eat: The Imagery of Food in Anita Desai's Fasting, Feasing by Anukriti and Prof Sujata Rana is an attempt to display the food and eating habits in *Fasting, Feasting* having multiple meanings at both literal and figurative levels, showing ways in which fasting and feasting are universal elements of all humanity. Hunger and feeling filled is something all persons are familiar with, whether American or Indian, male or female, oppressed or powerful. The universalism of food and eating choices make it an understandably useful image and metaphor in this novel—cutting across cultures and nationalities to represent power, gender stereotypes and inequality,

adherence or resistance of culture, family ties or relationship bonds along with human weaknesses and consumption issues.

The next chapter *Reclaiming Indian Identity in Foreign Lands: an analysis of Tabish khair's poetic work**s*** by Madiha Saeed and Shahida Parveen is an attempt to present the condition named as exile that breeds a unique spirit which can be both limiting and liberating. This difficult to explain state can cause fragmentation, disillusionment, discontinuity and pain but at the same time it can turn into a creative force and become a source of new mode of expression. This chapter is an analysis of the poetic works i. e. *Where Parallel Lines Meet* and *Man of Glass* of Tabish Khair, an exiled in the light of the above mentioned statement.

Rumi Roy in her paper titled *Politics of Citizenship And Assamese Nationalism* attempts to understand how a constructed category of migrant is created around the boundaries of citizenship while attributing the connotation of illegality and Bangladeshi Muslim with it. Dr. Swagata Bhattacharya in her paper titled *Don't Ever Forget Where You Come From"—Immigrant Youth and the Problems of Acculturation* presents the Canada as a land that is often casually referred to as a land of immigrants and suffers from a sense of an acute lack of a specific identity of its own.

Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake : A Journey of an Immigrant Woman from Alienation to Assimilation by Lalita Sharma is a study of Jhumpa Lahiri's famous masterpiece *The Namesake* where the writer tries to incarcerate the experiences of Ganguli family. This masterpiece deals with the tribulations of the immigrants in an alien land and the research paper of Dr. Lalita Sharma portrays through the study of the characters in the novel how the Indian Immigrants try

to be on both sides of the two cultures i.e. their Indian heritage and the American dreams.

Dr. Parul Yadav in her paper entitled *Bharti Mukherjee:Aspects of Immigration And Diasporic Sensibility* examines the nature and scope of the "diasporic sensibility" of Bharati Mukherjee, which promises much more than a synthesis of tradition and modernity. Dr. Swati Kumari tries to bring forth various voices of women striving for their identity. This paper takes into account various works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and show their struggle.

Dr. Parul Mishra in her paper throws light the plight of women who were victims of indenture servitude. Dr. Priti Bala Sharma in her paper *Our Moon has Blood Clot: A Study of Diaspora Literature on the Refugees in their own Land* portrays the pain and trauma of the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir either in the form of internal exile or foreign exile. The paper is a study of Rahul Pandita's celebrated memoir Our Moon had Blood Clots from the diaspora lens in order to capture the heart and the soul of Kashmiri Hindus' tragedy, displacement, exile and hopelessness of homecoming.

We acknowledge with thanks the contribution of all the scholars, eminent in their own right for their unfailing support and cooperation in bringing out this anthology. We thank Akhand Publishing House, New Delhi for their initiative and making the publication possible in an aesthetically satisfying manner. We hope that the book will be found useful by researchers and scholars in the field of English Literature as well as other allied disciplines of Humanities and social sciences.

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1

African Diaspora in Medieval Indian History: Contextualizing the Political Presence of *Sidi* and *Habshi* Tribes in India

Lubna Irfan

While the large-scale transfer of African population to Americas has been well documented and studied, less is known about the movement of the African slaves towards the east. Major areas of supply of slaves to the east during the 13th and 14th centuries were areas around the Nile, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. (Don Jaide)

Transfer of African slaves to the east made them an important force that contributed to the military campaigns of the kingdoms of the east. Apart from the presence in the military circles, Abyssinians also served as helps, bodyguards or soldiers and sometimes as agricultural workers in the areas of the Indian subcontinent. The presence of these sections who were called *sidis* or *habshis* in the medieval society of Indian subcontinent was however not limited to the labour work. At various instances across the time period of medieval era *habshis* and *sidis* are reported to have exercised much political and administrative authority, though these instances were sporadic and hardly any of these powerful Indo-Africans could establish a dynastic

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rule, yet the fact that the nature of power could also reach the numerically disadvantaged and marginal sections like *habshis* is an area of interest for the researchers.

This paper would aim at tracing the political presence of the African settled in India from the medieval times, concentrating on the Mughal period and chalk out the trajectory of their rise to power and their fall. Further, the paper would chalk the social and political realities of the *Sidis* of present times and their relegation to the status of Scheduled Tribes in certain states. It would touch on the causes behind this change in the position of the *Habshis* as they travelled in time from Medieval to the Modern era.

The information obtained from contemporary and secondary sources suggest that the spread of the *habshi* population was vast even in medieval times. They were reported to be present in the northern areas, Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller, informs about the brave Abyssinian Badr who was the governor of *Alapur* near Delhi during the 14th century. (H.A.R. Gibb 224) Areas in Indian subcontinent where there was a concentrated *Habshi* presence included the areas of Gujarat in the west and Bengal in the east, both carried on the slave trade with the east African coast and hence were home to a considerable population of Africans. (Jayasuriya & Angenot 153) In the west, the important centre was Cambay, where reports suggest that the *habshi* population not only was an important armed section in the army of the Khilji Sultans that ruled that area during the 15th century but they were also involved themselves in trade of agate. Thus there appears the presence of a number of free Africans in these areas. Further the presence of *habshis* as a powerful merchant class and armed soldiery must have made them an active force in the shaping of the political scenario of that area. Another

area where *Sidis* are reported to have enjoyed a major political presence and power was in Bengal in the east. Bengali rulers of the 15th century had a number of Africans who were placed at strategic and powerful administrative and political positions and these African elements eventually went ahead to overthrow the Bengali rulers and establishing a *Habshi* dynasty, which however couldn't last long.

Apart from Bengal and Gujarat the *habshi* community exercised much authority in another area of Indian Subcontinent that is Deccan. The area of Deccan was divided into three principal kingdoms of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Golconda during Medieval times. These kingdoms contained a significant number of Abyssinian people and there were quite a few who had risen to the status of power and authority of the nature of the royalty. There are references in the contemporary sources to the rise to prominence of Raihan Habshi under the *Adil Shahi* rule of Bijapur where the former rose to power and gained the position of Chief Ministership of the state. Another similar story of arrogation of authority by a *Habshi* is of the rise to the position of the Prime Ministership of Malik Ambar, the Ethiopian born administrator of Ahmad Nagar who had developed an independent army of his own and who glorified the name of *Nizam Shahi* rulers by subduing Bijapur and contending the mighty Mughal Empire. (Jayasuriya & Pankhurst 232)

Despite the political and administrative power enjoyed by the *Habshis*, their social realities remained of a disadvantaged nature. The *Sidis* in the Indian subcontinent had to face a racial and social discrimination, even if they were patronized by the royalty and exercised much authority. There is a reference to much antagonism faced by Jamaluddin Yaqut, the alleged lover and close confidante of Razia

Sultan, the first female ruler of Delhi Sultanate; the antagonism was largely centred on the racial descent of Yaqut who was a *Habshi*. (*V. D. Mahajan 102)*

The fact that the demands for *Habshi* slave kept on rising till the advent of the 18th century in Indian subcontinent suggest that despite all sorts of stigma attached with their presence they were still forming an important though marginal part in the administrative and the military setup of the time. The labour of *Sidis,* however, doesn't appear limited to the military setup since it is reported that when British reached Baluchistan they witnessed that not a single home was without male and female *Sidi* slaves. (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst 228)

This paper, thus, enquires into the historical realities of *Sidis* and *Habshis* in the Indian subcontinent in the medieval times, and with that information, the paper would also try to locate the social position of this tribal group in India. The reading of historical sources not only brings forth the finer details of the social exclusion faced by this section, but it also helps in the development of the larger picture which in turn helps in establishing a trajectory of the social mobility of various groups. This paper would precisely aim at putting into context the social status and political power enjoyed by the Indo-Africans through the medieval era.

Tracing from the medieval times, from the beginning of the arrival of *Habshis* to Indian Subcontinent to the present times the paper will also analyse the relative extent of power as exercised by this tribal group in the past and the change in the form of its accessibility and scope in the present scenario. The enquiry will be made into the anthropological relations and assimilation of the *Habshi* and *Sidi* tribes in the Indian population over time. Reports of surviving descendants of *Sidis* of the historical times suggest the

presence of 250,000 *Sidis* and *Habshis* still residing in India. They are dispersed in states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. There is also a considerable population of these groups in present-day Pakistan where reportedly in Sindh some 50,000 *Sidis* still have homes. With the analysis of information in contemporary medieval sources and taking into account the works of modern authorities on *Sidis* an attempt is being made in this paper to draw a contrast between the accessibility and the scope of power to these tribal sections in medieval times as compared to their Scheduled Tribes status and inaccessibility to real power in current times.

It is also proposed that the unique nature of gradual relegation of the *Sidi* community from them being ones exercising considerable power to the level of them being marginalized as Scheduled Tribes can be understood from the nature of the influx of the *Sidi* population during various periods of time and the nature of social mobility existing in a particular society. Kamat research findings suggest that the *Sidi* migration that took place during the early phase, i.e. to say before the advent of European hegemony, comprised of large commercial sections who were migrating in lieu of profits in addition to the transfer of slaves. Since *Sidis* were mostly merchants, interested in the spice trade due to its great sale price promised in the Middle Eastern and European kingdoms. And since the spices were an important item of export and income for the Indian rulers, thus *Sidis* must have had great respect and cordiality with the rulers of India.(Kamat) With the advent of Europeans, the transfer of African slaves increases exponentially, and the gradual emergence of rigidity in the structure of the political organization must have contributed to the marginalization of the *Sidi* population.

It is informed that Sir John Hawkins was one of the

first Englishman who had a role in the traffic of African slaves of great numbers. Furthermore, it is reported that in 1791 the number of European factories on the coasts of Africa was 40; out of these 14 were English, 3 French, 15 Dutch, 4 Portuguese and 4 Danish. Out of these factories, more than 74,000 *Sidi* slaves were transported to the colonies of the European countries. Around 10,000 slaves were transferred by Portuguese alone and 38,000 by the British. The slave factories increased their amount of transporting *Sidis* until a ban was placed on the slave trade in the 19th century. (Herold Christopher 37) Thus the intensity of African slave trading activities had become aggravated with the arrival of the colonial masters. And since the population that arrived by such slave trading activities was to be incorporated as labour force and made to work for the factors, thus the previous position of power and privilege must have been overturned and a major role in this change of position of *Sidis* must have been of the commercial and political hegemony of the colonialists.

To analyse the position of power enjoyed by the *Sidis* in the medieval era there is a need to look into the sources of that period and since there are no accounts exclusively on *Habshi* communities, the information contained in official histories or memoirs need to be utilised to understand the position of *Habshi* community vis-à-vis the established powerful races and communities.

When there is a discussion on tribal histories, it needs to be understood that the division is being made in the name of race as a community structure, thus racial ethnicity becomes the vantage point of a comparative study between various groups. This can hold importance in present times but to understand the nature of the organization of populations and their associations as community structures in bygone times one needs to

analyse the social conditions and psychological trends of the past. For example in a monarchical form of government which was dominated by a strong central authority everything was relevant in the context of loyalty to the Emperor, be it religion, race or caste. This trend died out with the decay of the autocratic power and rise of commercial colonial powers. And with the coming of the British in India, the trend of rigid classification of people in various community structures was started. And it was a part of these attempts at crystallization of community structures that along with other community structures the structures of Scheduled Tribes were put into place. (Xaxa 1519-1524, 1519)

A brief overview of the *Habshi* past would suffice here to build up a contrast between the past and the present. In addition to the Abyssinian governor of Alapur near modern-day Delhi, mentioned above there has been an active presence of *Habshis* in the Indian subcontinent in early periods of the medieval era. The Abyssinian governor about which Ibn Battuta informs us was also reported to have been a brave heart and a ferocious eater. Ibn Battuta writes of his food habits, he mentions that after eating his meals which included a whole sheep he would drink a pound and a half of ghee in accordance with the custom of his country of Abyssinia. (Gibb 224) Moreover, the mention of Abyssinians surfaces majorly in Ibn Battuta's work for their military services which were provided by them to various elites of the Indian Dynasties. The author of *Rehla*, Ibn Battuta mentions about a boat, al-Jagir, which he boarded and which had a complement of fifty rowers and fifty Abyssinian men-at-arms. These men at arms were supposed to be the guarantors of safety on the India Ocean waters. To highlight the importance of the *Habshi* protectors Ibn Battuta adds that if even one of the *Habshi* soldiers was on a ship it will not be attacked by the 'Indian pirates

and idolaters'. (Gibb 229) Ibn Battuta also relates instances about ship owners and their factors; he suggests that factors on board of a ship were like some great *amirs*. When the factor would go on shore he would be preceded by archers and Abyssinians with javelins, swords, drums, trumpets, and bugles. On reaching his accommodation these Abyssinians would stand their lances on both sides of the door and continue like this during the stay of the factor. . (Gibb 236) Furthermore while mentioning the details of the coastal town of *Dinawar* and the town of *Kalanbu* (Colombo) which according to Ibn Battuta was one of the finest and largest towns in Ceylon, he mentions *Habshis*. The author relates that in the town of *Kalanbu* resides the *Wazir* and ruler of the sea Jalasti and this man has with him about five hundred Abyssinians. (Gibb 260) Thus it can be understood that the significance of *Habshis* as a community of being armed defenders and guards for rulers and elites of various places and types was enormous and that they also had a reputation of being the ferocious defenders.

There was a lesser known presence of *Habshis* in the northern areas of the Indian subcontinent as well in medieval times, where there a number of *Habshis* nobles reported during the reign of Shah Jahan and most of them enjoyed a position of considerable political and administrative power and authority. We however start noticing the presence of *Habshis* from the period of Akbar himself; there is reference to Abyssinians and Afghans fighting in a battle during the rebellion of the *Mirzas* of Gujarat. (Bhakkari& *Khwanin 85)* A source on Mughal nobility mentions a number of *Habshi* nobles who had become a part of the Mughal administrative paraphernalia. Habash Khan Habshi Dakani or Sidi Miftah was one noble who tactfully secured for himself a *mansab* of 3000 *zat* and 1500 *do-aspa si-aspa sawaar* rank and a *jagir* along with the title of Habsh Khan, when