

Negotiation of Flux Identities and Quest for Space in Diasporic Cross-Cultural Literary Contexts: Emerging Psychological Paradigms

Dr. Shri Bhagwan Sharma

Assistant Professor in English

Govt. College, Amargarh

Sangrur, India

Abstract

The present paper underlines the fact that the uprooted, displaced diasporic expatriates carrying the value system and cultural ethos of their native country, as represented in diasporic literature, in their attempts to acclimatize themselves to the alien host culture, do encounter a host of psychological complexities and cultural barriers which affect not only their physical health but mental wellbeing also. This paper also brings to surface the point that different behavioural reaction of different characters from diasporic literature in conflict or conformity with the cultural parameters and national sensibilities of the host countries determine their modes of life, mental health, individual ideologies in particular and socio-political status in the overall scheme of things, in general. The main highlight of the paper is that the different personality types, their unique emotional sides and thought patterns, assimilative techniques or marginalization effects once having been exposed to a new arcane and unfamiliar social set up, has led the psychologists or writers to construct new paradigms with their constituent factors in their respective fields.

Keywords: Diaspora, Cultural Ethos, National Sensibility, Navigation, Sub-Identities, Marginalization, Assimilation

The Indian Diaspora has grown apace in the past 3 decades to comprise more than 20 million people spread all over the continents. This sort of population movements brings about not only unprecedented challenges for the political, economical and social system of host countries but considerable challenges for immigrants as individuals also. In this period of contemporary globalization, rapid creation of multicultural citizens and growing formation of diasporic communities, acculturation becomes increasingly complicated. A body of diasporic literature has come up giving the photographic representation of this postmodern reality of

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue IV

displacement, dislocation and expatriation which needs to be further probed at various levels. The present paper underline the fact that these uprooted, displaced expatriates carrying the value system and cultural ethos of their native country, as represented in diasporic literature in their attempts to acclimatize themselves to the alien host culture, do encounter a host of psychological complexities and cultural barriers which affect not only their physical health but mental well being also. This paper also brings to surface the point that different behavioural reactions of different characters from diasporic literature in conflict or conformity with the cultural parameters and national sensibilities of the host countries determine their modes of life, mental health, individual ideologies, in particular and socio-political status in the overall scheme of things, in general. The main highlight of the paper is that the different personality types, their unique emotional sides and thought patterns, assimilative techniques or marginalization effects once having been exposed to a new arcane and unfamiliar social setup, has led the psychologists or writers to construct new paradigms with their respective fields. The present paper traces the process of acculturation in the protagonist's lives in that many aspects of their self identities are modified to accommodate experiences of new culture, shed notions and nuances of the old culture and, as a result, new hybrid or multicultural identities are reconstructed by combining the identities associated with their native culture, host culture and even global culture. It can be argued that these news identities come into existence depending upon the demands of the situation.

The present paper has based this research mainly on the protagonists of transnational diasporic milieu delineated by the Indian diasporic writers like Bharti Mukharjee, Jhumpa lahiri, Anita Desai, Chitra Bannerjee, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander. The paper has taken the four predicators of acculturation-integration. assimilation, separation and marginalization in respect of various characters depending upon their personality traits which eventually decide their present and future i.e. their being happy, contented and a new incarnated entities or they end up being merely discontented and disgruntled lot simmering with anger and anguish, frustration and revulsion. One of the two needs-one, need to adjust to their new surroundings and the second, need to preserve their cultural identities not only paves the way for their stressful life or enjoyable one but defines, regulates and shapes their individual orientations while negotiating between the parent and emigrant culture. Diasporic writers and their protagonists occupy what Home Bhabha calls 'interstitial space'. Though the consciousness of homeland is never seen to be missing from their life, but the balance of Americanness & Indianness is struck by the successful and assimilated characters. Their present mental orientation, open or closed depending upon their education level and their futuristic vision or lack of it sows the seed for their personality traits and the resultant mental health in the multicultural or assimilative host society. Ashima of Jhumpa Lahire's *The Namesake* is the

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue IV

epitome of pathetic depiction of apprehension, clumsiness and an assortment of psychological problems such as longing, rootlessness, schizophrenia etc. The novel opens with Ashima Ganguli trying to make spicy Indian snacks from African ingredients- rice krispies and planters peanuts, but as usual there is something missing. Ashima does not find anything customary in America, a country where she is designed to spend her rest of life and even in labours of delivery of her baby, she is petrified to elevate a child in country where life seems so tentative and spare. Unaccompanied and deprived entry of baby into the world laid the foundation of that predicament that small child had to experience throughout his life. Feeling lonely and displaced in a foreign land, Ashima begins to feel cultural alienation and loss of identity. Being a foreigner is a sort of life long pregnancy-a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an on-going responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life only to discover that previous life has vanished... (49-50). She starts accepting the American ways of living but longing for her lost home country in her is kept intact by adhering to the Indian tradition and rituals. The anxiety, the fear of losing one's identity in an entirely foreign land is passed on to the next generation also in Gogol. The qualms, the nervousness, the agitation, which his mother had experienced when he was in the womb, passes hereditarily to him. He hates his name for lacking self- respect. He hates having to tell people that he is neither Indian nor American but of all things Russian. Jhumpa Lehari herself a child of an immigrant couple takes herself a classic case of divided identity where the Indian part was unacknowledged and so neglected by the American environment and vice versa making her lead two separate life. Gogol, in order to avoid distrust, contempt and segregation of natives faced by his parents, is ready to disown what is his own and assimilate into a culture that he wants to make his own.

Ashima of *The Namesake* is doomed to be a pathetic figure because of her unidimensional psychological make up which makes her oscillate between her past and present, Indianness and Americanness and doesnot let her either assimilate or integrate into the multicultural society. Her attitude of cultural maintenance of her native country and reluctance to participate, negotiate or navigate into the culture of the host country, rigid and closed mindset to new experiences, prejudiced attitude towards different cultural values restrict her to remain in margins or ghettos, resulting in her neuroticism, aggressiveness, impulsivity, anxiety, unsuitability, acculturative stress in behaviour. Gogol or Nikhil, a second generation expatriate, swings in the process of hyphenation, neither here nor there because of imposition of certain Indian values by his parents and his personal inclination towards American ethos in the beginning, and between the demand of tradition to don the role of the head of the family (after the father's death) and the temptations of a new culture in the 'age of refuge' where man is 'the new nomad' of the postmodern world. Nikhil's cause of

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue IV

confusion and unhappiness is his inability to navigate between two roles or because he has developed his rigid personality nourished by the American sensibility and the freedom of choice. The one-dimensional character Jamubhai of Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of loss" feels actually lonely and sad in a completely alien land. He feels hesitant and nervous to get out and deal with people comfortably. Jemu in reality remains conscious of his brown colour, Indian accent, pronunciation and above all the despising and biased social attitude of the whites. His refuge in library to escape the embarrassment of his peers and their quirky and sarcastic laughter at his cury smell develops an inferiority complex in him and creates fissures in his personality. His mental health and quest for space is at stake because of heightened anxiety, confusion, depression, deviant behaviour, psychosomatic symptoms, feeling of marginality and being culturally distant. Lack of openness to new experience, introversion all together constitute serious flaws in the tragic persona of Jemu as much as these are for Biju, a young Indian dreaming to make big in the land of plentiful opportunities and freedom.

The case of Biju makes an interesting study as he too ends up being not assimilated and integrated into the host culture despite his enthusiastic and focussed culture and remaining devoid of any nostalgia and emotional strings attached to native culture. He is vulnerable to acculturation stress due to his being misfit between his personality, acculturation mode perceived attitude from the main stream culture. Biju is unable to muddle through and adapt to the culture differences to the host culture.

On the other side of the psychological spectrum is the successful assimilation and integration in the host culture as represented through Jasmine of Bharat Mukhrajis novel 'Jasmine'. Her chequered journey of cross culture confrontation and radical transformations from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jane stands testimony and immense human flexibility in establishing new psychological paradigms in assimilation list and multicultural society here is an ideal case substantiating the multidimensional model which does not see the heritage and host culture identities of opposite streams but rather allows for the maintenance culture of origin and the adaptation to the host culture to occur independently on separate continuums . The notion of pluralism constitutes or informs Jane's persona and her ideology that sets her orientation towards her life ahead in the host culture.

Her fusion of two cultures and relational aspects of her personality paves the way for assimilation and integration into American ways of life and American sensibilities, and which makes her declare 'I am one of you now' Jasmine succeeds in maintaining her identity her identity as Indian American in a ethnic high fashion where diaspora means 'gain' and no 'lose' here Bharti calls for an end to futile nostalgic engagement with the past and a bold affirmation of the adopted land. Assimilation would only be the answer to the discontents of

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed E-Journal in English

Vol. I & Issue IV

diaspora. Tilo in 'The Mistress of Spices' by Chitra Bannerji, true representative of diasporic Indian women, leaves as a successful individual in America and is called the Mistress of Spices. She comes across as many characters representing vivid identities of diasporic life, like scattered identity, marginalised, rebellious, docile, and traditional. She, like Jasmine, a prototype of thoroughly assimilated and integrated individual, rules the roost in public and private domain moulding the discourse as she wants. Their extroversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, less neuroticism, sociability and open-mindedness significantly contributes towards their psychological adaption, sound mental health and cross cultural adjustments

On the basis of the probes made into the psychological recesses of people inhabiting the diasporic cross cultural literary landscapes through this paper, it can be averred and proposed that the postmodern emerging theories of psychology need to construct the multidimensional modes to incorporate the fluid personal complexities, sub identities of the globalised expatriates as they are determined not to remain misfit adamant enough to find a foothold for them selves in the rehoused land while making the most of both the native and host cultures in the multicultural society defying the one-dimensional models of psychology.

Works Cited

- Berry, J. W [1997]. *Immigration, Acculturation and Adaption*. Applied Psychology, An International Review 46[1]5-68
- Berry, J.W [1990] Acculturation and adaption. Health consequences of culture contact among circumpolar people. 'Artric Medical Research'49,142-150
2. Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London Routledge, 1994
3. Ghost, Amitav. 'The Diaspora in Indian culture' in the Imam and the Indian. Prose Pieces. Delhi Ravi Dayal Public and Permanent Black, 2002.243-250
4. Mukherjee, Bharti. *Jasmine*. New York; Viking, 1989
5. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Delhi; Carper Collins.2003
6. Kaur, Jpinder. "Cultural Dilemmas and displacement, of Immigrants in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*" in *The Journal of Indian Writings in English* 32.2 [July 2004]; 34-44. Print
7. Desai Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss* London. Penguin Book 2006
8. Dhawan, R. K. 2001. Ed. *Writers of the Indian Diaspora*. New Delhi. Prestige Books
9. Paranjape, Makarand [ed]. *Indian Diaspora. Theory, Histories Texts*. New Delhi. India log Pub. Ltd