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Sociological and Literary Profile of Indo-American Diaspora

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Abstract

Indo-American diaspora is one of the important diasporas which has exerted the massive impact on the literary world and produced literary genius of our time. An Indian American is a resident or citizen of the United States with origins in India. They both born in India and immigrated to United States or are born in the U. S. and have Indian heritage. Indian population is spread across the U. S. primarily in the urban areas in general and the large metropolitan area in particular. They are regarded very affluent community. Like the terms 'Asian American' or 'South Asian American,' the term 'Indian American' is an umbrella expression applying to people of widely varying socio-economic status, education, places of residence, generations, views, values, lifestyles and appearances. They are known to assimilate into American culture effortlessly because they have no language barriers and come from a similar society.

Keywords – *Assimilation, Second generation writers, Bengli subgroup*

Introduction

Indians are among the largest ethnic groups migrating to the USA legally. Immigration of Indian Americans has taken place in many waves since 1790, followed by a few hundred Indian emigrants through the 19th century. However, significant emigration from India to U.S. has taken place in two distinct phases from 1904, and after 1965. The first wave is a part of larger Indian Diaspora generated by British Colonial repression in India, the emigrants were mostly Sikh farmers along with political refugees and activists, middle / upper-class students from various groups, who come to gain political support from British rule. The second wave after 1965 included mostly students and professionals from the educated middle and upper classes in search of a better standard of living. After LPG and IT revolution, in 1990 Silicon Valley of American is dominated by Indian IT professionals.

A basic reality for most of the first generation, Indian Americans is that they have grown up bilingual. Those who have had the benefit of being educated in English medium school have grown

up with English as another 'native' language. Unlike Chinese, language was no hurdle for Indian immigrants. Their cultural traits, excellent knowledge, good work habits have earned them the label of 'model minority.' For a large section of an Indian immigrant community, the bonds to India endure. Their consciousness and sensibility include strong and highly differentiated regional consciousness, having to do with language, food, religious affiliation, dress, etc.

Literary Profile of Indo- American Literature

Indian American literature is among the very 'young' literature in the United States, hardly forty years old.

(A) Memoirs

Writing by immigrants from the Indian sub-continent is associated with personal and communal identity, memories of the homeland, and the active response to this 'new' world. Writers express their personal, familial identities and socio-political contexts, explaining how and why they come to be where they are and to write what they do. Ved Mehta's autobiographical inquiry in *The Ledge between the Streams* deals with his personal and familial detailed in an old fashioned way.

Bharati Mukherjee widens the autobiographical tradition of Ved Mehta in quite different ways. Society is the subject matter of her memoir, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, co-authored with her husband. It is a work in which Mukherjee reveals her nostalgia for her home city.

Meena Alexander turned to writing for strength, catharsis, and alternate possibilities. The title of her memoir *Fault Lines* gives insight into one of the main preoccupations, self-creation, and identity formation in the context of migration.

Abraham Verghese's *My Own Country* is a moving memoir of how human participation and engagement with a community make any place a home. This autobiography of a doctor specializing in infectious diseases, battling with AIDS patients in a small town in Tennessee, unfolds the satisfaction that many professional Indian Americans feel about their specialized work.

(B) Poetry

Poetry is not as popular as the novel or short-story but still, there is some major contribution by the Indian diaspora in Indo-American Literature. A. K. Ramanujan occupies an important place among Indo- American poets with a wish for connectedness and the absence of connection are the two facts of Ramanujan's poetic world. Meena Alexander's *Migrant Music* deals with belonging and home which are created by the excavation and re- composition of the past. Agha Shahid Ali is a Kashmiri exile. The themes of homeland, loss and exile are central to Ali's work. *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, a collection of poems depict in four sections; the very spaces opened up in exile. A *Nostalgist's map of America* is a volume that reveals alien spaces of hyphenated identity. Sharat Chandra's *April Nanjangud* views and remembers India through an expatriate's sensitive awareness.

Once or Twice also contains some of his earliest passionate reflection of America's attitude towards its immigrants. *The family of Mirrors* is an extension of earlier immigrant themes. His *Immigrants of Loss* deals with universality of dislocation and sharply divisive nature of American social hierarchies. Vikram Seth, a well known Indian expatriate novelist has also contributed to his collections of poems like the *Golden Gate* and *All You Who Sleep Tonight*. Poets like Vijay Seshadri, Ravi Shankar, Maua Khosala, Prageeta Sharma have also contributed their literary talent.

(C) Novel and Short-Story

Bharti Mukherjee is one of the prominent expatriate writers who reject the tradition-bound society of the East as she reaches out for the more empowering and individualistic society of the West. Her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* depicts a young women's unsettling return home to Calcutta after years abroad. The wife is about the desolation of an immigrant woman of middle-class Bengali origin devoid of her support structure in a foreign society. *Darkness* portrays the despair produced by the encounter with Canadian racism. Her *Middleman and Another Stories* reveals immigrant experience in US and Canada in ironic vein Mukherjee's later novel *Jasmine* shows the possibilities of remaking oneself in the New World.

Meena Alexander's writing shares her experiences of exile. Self creation is a familiar theme of Meena Alexander's work. In *Manhattan Music* she portrays how New World Hybrid Dopti, a personification of the old world mythic Draupadi, saves Sandhya from an attempted suicide, as if to say that the challenge of exile is in survival and not in death. Vikram Seth shot to fame with *A Suitable Boy*, followed by the novel *Equal Music* and the non-fiction funnily memoir *two lives* written at the suggestion of his mother. Chitra Banerjee- Divakaruni's writing has come late in life and is directly linked with her migrant condition. Her *Mistress of Spices* is a novel that threads magic, memory, and immigrant life into a story of love and survival. Most of her fiction and poetry deals with the theme of gender and migration. Writers like Indira Ganesan, Amulya Maladi, Sanjay Kumar Nigam, Hema Nair, Vijay Lakshmi, etc. have also dealt with various aspects, dimensions of expatriate sensibility.

Second Generation Writers / ABCDs

American Born Confused Desi (ABCD) is a term that refers to people of Desi origin, living United States. 'Confused' refers to their confusion, regarding their identity having been born in America or lived there since childhood and been more closed to American culture than to their native culture. Their bonds in India are arbitrated by their parents. This second generation is more aware of struggles of people of color in the United States and attempts to review the inequalities of race and class. Another point that should be noted is that second generation women often find that they are subject to more paternal demands and limitations than their male counterparts. Dating often becomes

an uncomfortable issue in the lives of teenage daughters. Conflicts faced within the home by the Indian American women are the subject of Sushama Bedi's novel *The Fire Sacrifice* and is a recurring theme of fiction and poetry in the recent anthologies.

Jhumpa Lahiri represents the second generation diasporic 'desis' whose relationship with America as well as India is thoroughly different from that of the first generation. Lahiri portrays the situation of second generation expatriates who confidently asserts their ethnic identity in multiculturalists situation.

Sub-group of Bengali diasporic writing within Diasporic Indian Fiction

The exclusive thing about Indian diasporic writings lies in the fact that the Indian diaspora differs from another diaspora. Unlike other Asian diaspora, the Indians, despite being 'Indian' do not involuntarily share a common faith, language, cuisine, dress, etc. The result is that the variety we have in India gets echoed in the literature of the writers of diverse background typically based on regions and sometimes on castes and religions.

Rohinton Mistry writes in a different way from Jhumpa Lahiri or other Indian writers living and writing abroad. Writers write about the customs, traditions, dress and cuisine, peculiar to the region from where they come. In a way, they bring same rich diversity that we have in India in their writings by portraying the microscopic details of their rites, dress, cuisine, etc. into the literature that they create. The comprehensive handling of the fish or the description of the vermilion in Jhumpa Lahiri creates 'Bengaliness' or Rohinton Mistry can describe Parsi habits and traditions. These regional sub-groups make Indian diasporic literature in English somewhat unique and different.

In the great success of diasporic fiction of Indian writers, particularly in the last two decades of the 20th century – there has appear a substantial sub-group within diasporic Indian fiction that is writing in English from the Indian state of Bengal, the country of Bangladesh and by *Probashi Bengalis* (diasporic Bengalis) outside the two Bengals. This sub – group contains writers like – Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Sunetra Gupta, Nalinaksha Bhattacharya, and Joydeep Roy – Bhattacharya, Bidisha Bandopadhyay, Adib Khan, Amit Choudhary, Chitra Bananarjee - Divakaruni, and the three recent authors Amal Chatterjee, Ruchira Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri.

While reading these writers, we find the manifestation of delicate Bengaliness in their writings. These writers use language, themes, moods that are very culture specific. This includes many Bengali passions like local food (*luchi, tarkari, ilish parotas, narus or jilepi and shingara*)

politics, sports, endless and (discussion) as well as debates on philosophy, music, cinema, literature and obsession of writing itself.

Most of the works of these writers also give an exact record of Calcutta dockside often minutely presented in the mode of realism. This city is also constantly used by this sub-group in their literary works.

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