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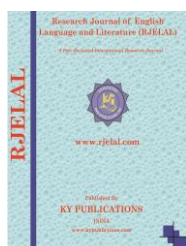
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DIASPORA IN WRITING ... WHAT CHARACTERIZES DIASPORA LITERATURE?

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ABSTRACT

Since literature reflects human sensibilities, complexities surrounding the concept and identity of diaspora diversifies current diaspora literary scenario. Diaspora writings come from a space where one has to assert his/her identity to new place and try to assimilate with new culture while also battling alienation, rootlessness, marginalization and dislocation. Also, writing enables them to revisit memories associated with home and take pleasure in the occasional retreat to the imaginary homeland. One of the post-colonial characteristic in diaspora writings is its problematic concept of home. Due to the polyvalent layers of 'home' and 'belonging', diaspora writers are often seen trying to address its complexities through their literary creations. Memory and its elusive nature is another dominant characteristic of diaspora writing. Memories of homeland elude the writer because they may appear clear at times while at other times it may appear faint and distant. As offsets of this anxiety, texts also reflect diaspora anxiety associated with the sensibilities of loneliness, alienation, nostalgia, and rootlessness. At times, the writer recollects memories of home as a place of suffering, violence, poverty and sadness, while at other times, the same is romanticized as an ideal home. The diaspora vision shifts time and again, which imparts a sense of dichotomy in diaspora writings.

Key Words: Diaspora Writing, Diaspora Literature, Diaspora in Writing

Diaspora Writing

Diaspora writing has come a long way from the time when people first started moving away from their homeland to today when migration is a normal day-to-day phenomenon with layers of understanding and theoretical basis. Initially, communication with family members or relatives back home was the only reason why diaspora would write in the form of letters. Now and then, nostalgia and the pain of separation were penned down in the form of songs, poems, stories, and journals also. As time passed globalization constricted the world and brought everyone closer together. So, diaspora writing also got sophisticated enough to be recognized as a type of literature that we now know

as diaspora literature. The writings from diaspora around the world are now studied as a form of literature which has its own unique characteristics regarding the subject, style and the sensibilities reflected in such writings.

Consequently, as diaspora as a concept got more and more complex, the writings also got more and more refined. Both the writers and readers of diaspora writings honed their skills and expertise resulting in a refined diaspora literature. As a result, now diaspora literature is a legitimate field of literature which has its own set of theorists, scholars and writers along with an informed readership. Not only did diaspora writing get refined with the

passage of time and the proliferation of worldwide diaspora community, it crossed over to other fields of study like sociology, cultural studies and anthropological studies making the subject much more inclusive. On the one hand, the concept of diaspora got progressively more accurate in its definition, while on the other hand, it got more fluid and inclusive. This push and pull regarding the concept of diaspora made diaspora literature more diverse and rich.

Since literature reflects human sensibilities, complexities surrounding the concept and identity of diaspora further diversifies current diaspora literary scenario. Also, diaspora writing now confirms to the 21st century cultural and literary movements regarding marginalization, post colonialism, neo colonialism, post modernism and the likes which has made it more relevant to changing ideologies and changing times. The popularity and relevance of diaspora is growing and so is diaspora writing.

Diaspora writings come from a space that is unique to diaspora writers. It is a space where one has to assert his/her identity to new place and try to assimilate with new culture while also battling alienation, rootlessness, marginalization and dislocation. Because they are torn between two cultures, languages and spaces, diaspora writers explore a new literary space. The broken psyche of the immigrants sheds off its psychosis into writing. Writing becomes a medium through which they express their unique socio-cultural and psychological standing, all in an attempt to understand it better. Diaspora writer therefore feels a forceful need to write because of their multicultural ethos and profound understanding of socio-cultural and economic realities around them which needs a creative outlet for the sake of maintaining their sense of self.

Another strong reason for diaspora to write is their intense desire to mark their existence. Being a minority in a foreign land, they are constantly worried if they would lose themselves into the crowd and be forgotten by their own people and their own countrymen. So, they want to assert their identity and make themselves heard through

writings. Also, writing enables them to revisit memories associated with home and take pleasure in the occasional retreat to the imaginary homeland. Through the creative process of writing, they take pleasure from memories associated with home and reach out to the inner cervices of their memory for reconnecting with past and setting up a form of association. Rushdie meditates on this further by saying:

--- one physical alienation from India at almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of redeeming precisely the thing that was lost, that will, in short, create fictions not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of mind. (Rushdie, 10)

Although Rushdie's comment denotes of Indian diaspora in particular, its implications are wider and globally acknowledged. Because diaspora have been detached from their actual home, they create imaginary homeland which they revisit through creative processes, one of which is writing.

Characteristics of Diaspora Writing

Diaspora as a post-colonial concept imparts post-colonial flavors to diaspora writing. One of the post-colonial characteristic in diaspora writings is its problematic concept of home. Diaspora writings are dominantly marked with concepts of home and belonging where home becomes a problematic subject with complexities that are tough to address for writers directly. Christou gives an account of home as a fluid, ambivalent, and anxiety-inducing concept among diaspora in the given lines:

Home is as much fluid as it is rigid, it is flexible and complex. It seeks to ground and localize, but it is also an integral part of a world of movement, it is relative and contested, a site of ambivalence and a source of anxiety. Home as a concept that raises issues of belongingness can become complicated and difficult to deconstruct and even to contextualize and situate. It may trigger memories, trauma, indifference and evoke struggles over selfhood and nationhood. (Christou, 112)

Due to the polyvalent layers of 'home' and 'belonging', diaspora writers are often seen trying to address its complexities through their literary creations. As much as home signifies a reclusive and safe place for the masses, its meaning is colored with complications for diaspora. It becomes a source of anxiety that reminds diaspora how removed they are living from their safe place. Home and belonging therefore becomes a complex issue for diaspora writers to "deconstruct and even to contextualize and situate." As a result, diaspora writings reflect a particular unease with contradictory elements that demonstrate their internal anxiousness regarding home and belonging.

Root of such problematic sense of home and belonging in diaspora writing have been traced back to Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalysis regarding home and belonging in his essay "The Uncanny". Freud differentiates between the terms '*heimlich*' (familiar, native, or belonging to the home) and the '*unheimlich*' (uncanny, unhomelike, unfamiliar, unknown). The terms, though initially functioning as binary opposites, are soon conflated in the ensuing etymological examination of these terms; the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated only through the process of repression." (Freud, 241). And "the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the negative prefix 'un' is the token of repression. (Freud, 245) Freud imparts this conflation to the maternal body which is the initial home of all subjects that later gets repressed in the construction of identity.

Homelessness, displacement, and anxiety associated with the concept of home is therefore the recurrent themes in any diaspora writing. In diaspora writing, we find a subtle undertone of anxiety that stems from dislocation and relocation. As offsets of this anxiety, texts also reflect diaspora anxiety associated with the sensibilities of loneliness, alienation, nostalgia, and rootlessness. Diaspora literature is always in constant dialogue with the concept of metahome. Loss of home and constant attempts at assimilating and acculturating to new home disturbs a diaspora mind. The longing to regain lost home often culminates in the creation

of a different version of home in the imagination of the writer.

Diaspora writing is characterized by a pluralistic vision. Since diasporawriters live in two worlds at the same time, there is a constant shifting between their worlds, voyaging back and forth between two locales. At times, the writer might recollect memories of home country as a place of suffering, violence, poverty and sadness, while at other times, the same is romanticized as an ideal home. The diaspora vision shifts time and again, which imparts a sense of dichotomy in diaspora writings as well, be it with regard to story line, language, characters or sensibilities. Diaspora writers struggle with such contradiction in every aspect of life which gets reflected in their writings as well.

Memory and its elusive nature is another dominant characteristic of diaspora writing. Memories of homeland elude the writer because they may appear clear at times while at other times it may appear faint and distant. Often, they get colored by nostalgia and imagination frustrating the writer in his/her writing process. The real and the imaginary collide which leaves the writer struggling to maintain a tangible focus while writing. Writing shifts through planes of existence as memories play hide and seek with the diaspora mind. This further characterizes diaspora writing with a unique literary quality.

Diaspora writing gets its unique characteristics also from the unique space that diaspora writers find themselves in. Diaspora always are themselves in a state of animated suspension regarding their existence, their affiliations and belonging. In such a state of suspension between home and abroad, diaspora writer develops a pluralistic vision accompanying their pluralistic existence and experiences. This vision is then translated into writing whenever a diaspora writer creates a piece of literature. The geographical, cultural and emotional disconnect felt by diaspora cultivates a sensibility of pluralistic vision which are eventually reflected in the texts imparting a unique diaspora characteristic to their literature.

Diaspora writing and diaspora literature add unique flavors to literature at large. With exclusive characteristics that explore concepts of home, belonging, identity, memory etc, diaspora writing imparts a new dimension to literature that no other forms of writing dwell upon so closely. Subtle emotions pertaining to diaspora sensibilities like nostalgia, homelessness, displacement, anxiety, alienation, loneliness etc. are all addressed via diaspora writing with utmost passion. In so doing, diaspora writing functions as the new-age literary force that addresses concerns of modern population wherein migration is much more prominent than ever before in the history of mankind. By the same token such writing also raises voices regarding the issues and concerns of the minorities from all around the world. Through writing, diaspora from all over come together and organize for common benefit. They share their sorrows and happiness while employing their skills in writing as a tool to convey their state of animated suspension, double consciousness, conflicted identity, identity loss and the likes.

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