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Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee

Editor: Dr. Saikat Banerjee
Assistant Professor & Head, Department of English
Assam Don Bosco University



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Rootlessness, Identity crisis, and Nostalgia in South Asian Diasporic Writing

Dr. Anita Goswami

Assistant Professor

Department of English

IEC University, Himachal Pradesh

(State Social and Educational coordinator

OSCA Himachal Pradesh)

Email: drgoswamianita@gmail.com

Abstract: “Home is no longer one place, its locations.” Home-both in its real shape as place, as well as in its symbolic imaginary form-provides the initial and emotional parameters for identity. Experience of ethnicity in early childhood, within the home, critically marks a sense of belonging. Home is the symbolic and real place that becomes a synonym to familiarity, intimacy, security and identity against the unknown, the distant and the large. ‘Home’ of course, needs to be understood in both literal and metaphorical senses. The defense of home is a defense of both the private spaces of intimate social relations and domestic security-the household; as well as of the larger symbolic spaces of neighborhood and nation-the collective and the community. In South-Asian Literature is also known as diasporic literature in which identity-crisis, nostalgia and rootlessness, hybridity, in-betweenness and sense of belongingness are the common features .Basically in South-Asian Literature, most of the writers have shared their own traumatic experiences homelessness or their forefather’s traumatic experience of colonialism. The South-Asian Literature is like an ocean in which vast and multiple diasporic experiences are floating in the form of poetry, novels, prose and article writing as well as memoirs. For diaspora, extended cultural boundaries might be enabling for the construction of new and multiple domestic and collective homes. At the same time, and cultural boundaries stretch, stability becomes less adequate as a synonym for home. Home in the case of diasporic populations is always ambiguous and incomplete. It is never fixed and permanent as ideal perception of ‘The Home’ assumes it to be: private, safe, fixed, a shelter to return. Therefore the main aim of this research paper is to restudy the works of South-Asian writers and the dilemma of a person wandering between two worlds.



Key Words: Nostalgia, Dilemma, Colonialism, Diaspora, Homelessness.

The Concept of 'Diaspora' emerged in 1990 and it is as old as post colonial theory. In the domain of postcolonial literature, different ethnic groups, based on their different original cultural heritages, have their ethnic, cultural, and historical specificities; hence, the condition of the and dispossessed is especially poignant and complicated because they cannot find a "home" of their own. VS. Naipaul himself experienced, and repeatedly described in his fiction, this particular urge. Throughout his life, he has desired a place to identify with. From genealogical mining, especially in his homeland (the Caribbean), through the quest for his cultural roots (India), and finally to his place of education (England) he has attempted to search for his own identity. Being an Indian by ancestry, a Trinidadian by birth, and an Englishman by education,

V. S. Naipaul possesses a multi-cultural background. As a colonial, he has always needed to locate his place in the world through writing. Prolific and critical in both fiction and nonfiction, he presents colonial anxieties in his quest for self-identity. For him, travel is a way to understand oneself, to achieve self-knowledge.

Naipaul had no tradition of literary discourse to rely on. He could not draw on the associations and resonances established by the natural and social settings of English literary works. As a result, he had to construct a natural and human background of his own special way for his reader which made it necessary for him to look outward. The moving forces of his novels and essays are thus more often are of social order and culture.

Naipaul has converted his liability of having no tradition into an advantage. He has succeeded in making use of this freedom to acquire the intellectual freedom. It is this intellectual freedom and lack of any sense of obligation at the personal level to any particular place or culture which makes Naipaul a judge of the situations where disorder and chaos are at large. For Naipaul who has experienced colonial dislocation, the art of fiction has represented in the other ways where the lost self of man could be retrieved, clarified and restored.



Twice displaced from his ancestral homeland of India, V.S. Naipaul seems to epitomize the diasporic writer. But categorization of such an extraordinary individual is not easy, even if the categories are clearly defined, and the details of the theories of Diaspora that have been developed over the years are subject to dispute. James Clifford summarizes William Safran's 'main features of Diaspora' as 'a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host... country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship,(Clifford 305.) but points out that "there is little room in his definition for the principled ambivalence about physical return and attachment to land which has characterized much Jewish diasporic consciousness.(305).

The effects of the displacement of people their forced migration, their deportation, their voluntary emigration, their movement to new lands where they made themselves masters over others or became subjects of the masters of their new homes-reverberate down the years and are still felt today. Naipaul has also, in his many interviews and essays, made his own myth into that of the writer as a displaced person. One who does not have a side, doesn't have a country, doesn't have a community; one (who) is entirely an individual", a figure who has achieved a Brahmanical "ideal of non-attachment" (Overcrowded Barracoon 16), a man without a home. His most well- known protagonist, Mr.Biswas sees 'manhood' as invariably linked to the ownership of a house", a home, and therefore himself as not a man. One morning he says to his dog-"you are an animal and think that because I have a head and hands and looks as I did yesterday I am a man am deceiving you. I am not whole." (*A House* 268). The self becomes inseparable from the house- to create the one is to achieve the other. Salim in *A Bend in the River* never sees his apartment as a home, never even removes the stacks of bad paintings the previous owner has left behind her; "he keeps it as a found it, however inconvenient, as a permanent reminder that he has as the novel's first sentence puts it, allowed himself to become nothing*" (*Gorra* 64).

This novel displays a unique affection for the homeland of his birth. It deals with the historical period of colonialism and indenture and the experiences of migration and displacement with respect to



Trinidad. The rawness of emotion present in the novel is missing in Naipaul's later texts which have become increasingly sophisticated in their treatment of imaginary homeland and identity. This diversity of literary expression provides the writers with the flexibility and freedom to utilize the most effective means to communicate their idea express their creativity and share their lives with their readers. Through their effective and can did self-Exposure, these writers ultimately establish a "post-exilic discourse" and can invite their readers to visit their literary homelands.

It is a novel which he created out of what he saw and felt as a child. In his famous novel *A House For Mr Biswas*, V.S.Naipaul depicts the desperate struggle of Mr. Biswas to acquire a house of his own which is symbolic of an individual's need to develop an authentic identity. Though Mr Biswas ultimately manages to acquire, yet his premature death has a tragedy about it. V.S.Naipaul satirizes the social classes realistically, such as the vivid, candid and straightforward presentation of the adherence to the level of low life. The Tulsi family and Hanuman House represent the old Hindu culture now coming under the influence of the alien western culture. The life story of Mr. Biswas shows a self-respecting individual's rebellion against tyranny, the account of Tulsi family shows the interaction of two cultures, the old Hindu culture as represented by the Tulsi family and the alien western culture as represented by the Port of Spain and by such individuals as Dorothy, the Christian girl whom Shekhar marries, and Dorothy's cousin whom Owad marries.

The interaction between these two cultures is designed to show that old Hindu culture which the Indian Hindus had taken with them to Trinidad cannot long withstand the influence of the alien western culture. Of course, the old Hindu culture is not completely absorbed by the western culture, but it is certainly weakened and undermined. In short, Hanuman House is a microcosm of the old Hindu culture. The Tulsi family is very orthodox, but its orthodoxy begins to crumble with the onset of western influences. Mrs. Tulsi, in ruling over her family, is helped in her task by Seth, her dead husband's brother. Seth and his wife Padma also live in Hanuman House where they enjoy a status as high as that of Mrs.Tulsi herself.



He seems to move toward a clearer feeling of place, of being at "home." I thus regard Naipaul's novelistic writing as a process of identity recovery undergoing a series of transformations: he denies or negates his Caribbean homeland, adopts a stage of mimicry in England, searches for his cultural roots in India, and finally reconstructs his identity out of his multi-cultural particularity and uniqueness. His writing career comes in four stages: (1) placelessness and alienation, (2) colonial predicament, (3) cultural heritage in India, and (4) writing for self-definition. By accepting his homelessness and statelessness, he (re)creates a new identity in exile. He makes a voice not only for himself but also for other marginalized people. Through writing, he translates his "cultural incommensurability" to the world and articulates the representation of his cultural particularity (Bhabha 59). Diasporic literature has-made a significant contribution to Indo-English literature by its rich exposure to multiculturalism. Though the sense of displacement may be an essential condition of diasporic literature, it is not experienced precisely with the same identity by all; it differs according to time and place. The spirit of exile and alienation enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in the minds of readers. Naipaul, in particular, consistently paints the picture of the derelict man in the desolate landscape.

A House for Mr. Biswas is, therefore, individual attempts to overcome "homelessness". The writer sees the characters as victims of their environment. Their urgency comes from their efforts to get others to acknowledge them so as to have it validated for themselves, their human necessity. The house becomes a legacy which Mr. Biswas can bequeath to his family. Just as through his writing Naipaul attempts to salvage his own family history and the history of the Trinidadian Indian community so also the hero of his novel makes a final effort to create a new world out of nothingness, thereby leaving behind his footprint on history and escaping annihilation and attaining fulfillment.

Uma Parameswarn's writings comprised of different genres which include short stories, plays and poems with common themes which juxtapose her Western experience with the Indian realities. In her play named *Dear Deedi, My Sister*, she discusses the lives and experiences of Indian immigrants as they struggle hard to adjust and cope with the new atmosphere of the new land. In order to survive in



the alien place, a school boy named Ilago from Philippines asks his mother to change his name to Jim or David

Ma, you think you could change my name

To Jim or David or something.. .

It would be nice to be white,

More like everyone else You know? (64-65)

The immigrants in these situations are forced to feel that they stand on the borderline belonging neither to their homeland nor to their foster country. In their attempt to merge with the host culture while preserving their heritage, they develop a double identity and their culture becomes a sandwich culture. This double identity has been expressed by Homi. K.Bhabha in his article on *Postcolonial Criticism*, "A doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once which makes it impossible to accept the invitation to identity: You are a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different.. . It is precisely in that ambivalent use of 'different - to be different from those that are different makes you the same - which the Unconscious speaks of the form of otherness... "(228)

The immigrants dilemmas, predicaments, contradictions, paradoxes, complexities have been a predominant idea in postcolonial writers as they seek emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race and class. Uma Parameswaran's novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* and her poem *Trishanku* portray the 'in-between' condition of the immigrants. A chronological study of Uma Parmeswaran's works reflects the ongoing involvement of P immigrant writer with reality. Her first short story "The door I shut behind me" (1967) reflects the sense of wonder and fear of the immigrant at the new world around oneself, and nostalgia for the world left behind. The story is about a young graduate Chander who secures a green card and goes to Canada of being and his first impressions of being in a new country While his mother gives him a copy of "The Ramayana" and a translation of "Bhagvad Gita" as parting gifts, Chander himself. buys a copy of Chandra Sekhar's *Radioactive Transfer*, though it was not his field of study nor a book which is to be read during a journey .He simply was driven by a urge to hold that book "To see it was to think of its India-born



author and to think of him Wasto open a world of ambition and inspiration."After being Indian families, he realizes that when we leave our country we shut many doors behind ourselves though we are not aware Of it at that time." At the same time, being an optimistic, he feels that there are - many doors of us.

Uma's second and most important work "*Trishanku* (1988) was a sequence of poems covering twenty years and spoken by various voices, where one finds an encounter of different cultures. In a review of the sequence, Tom Wayman pays tribute to its "startling and powerful Collage of the experience of uprooting and re-settlement, of the intermingling of personal and social histories of many other human dimensions involved in transplanting an ancient culture to a new land.

Bharati Mukherjee, an American novelist born in India, her life shows a strong resemblance to the characters of her fictional world. It is the voice of Bharati Mukherjee, who speaks behind all the protagonists of her novels. She is quite a sensible writer. Basically, the literary tendencies were reflected in her early childhood but still in the formation of a writer, some major impacts on her sensibility are also responsible. So, the biographical details of Bharati Mukherjee explicitly highlight those influences which enable her to be a writer in a true sense Bharati Mukherjee is one of the pioneers among the Indian diasporic writers. Today she is considered a strong voice of Indian diaspora in America. Her writing is basically concerned to Asian-American literature, Canadian multiculturalism and immigrant Indian Women.

Indian diasporic generation, different aspects of diaspora, dislocation and displacement of Indian immigrants not only physical but psychological alienation, creating rootlessness, cultural shock, crisis of identity, multiculturalism and the different dilemmas through which Indian immigrants suffer and feel homelessness, aspire for 'third world.' The chapter glances at the literary background and contribution of Bharati Mukherjee as an Indian Diasporic writer, through her creative works she presents the predicament of Indian immigrant's women who are living in America, they are trying to be the part of adopted land as Bharati Mukherjee has become the part and partial of American culture. Being a writer and immigrant Mukherjee has given message to immigrant Indian women that don't



consider yourself alien, recognize your potentialities, break the shell of past and enjoy your new identify become the part of new world, it will be the world of women.

The early two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, are focusing on the theme, Crisis of belongingness in both the novels. *The Tiger's Daughter* is based on the biographical experience of Bharati Mukherjee's known as her maiden novel. She narrates the story of a young Bengali girl Tara, born in Calcutta, returns her native land after seven years of her marriage in America. Her marriage is outcaste to an American. Now she is unable to correlate herself with her family members and friends. She feels herself rootless. Her position is like Trishanku, She is dwindling between native land and adopted land. Uprooted from her native culture and identity, she has lost the sense of belonging, she lives life an exile. She suffers the trauma of identity crisis. *Wife* is the second novel of Bharati Mukherjee revealing the postcolonial complexities of Indian Immigrant woman Dimple who is incapable to balance between her native culture and American life-style. Being an Indian woman she is deprived of her duties and always wanders in fancy. She gets chance to go America with her husband Amit where is perplexed to see the rapid life of America, she feels herself isolated and gets cultural shock. Depression begins to process in Dimple and starts to break inside. She kills Amit in a fit and also kills herself. Bharati Mukherjee has concentrated on dillusionment in that novel. It is the purpose of the novelist to give message to the readers that to survive and to do well in the states; one must become American in one's thoughts and actions. It is no use being Indian and living in a claustrophobic ghetto not a physical one, but a ghetto all the same, it being on the psychological plane. Those who are incapable, break down like Dimple. The above two novels are devoted to the phase of expatriation of the novelist during her stay in Canada. *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World* deal with theme of assimilation and adaptation of a new culture. Ages ago, Shakespeare quoted in *Romeo and Juliet*, "What's in name"? Readers agreed to it and even there was contradiction of any sort, it was a minimal. In the present global scenario the conditions are not quite similar. The touch of 'modernity' has loaded the term 'name' as an identity to oneself. Mukherjee creates a character beyond the boundaries of gender, race, class and economic or political status The Protagonist goes through various transformations in her name, place and personality.



Bharati Mukherjee's popular novel *Jasmine* is basically the story of transformation with disintegration and regeneration. The protagonist of the novel is an Indian village woman of who starts her journey Hasanpur, Punjab, to Florida, to New York, to Iowa and as the novel comes to a close she is about to set off to California. Jasmine is just like other village girl, unfortunately she becomes widow at the age of seventeenth, her husband Prakash Vihh is murdered. The identity of Jasmine shifts to multiple identities like Jyoti as a village girl, Jasmine for husband, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane and Half-Face Kali. It is the story of dislocation and relocation, as the Protagonist frequently sheds her existing role to move into other roles. Jasmine is an epitome of modern Indian woman, who suffers endless trials in her life and yet comes out successful at last with sheer will and determination. Through *Jasmine* Bharati Mukherjee shows all the cultural problems can be boldly faced and solved if the target is determined. In the beginning Jasmine suffers uncountable hurdles like prejudices, exploitation and violence of migration but it allows her to overcome these difficulties by using prudence and aptitude. On the other hand *The Holder of the World* which is multidimensional which directly focuses on complexities of postcolonial world. This novel may be put in category of feministic, historical and anti-war novel. *The Holder of the World* is a story about the trauma of dislocation and joy of transformation arising out of the union of two cultures. It is a story of Hannah Easton, an abandoned child, came to India in the 17th century and imbibed herself in its culture. She is an embodiment of courage, imagination and assertiveness which is part and parcel of the American spirit. A woman is a woman whether Indian or American; it is mental makeup that counts. She travels to India and gets involved with a few Indian lovers.

All through the narrative the novelist concentrates on the immigrant women and their efforts to gain freedom as individuals. The novel gains a broader perspective as the women characters are utilized now to explore the affinity between different cultures. Hannah's journey to the East fraught with images of adventure, action and passion projects a sort of escape from the rigid claustrophobic Puritan world. She agrees to marry Gabriel Legge because she visualizes liberation from a constrictive society.



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