

Diasporic Dilemma in the selected Novels of Romen Basu a lesser known Indian English Writer

Iffat Siddiqui*

Abstract

Diaspora as everyone is quiet aware what is it, I shall say a few things about diaspora as per my research Diaspora originates from the Greek word, Diaspora which means, dispersion and in true sense dispersion means scattering. This dispersion may be spreading or scattering of people. As people scatter, their language will also spread along with culture. At the beginning it would be culture of one particular place, and it would be focused at that particular place, but as people spread out they take along culture and language with them. The form they have inherited they impose it on the language of the people and place they have settled.

What is Dilemma and why a dilemma here? :

As and when a person is not sure of certain things and when asked to make certain decision and he is not sure about then the situation arises a dilemma. Same is the situation with Romen Basu therefore I call him a writer of Diasporic Dilemma. Though he wasn't a literary person but after being inspired by his clients he becomes a novelist. He had passed his entire life as an economist and it is only after retirement while running a printing press he turns into a writer of Indian English.

Here the reality of his life which has a Diasporic behaviour but at every step the reader shall find the characters portrayed by the writer all in dilemma.

Key words: Diaspora, dilemma, lesser known Indian writer with a feeling of loss of Bengali identity.

Diasporic Dilemma in the selected Novels of Romen Basu a lesser known Indian English Writer

Diaspora as everyone is quiet aware what is it, I shall say a few things about diaspora as per my research Diaspora originates from the Greek word, Diaspora which means, dispersion and in true sense dispersion means scattering. The dispersion first started with the Greeks, they had to disperse due to the adverse conditions prevailing in their country either to do trade or business. Then next to them were the Jews, theirs was a forced dispersion which was due to lot of sufferings. As per Oxford Dictionary the first known recorded usage of the word *diaspora* in the English Language was in 1876 referring "extensive *diaspora* work (as it is termed) of evangelizing among the National Protestant Churches on the continent" The term became more widely assimilated into English by the mid 1950s, with long-term expatriates in significant numbers from other particular countries or regions also being referred to as a diaspora. This dispersion may be spreading or scattering of people. As people scatter, their language will also spread along with culture. At the beginning it would be culture of one particular place, and it would be focused at that particular place, but as people

spread out they take along culture religion and language with them. The form they have inherited they try to impose it on the people at the place they have settled.

Who are the diaspora writers, and why do we label them so? It is these immigrants who leave their homeland for their betterment, but when not being readily accepted by the host land they find their means and ways to ignore this situation or rather to avoid their frustration they put down in writing whatever is missed and have become diaspora writers.

I would now come to my topic as I said, I am to speak about dilemma, yes these Diasporic writers have always remained in Dilemma and that is the reason why I have given the title Diasporic dilemma. Diasporic writers are missing their homeland, culture, language and a feeling of neglect that is why they remain in dilemma. A real dilemma of acceptance, acceptance from the sides, host land as well as homeland and this is what reflects in their writing too.

What is Dilemma and why a dilemma here? :

As and when a person is not sure of certain things and when asked to make certain decision and he is not sure about then the situation arises is a dilemma. Same is the situation with Romen Basu therefore I call him a writer of Diasporic Dilemma. Diasporic Dilemma as my author wasn't a literary person but after being inspired by his clients he started putting down things and soon achieved fame and name and became a novelist. He has worked as an economist for the United Nations Organization, before being an Economist he was a secretary to K Krishna Menon. Later on after completing his studies from United Kingdom he moved to the United States and here worked for the United Nations Organization. While working for the United Nations Organization he got an opportunity to move all around the world thus acquiring or rather achieving a lot of knowledge about various subjects and other things had helped him to become a writer of English literature also. Though all his novels do not reveal Diasporic behaviour but there are some which reveal his Diasporic behaviour. To name these few novels are as follows the first and foremost his debut novel '*Houseful of People*' which can be labeled as autobiographical as well as Diasporic novel. The others are *A Gift of Love*, *Your life to live*, *Hours Before Dawn* and *Candles and Roses* As we see in present time Indian diaspora has been at the centre stage due to its theoretical formulation which is being generated by their works, as writers are often pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. It is this Diasporic literature which has helped in breaking the barriers between different countries and localizing peace among them.

Usually when the person is not very clear about his own self he/she is not very sure of what he is going to produce will be acceptable by the society or not he remains in a dilemma with a fear of rejection. No doubt Romen Basu who wrote about Bengali culture and Bengali society but he survived with a non acceptance nature as he himself had married outside his culture and state in spite of his wife being an Indian a Sikh, from whom he has two daughters also. As we read his novels and what he has revealed in his five selected novels we come to a conclusion that at every point he has shown his characters also remaining in dilemma.

In his first novel he has shown the protagonist Arun who represents the author as he also moves out of the house, finds a Punjabi girl develops friendship with her and she even gets pregnant without tying a knot. This reveals a typical western style where a boy and girl

develop relation outside marriage and soon they even move away, as the protagonist was not very confident and brave to face the consequences. Next I would say he has shown the protagonist has a feeling of fear or rather dilemma, he leaves her and returns to his hometown. But the girl being headstrong comes behind him and makes a place for herself in Arun's house. Same story has other characters who are also shown in dilemma, they too want to get married to girls outside their caste but here the situation is different, as the boys are adamant and fearless they leave the house and after getting married they settle at far off places but return after certain time period bringing home with them their better halves as well as a child. This is also because they are in dilemma for if they stay away from their homeland they will lose their culture and language. They don't want to keep their children aloof from their culture and their language.

Same is the situation with the protagonist; he has written about in his other four novels which I have labelled as diaspora novels in the west. All these novels are stationed in U.S.A as he had passed his retirement life in the U.S.A but with a dilemma. The next novel '*Your life to Live*' here we have the typical Indian protagonist staying in the west but he has Indian thinking and views that a woman is not free to talk to his male friends, on one side you say you are living in the west but your thoughts never change. We have Ashoke and Zarine from different caste both have perceived higher education in the West yet Ashoke is shown to be orthodox by nature, he feels he has full freedom for himself but when it comes for his better half he doesn't want to sacrifice a bit. This shows his dilemma of losing his identity as well as his values for he even tells Zarine that she will have to change her religion after getting married to him, for which she even agrees and changes but he is shown always suspicious about her. It is only when Zarine gets frustrated and leaves him and returns to her parents on returning to India Ashoke realises that he had created a blunder on returning to India this shows his dilemma.

Again we have another novel *The Gift of Love* to begin with, it is a story about a kaleidoscope love about man-woman relationship, sexual affairs before marriage, even before the mind meets and later on when it develops and matures which involves spontaneity but later on there is again the same religious wedlock which ends into mature form of love and the same selfless sacrifice, finally ending in defiant wedlock cutting the barriers of caste and community. This is about the hero Sukumal who had lost his mother at a very tender age when he even didn't understand the meaning what a mother is. His feelings of love are fulfilled only after he reaches an age of maturity and that too in an alien land, coming across an English girl without bothering about class, creed, religion, colour or age. Here the writer has proved this has lot of similarities with authors own life, for he too may be had not got that affection in life so even he married to a girl out of religion that too in an alien land. Only difference is he met an Indian girl from different religion and got settled with her in an alien land. This is a pure Diasporic dilemma as the writer first comes to the west for higher education, completing it gets work and settles there. Further getting good opportunity shifts from one country to another and later getting married settles there.

Coming to the fourth novel which speaks about Internationalism and East-West encounter is *Candles and Roses* it is also about a search for the truth we see here the author speaking about human relationship along with elaborative ideas on mannerism. In this novel the author has tried to show a love triangle where we find a hero with two heroines one is a Parisian girl named Monique who represents the West and Pramila an Indian who represents the East and in between is Samir Sen the central character between the two

standing at cross roads. Being an Indian married to an Indian girl but soon it happened that Samir is appointed as a civil servant in an international organization in Paris, he reaches there. Coming to Paris he moves out and gets attracted by the beauty of the Parisian girl whom he sees at one of the shopping centres in Paris. He then regularly visits her work place she even ignores him, yet he pursues her and they come close to each other. After coming close to each other they reveal to each other about their personal life in which Monique tells Samir about her past and having a love affair with a Yugoslavian peasant named Marco and how he betrayed her. Even Samir tells her about his marriage with Pramila and the Indian customs of taking dowry and getting married to her on his elders' persuasion. Besides this he even tells how Pramila refused to have sex with her and Pramila's feeling about sex as unclean act and his unsatisfactory state of mind. Listening to all this Monique for an instance wants to be away from Samir she even tries to avoid him as she doesn't want a second disappointment in life. Yet they keep on meeting and it is after about three months they get united they have physical relations. Listening to Samir and his Hindu philosophy she gets highly impressed by him, she leaves her parents home and stays in an individual apartment. On the other hand Samir's family comes to know about Samir and his affairs in Paris they send his wife Pramila to Paris. Though she is aware about his affair she has no grudge or consent for it, where as Monique on coming to know about Pramila's coming to Paris now tries to be away from Samir and makes him realise about him taking care of his wife, and there was no possibility of having a platonic love between them. Even though he explains that Pramila was very traditional and he couldn't have that relation as husband and wife, yet Monique forces Samir to understand her and have relations with her. Hence Samir on Monique's force tries to change Pramila by asking her to change herself by taking French classes, learn music she also tries to change herself by taking French lessons and go shopping all alone she does gets transformed and they come close to each other. This is not enough Pramila even gets pregnant but soon a miscarriage takes place and this brings them close, yet Samir is in a dilemma about Pramila that she wants detachment from life and therefore is practising yoga therefore he again tries to drift towards Monique. Again Monique comes between them in the guise of a reporter meets Pramila and interviews her and finds out about Pramila's love for Samir and soon moves away from their lives. This is a good example of East-West encounter on International board for how even a western girl is able to understand the feelings of other human being which usually doesn't take place. This is pure diaspora in dilemma what Romen Basu has tried to portray, along with juxtaposing the east-west values to highlighting the social, religious, romantic and philosophical aspects.

Discussing about dilemma there are various instances from the beginning till the end that I have show cased that too Diasporic dilemma, it starts with the protagonist from the very young age while he is in search of love which he has not received in the childhood as he lost his mother at a very tender age. Therefore he tries to seek love from the street urchins' families which he visits, but in dilemma for he was not sure of what he was doing. Later when he grows up and attains a marriageable age he is in dilemma while selecting a girl for him, as to select a beauty or to go for dowry. In this he is trapped by dowry which gives him a great setback for his wife is very orthodox type and who is not ready to believe in herself, for she is not good at looks and she thinks that her parents have cheated the boy by showing him a different painted picture of hers. Therefore when Samir wants to have

relations with her she refuses saying it is all baseless and dirty acts, isn't this a dilemma? Dilemma from both characters Pramila as well as Samir. On the other side Samir is in double dilemma for one side he has his wife on the other hand beautiful lover. He can't leave his wife or the lover, this is because he had promised her that whatever happens he would not leave her and with this agreement she had left her parents place and come to stay alone. He is in a fix and the other side we have Monique feeling that Samir would divorce his wife and accept her, but as Samir is too much religious minded he comes under the influence of Pramila and her religious affects he gets drifted towards Pramila. As he is in dilemma he also wants to have platonic relationship with Monique, this is also dilemma from both the sides but after Monique meets Pramila she comes out of it and moves away from their lives. Yet Samir is in a dilemma for she doesn't know how to treat them but later being religious minded and Pramila getting pregnant and losing a baby due to miscarriage he is drawn towards Pramila.

Coming to the fifth selected novel *Hours before Dawn* here there is a lot of Diasporic dilemma along with east-west encounter and suspicion. We find the protagonist very suspicious from the beginning till the end. Though the hero and heroine have met in the west come close to each other with their mutual consent and after finding oneness, get married as per their own customs yet we find the protagonist very suspicious. This suspicious nature leaves him in a dilemma, and he moves away from his family without informing his wife it is only after twenty-five years or on their twenty-fifth anniversary they meet. This type of dilemma has even not allowed him to settle in his jobs, and always been suspicious about his wife Kabita. Mrinal the protagonist is in such a state of dilemma when it comes to normal behaviour he can't be normal for his behaviour at his home is different from that at Kabita's parents place. This is because he wants to show Kabita's father he belongs to an affluent class I quote **"It is quite simple at my home I am in spirit with my family and at your place I prefer the life style of your family, why have you to be unacceptable to that?"** Pg 66. **"why this hypocrisy, you cannot have an ideal of something and if one doesn't have ideals means one is running away from something. I will have to find out"** pg 72

According to Romen Basu one can wisely point out and even portray its impact like the western education and its adverse effects on the younger generation. The western culture has many a times knowingly or unknowingly influenced the east, this is all through education. As the English people have always lived in nuclear families this has somehow impressed the younger generation and they have also tried to imitate them, but when it comes to preserving culture or finding it difficult to deal with their better halves they have become either suspicious or left the girls on their own and fled away from the fields. Such things are very prominent in International outlook and east west encounter.

Indeed at times the readers may find Romen Basu discussing such a lot about culture, this shows him, missing his culture this is his Diaspora behaviour, but when it comes to discussing about the protagonist to be like free birds running away from homeland in search of freedom it shows his international attitude also. But behind all this behaviour is his dilemma according to me, for he too might have passed in such a manner which has given him way to write down such novels creating such characters which resemble his own life.

Besides freedom and culture no doubt the protagonist are bounded by these things but when it comes to taking liberty for their own self each one of them has gone beyond the norms of society and culture and selected girls for themselves. As Basu was an internationalist and got married outside his religion, same way most of his protagonist gets married outside their religion. As we have Arun who gets married to Sheila who is a Punjabi, then we have Ranjit who also gets married to a Christian. Though they are not very staunch religious persons, this is the fact that they have selected girls of their liking but when it came to rearing children Basu has given upper hand to religion. This shows he has missed it in reality a pure Diasporic dilemma therefore he portrays such things through his protagonist; he doesn't want them to repent over it. Later we have Ashoke and Zariné here also same is the reality no doubt their return was truly speaking for that purpose. On the name of religion and culture and by the time they realize it was too late. Now when they realize they want to return to the land which had given them freedom and everything it was too late. But at last it had stopped them at least from being separated. They reunite and understand each other and return to their own self living a peaceful life.

Same way if we consider other eminent Indian diaspora writers like Jhumpa Laheri, Bharti Mukherji, Anita Desai, Vikram Seth, etc same is their situation they too have some or the other dilemma let me just give example of Jhumpa Laheri she has shown how the characters live in cultural dilemma, whatever would be their feelings for the west yet we find them dying to preserve their culture. This is the biggest dilemma most of the characters are shown to be living in, same is the case with other writers.

Conclusion:

As such diaspora is all about creating new identities and space for growth resolution for conflicts and new culture, as time passes by the migrants are trying to get accustomed with the culture of the host land and also trying to imbibe with the prevailing culture. They have become bilingual, bicultural as well as a mood of dilemma prevails with a thought of being losing their identity. Thus they have accepted and kept an open vision of accepting the culture of the host land and not necessary to go back in search of roots. Rather coming up with open views and creating a new culture of their own. Thus a Diasporic dilemma in true sense.

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*I Iffat Siddiqui an academician recently was awarded the Degree of PhD by JJTUniversity Rajasthan on the above stated topic. **“A Critical Study on the Diasporic Dilemma in the selected novels of Romen Basu”** I have worked with F.D Arts and Commerce College for 11 years as a part time lecturer, with H. K. Arts College for 2 years as a visiting faculty was also handling Post Graduate classes. Also worked in the Muscat Oman for 4 years. Presently as I was focusing on my PhD I am not working for last 2 years.

Visiting Faculty from November end at **Study Abroad program Gujarat University Ahmedabad teaching M.A students**