

Indianness in the Diasporic Novels of Romen Basu

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Abstract

As in today's times the word Diaspora has become very important as well as very renowned in literature, for the writers of diaspora have been achieving important place. It is not that they are given greater importance but it is due to the manner in which they portray the reality of life making the entire scenario very interesting as well as eye catching. As far as my view point and other writers of diaspora in search of roots or their identity they try to be very accurate as a perfectionist going to the depth of the topic. It seems they become more patriotic and truthful towards their work, in language and art which ever place they may belong to they show their Indianness. While showing their Indianness they use typical places, sense of dressing, food, and other words used are all very Indian.

My author Romen Basu on whom I am to speak about is one such writer, though a Bengali lived in India until his graduation and moved to the west for higher education. Achieving higher education worked as a bureaucrat, after a long journey takes up writing and becomes a Diasporic writer. Moved all over the world as was his job but he is no less than an Indian in his literary works. In spite of being influenced by Russian and French writer he doesn't take the niche from them but has remained very much Indian in his novels. I am here to discuss his major Diasporic novels though he has written more than a dozen novels.

Key words: Indianness, Diaspora a comparative study.

Romen Basu being an Indian English author but a lesser known, in Indian English literature first and secondly a diaspora writer. No doubt he didn't take up his career as a writer, it was only after his retirement and due to his passion he turned to be an author of Indian English writing. He has penned more than a dozen novels among which selected of them can be labelled as Diaspora writings. To name a few of his diaspora writings are *A House full of*

People 1968, Your life to live 1972, A gift of love 1976, Candles and Rose 1978, Hours Before Dawn 1988.

Romen Basu was born in 1923 in Calcutta now Kolkata belonging to Kayastha community. He grew up in the old traditional manner of joint family system having sixty-five members a very affluent family having all doctors, professors, solicitors and barristers. Only his father was a business man who managed the upliftment of the family. Also his eldest uncle took great care of the family in all respect whereas his uncles just educated the nephews and other extravagances like providing cars to them and other comforts. His great grand-father was a teacher Kabi Bhusan Jogindernath Basu who became a headmaster and later a Professor and a poet. Under all these influences Romen Basu also after acquiring basic education completing his under-graduation in economics he moved to London here he studied Charter Secretaries and Masters in Business administration. He joined the Indian services and served as a secretary to V.K.Krishna Menon. Later on he moved to United States and joined United Nation Organisation and dedicated his thirty-five years in its service. It was then after a very long period of time in later years he started writing and then he wrote more than a dozen novels two volumes of short stories and poems. In between he also worked for several other countries and worked as an economist representing Southeast Asian countries. During this period he only wrote about the topics of Economics and ran a publishing house, published books for Russian, Japanese and Indian authors, it was very late in 1968 he was encouraged by these writers and he wrote his debut novel in literature therefore he is not very well known as a writer of Indian English Literature. He says he has never written any book at a stretch it was only while travelling whatever he remembered he put them down in bits. These bits turned out to be very real and enthusiastic; whatever he has written has remained to be with very minutely observed and to portrayed in a realistic manner such that if a reader picks up his novel they wont feel like leaving it without completing it.

As a student I had studied his only one novel which forced me to take up the study to its depth and concluded doing research on it as my MPhil topic, that was based on Indian English literature as not much was said about Diaspora in those times in India. As such not much work has been done on him and later on I took a serious study doing my PhD and tried to prove him as a Diaspora writer but in Dilemma. Here this paper goes beyond that I am going to compare him as Indian Diaspora writer. According to Basu literary career is a cause,

he believes that fiction is a human document, and as he gets involved in writing he says he gets involved into reality as he has said in one of his interview “*I do submit that there is no room for parochialism or nationalism in the matter of language. Every language is a universal language. Any language in which an author chooses to write is his personal preference.*”¹Pg18. With these little words I shall try and compare his Indianness in his diaspora novels. As his debut novel *House Full of People* narrates about the family life in Bengali joint family system, the Roy family is shown to be very affluent one but slowly how it disintegrates into several nuclear families. Though the entire setup is Indian and it has taken place in India yet I have labelled it as diaspora as the behaviour of characters and the prevailing culture shown in the novel is totally diaspora manner. Now I compare it with Indian setting, the places mentioned the religious ceremonies taking place and the nature of the characters, the living style, the food habits, religious ceremonies, festivals celebrated and marriages conducted with the giving and taking of dowry is very traditional. As he writes about the head family member Sudhir Roy, who is the sole earning member of the family taking care of the entire family in spite of his young brothers, being advocates and engineers but all are good for nothing they have daughters who have reached a marriageable age. Yet they rely on their elder brother, this is right from the selection of the bride to purchasing clothes, ornaments, arranging for the guest, deciding the menu and giving away the dowry. Such things make it very Indian, not only this the words used by him like Kaka, for uncle chotupishima, for aunt, uncle’s wife so on and this alone is enough to show the joint family system keeping old people as well as divorced aunts and orphans a protection and a place to live. This is his first novel though written about Indian joint family system having Indian roots but very much a diaspora novel as I have proved it in my research work. This shows the Indianness in his very first novel Diasporic yet Indian.

Coming to his second selected novel *Your life to live* which is based in America then shifts to India but here again there is dilemma as well as Indianness. We have American setting as the hero and the heroine first meet at Vienna then they move to the United States get married and settle down in United States but the attitude of the protagonist is such that it binds the female protagonist not allowing her to work asking her to follow his religion as she hails from a different religion as well as different culture. Here the author has shown the girl to be very down to earth, she accepts everything from the protagonist even accepts his religion is ready to wear a saree cover her head and so on does all the rituals according to him this shows the

Indianness about the female protagonist. Had Zarine the female protagonist been from some foreign land she wouldn't have accepted such things on the contrary left him and gone away. This is the Indian Diaspora attitude shown by the writer. On the contrary Romen Basu has even shown how she is accepted by family members on their return from United States she lives with other family members in a joint family meeting her husband only in the night. During the day she is shown doing all the chores with other females of the house without complaining about anything. It is only after her being neglected by Ashoke she returns to her family in spite of her family forbidden her. This is in true sense Indianness conveyed by the writer what generally happens in Indian families here again even after her family had forbidden her but soon shown to be accepted by them, not only this after a period of time when Ashoke accepts his mistake and goes to bring her back he is honoured in traditional manner as was prevalent in Bengali culture. Gifted him with silken clothes and Bengali sweets entirely Bengali tradition this is purely Indian tradition.

The next novel is *A Gift of love* which is very much Diasporic now how I compare it and call it Indian. As the setting in the beginning is Indian and later on as the protagonist moves to West acquiring western culture but when it comes to selecting a life partner he no doubt has many affairs one after the other even making girls pregnant and leaving them. This is entirely western culture but in the end he finds a maid servant's daughter trains her, teaches her, reforms her and marries her going against all odds. Here the author has shown a mix culture of east as well as the west. With this we can say there is culmination of the east as well as the west. Ultimately it is the author who cannot forget the Indian culture but very tactfully he portrays his Indian identity in his novels which forces the writer to call him purely Indian in true context. The manner in which the author has portrayed the protagonist his drifting from one place to other from one female character to another and his selection of female characters make him every inch an Indian. Whatever may be the title as it speaks about love as a gift which may be little different from usual Indian titles but in true sense it is that gift of love which had made the protagonist drift from one girl to another and final it is this gift which he receives in the end making it a novel of east as well as the west.

Coming to his fourth novel *Candles and Roses* the title is very symbolic itself; the Candles stands for the western culture and Roses suggest the eastern culture. Here the author has given this title to his fourth novel, where he shows the protagonist giving flowers to his lover

whom he has chosen as a support, in spite of his being a married man but he feels his wife is not up to his marks. Therefore coming to a foreign land he is behind her, going behind her beauty and gives away flowers to her. This is when she agrees to meet him for the first time at a restaurant, this act of his was very much western act and while she comes to meet he ignites a candle in her honour this is again western culture. But as soon as the truth of his married life is revealed and his wife has come to stay with him in Paris the lover or the female counter part behaves in the manner of moving apart from him in spite of her being a foreigner a Parisian is shown very much Indian. The author at times has shown situations in which the reader would sometimes get baffled as to how can a foreigner behave like an Indian and an Indian behave like a foreigner. This act of the writer makes me compare and portray him as an Indian Diasporic writer. Or rather calling more an Indian creating a diaspora atmosphere in his ongoing novel which takes the reader to go to its depth and complete it. He uses simple language with simple words and the method of conveying is very straight forward. Which makes him very much Indian. The setting the characters portrayed are all very Indian even in a foreign land he selects places where one would find more of Indians dwelling and making the atmosphere Indian. Therefore this novel again though a diaspora novel is compared to being an Indian English novel.

The last and the final novel as per the researcher calling it a diaspora novel *Hours Before Dawn* is totally portrayed on a foreign land, even the marriage taking place between the couple is on a foreign land but the protagonist is a typical of having Indian mentality. The female counterpart shouldn't work though she is a doctor, he is impressed by her when he meets her but after marriage he behaves like a typical Indian. He leaves her along with her daughter and move away to other country as he is a journalist. He is shown to be very suspicious person and egoistic. According to him a women cannot be outspoken and shouldn't have male friends and should not be free and very interactive. He lives with double standards while he is in India, which is even at one point shown by the female counterparts and asked him about it. To this the protagonist replies that was his life and he could live as he liked. With this type of nature the protagonist himself leaves his wife and when they meet it is on their twenty-fifth marriage anniversary. Like any other Indian writer this Diasporic writer Romen Basu also very artfully shows both the things diaspora as well as Indianness in his diaspora novels.

He has written more than a dozen novels with two volumes of short stories and two volumes of poetry, where no doubt he is very much Indian but the above stated novels are Diasporic as well as Indian for the settings and the characters are always shown to be searching their roots and identity. Coming to culture parts he has always portrayed Indian culture, the characters also take a deep insight and see that they do not deviate from it. In fact the author has always tried to portray at every step the characters are bounded in Indian culture, society, living style along with their way of dressing, offering prayers performing rituals, marriage ceremonies and so on. Therefore I took an opportunity of comparing this diaspora writer as an Indian writer to every inch. I am not biased with any diaspora writer but I would like him to be given a place among the Indian English writers and make him a prominent writer of Indian English.

To conclude the comparison of this Diasporic writer as Indian English writer, I would request the readers to give him space. As of whatever he has written and mentioned in his novels relates a lot to the ongoing situation in today's times they are like an eye opener for the younger generation. If it is introduced into curriculum at least, at under graduate level it might bring a little change among the students which may bring a great change in the society. Though he belongs to the writers of second generation as he is compared by two earlier researchers, he has much to give to the present generation. Whatever he has portrayed is with a wider aspect conveying great message to the present generation.

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