

Diaspora: A Chronological Study with Indian and Indo-Anglian Milieu

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ABSTRACT

The movement of people from India to the various parts of the world since ancient times till now is a fascinating story of cultural exchanges that the people of India have with the rest of the world. In the post-modern time, the era of globalization, most of the authors tend to focus on the motif of crisis of migrants and their quest for identity in the newly stepped world. The multiple experience and identity of migrant and his sensibility that deals with his old world and his new one, gives birth to Diaspora. Diaspora is much created by the experience of cultural transplantation of an immigrant. This transplantation is marked by two distinct strains- one is the reflection of his or her own racial history and other is the cultural and political history born out of his experience of migration and dislocation. The present paper is an attempt to theorize Diaspora with all its aspects and chronological development in Indian and Indo-Anglian Milieu.

Keywords- Diaspora, migration, quest for identity, geographical and cultural dislocation, nostalgia, biculturalism and multiculturalism, rootlessness and Third World experiences.

“We, the migratory birds...
are here this session thinking we will fly back to our home for sure.
Does anyone know which invisible cage imprisons us?
And the flight begins to die slowly in our wings.
Some of us are drawn with the chains...some legs in the swamp.
No sun ...no earth...Where to look? What to look for?
The next session is never our own and every session makes mouth at us.”¹

DIASPORA is relatively a new term used in the 21st century in connection with the study of those people who went abroad either forcibly or willingly and produced a great deal of their potentialities and abilities having specific sensibilities like nostalgia, alienation, troubles and travails, rootlessness, abolition of imperialism, biculturalism and multiculturalism etc. Generally, diaspora is a multi-disciplinary area which covers literature, sociology, history, geography,

culture and so on. ‘Diaspora’ is gaining popularity at present which is the movement of people from any nation or a group of people away from their own country. They migrate from their own country for seeking opportunities “for work, research and freedom” from a colonial state to a free country which necessarily make them “an ambassador and a refugee”² (11) in the alien land. It creates a way of thinking about ‘cultural identity’ which means as “one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.”³ (110-111) These migrants project a world of geographical and cultural dislocation and creates the poetics of exile, displacement, rootlessness, homelessness, nostalgia, past memories which cultivates a conflict of culture – biculturalism and multiculturalism. They become as ‘the marginalized people’ in the alien land and build the Third World or ‘the otherness’ which is a result of ‘Diaspora.

In simplest terms, Diasporic phenomenon is like *parkayapravesh* (entering the other body) which is a process of transfer from one body to the other but what remains is ‘spirit’. Diasporians undergo a material change but they try their best to retain their ‘spirit’ or ‘identity of self’. We may apply this *parkaya pravesh* phenomenon in order to understand the diaspora in terms like *pardesh pravesh* (entering the other land), *parsanskriti pravesh* (entering the other culture) and *parkosh pravesh* (entering the other selves). The quest for homeland is the quest for space of one’s self or the remains of one’s spirit. Diasporian moves between two worlds of ‘homeland’ and ‘adopted land’ but his spirit is yet retained and that is the spirit of his land of origin. In his *pardesh pravesh*, everything gets entered but the spirit of self is uncontrollable to be entered. To support the above meaning of diaspora, it is notable to quote Dr. Iqbal- “Ghurat mein ho agar hum rehta hai dil watan mein, Samjho waheen humen bhi dil ho jahan humara” means if we are in an alien place, the heart (spirit) remains in the homeland, know us to be only there where our heart is. (*Tarana-e-Hindi*, The Indian Anthem)

Diasporic people have created ‘a minority community’ and in the context of India, as a minority community of ‘little India’ in the foreign land who, according to William Saffron, share the following characteristics:

1) they or their ancestors have been dispersed from a specific original “center” to two or more “peripheral” of foreign regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history and achievements; 3) they believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendents would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe they should collectively be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their homeland and its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate personality or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.⁴ (53)

The diasporic people cope with feelings of marginality, the otherness, the third world who seek their centre and are set in the process of decentring. They remember their past through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth and their search for 'cultural identity' make them as "individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels." (113) They are put in a state of 'being' and 'becoming' and they think of the difference between 'what we really are' and that of 'what we have become' as 'the lost origins' in a foreign land. As a result, a new person is born as a diasporic person of the 'New World' that Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* considers as "the beginning of Diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference" (120) Such people build a new world of universalism which is a kind of meta-centre – centre which heightens the identity of diasporic world. In Naipaul's *A Way in the World*, he encounters with India and many other lands which is a kind of homecoming. As a result Naipaul "can only find a house, not a home." (55)

Indian Diaspora represents "half a dozen religions...seven different regions of India...nearly a dozen castes" and is "like a banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life" and it spreads out its "roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up." Homi Bhabha treats the journey from 'home' to 'world' as a process of cultural conflict and he calls the diasporic scatterings as a "gatherings of exiles and emigrants and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gatherings at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres. But the expatriates and immigrants are set in "the process of decentring" and their search of centre is affected by a diasporic space which is not the centre but the land of margins which have pushed their home cultures to outer space i.e. the west which still continues to be the place of recognition and judgment. Amitav Ghosh, in an essay in 1989, wrote:

The modern Indian Diaspora ... represents an important force in world culture. The culture of diaspora is also increasingly a factor within the culture of the Indian subcontinent. This is self-evidently true of its material culture which now sets the standard for all that is desirable in the metropolitan cities. (53)

If we look into the deep background of diasporic history, we find that 'Diaspora' is a complex phenomenon of the Third World and that of the Post-Colonial era. The word is extracted from the Greek word '*dia*' (through) , '*speirein*' (to scatter) which means the dispersal of masses collectively and is used for the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian captivity, and also in the apostolic age for the Jews living outside of Palestine. 'Diaspora' has a rich and long history which took place every time and everywhere in the world and it brings a sort of separation, displacement, dislocation, re-location, exile and alienation. If we look into literatures of East and West, we can find the images of diasporic journey and exile. In East, the great epics of India like *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* provide us the fine examples of exile and the quest for homeland. In *The Mahabharata*, there is a canto 'Vana Parva' which is a story of exile and homelessness and the Pandavas lived in *Agyatvas* (the hidden and unknown place) till their return to power in their homeland which is full of poetics of displacement, exile and memory. In *The Ramayana*, Rama and Sita, after leaving Ayodhya for a banishment of fourteen years, build a new home in the forest where Sita was eloped and thus separated from Rama while living in

the Kingdom of Ravana. She remained there as a captive which provides us the image of a diasporan who is away from her 'homeland' to 'alien land'. Sita, thus, becomes the image of 'the other' of the Third World. But Sita is a myth of Goddess and Rama as a God who is born to establish the kingdom of 'good' by killing Ravana, the image of 'evil' on the earth. But Sita's suffering, pains, miseries of isolation and dislocation are similar to those of diasporans.

In the West, *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* are based on the journey and separation motifs. John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, like the parallel of 'good' and 'evil' of Ravana and Rama, cultivates the similar journey of Satan from the space of Garden to Hell and Satan always craves and explores in protest and antagonism for space which exists in his 'within' with a sense of 'home' and 'otherness'. He could not escape the category of 'space' and wherever and whichever he flies, he finds only the way to Hell. The journey from Paradise to Earth for Adam and Eve is identified as The Fall of Man which is a signified 'separation' in 'the journey' from Paradise: "They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow/Through Eden took their solitary way." (*Paradise Lost*, xii: 658-49)

Indian Diaspora has been beautifully discussed by Professor Kapil Kapoor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi at the International Seminar held at North Gujarat University, Patana, Gujarat, who emphasized on two types of diaspora- diaspora into the country and diaspora out of country. According to him, out-of-India diaspora has a rich and long history and he calls India as "a diaspora laboratory" where there was in-flow and out-flow of migrants into and out of India. India provides models of nativisation, acceptance and assimilation.

The history of diaspora out of India dates back after the Mahabharata War when people who worshipped the gods like Mitra and Varuna left India and appeared in the Middle East as a conquering people after the war. Apart from it, there are references in texts to people that Indians went to Asia, South Asia, and Rome where they established an Indian colony at the turn of Christian era. Buddhist monks traveled all over Asia and Sri Lanka for spreading Buddhism. At present, we can find indentured labour and Cyber labour who went to their dreamland in USA and Europe in search of gold and opportunity out of India.

The history of diaspora into India is much more complex. During the 4th Century B.C., Greeks came to India and the great Greek King, Meander, settled in the city of Sialkot and founded the Great City. Some communities also scattered in Kangra of Himachal Pradesh and the descendants of Greeks stayed behind them there. In the second century A.D., the Jewish migrants settled on the southern West Coast of India and lived there for two thousand years peacefully uninterfered with. According to the Old Testament of the Bible, they are cursed people: "you shall be thrown out of all (places)." The second migration of Parsis who came to Gujarat in the 8th century and the king of Gujarat told them "to live either like lemon in milk or like sugar in milk." It is interesting to record that the Parsis "have lived like sugar in milk, speaking the language of people, eating their food, yet retaining their identity and living uninterfered with."⁵(30) Professor Kapoor considers it as the great "matrix culture". The Sakas and the Huns adopted the Indian culture voluntarily. The Turks, Afghans and Mughals came to India as a conqueror and they endangered the bond of cultural assimilation. The Britishers were

“the permanent aliens” (31) who could never feel at home in India. In the sixties of the last century, the Tibetan into-India-diaspora happened and settled in India for a revival of Buddhism in India. The transfer of population in 1947 from Pakistan is a true case of ‘exodus’ that could not yet be assimilated. The Hindu-Muslim unity is still unassimilated and community is still a big issue in India and Pakistan.

If we look into the history of Indian diaspora, we can find that India has received migrants from various parts of the world and has absorbed them with their culture, language, economic and social status. Indians have a peculiar consciousness of adaptability and they are scattered across the globe in a hundred and ten countries and have maintained their commitment to *Bharatiyata or Indianness*. The story of evolution of Indian diaspora can be divided into three phases for a chronological glimpse-

1. The First Phase of Indian Diaspora begins with the nineteenth century during the Colonial Empire, when the indentured labourers were forcibly sent to South-African countries for sugarcane plantations because of the enormous demand for cheap labour there and labourers were seeking their livelihood in distant lands of different ‘origins’. The sufferings and pains of being the indentured labour as the *girmittias* (the permit/girmit/ holders), working in East and West India are beautifully constructed by Vijay Mishra (a Fijian descent of the *girmittias*) in his article ‘*Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning*’. These *girmittias* were sent to Mauritius, Caribbean countries like Trinidad, Tobago, and Guyana, Fiji and South Africa. French and Dutch also followed the same path and as a result, a migration of Indian plantation labourers took place in their territories like Reunion Island, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Surinam. There were primarily two reasons behind migration of *girmittias* under the Colonial Rule. First and foremost reason was the poverty which spoilt the Indian village and cottage industry and they became the victim of poverty and unemployment. Secondly, the West was growing affluent because of industrial development and the colonial masters found Indians skillful, hard-working and useful and the British, the French and the Dutch and the Portuguese utilized the labour and talent of these indentured labourers in building their agricultural and industrial economies. In the Caribbean, the indentured labourers included people from Indian origin from U.P. Bihar and Bengal. In South Africa, Mahatma Gandhi with a majority of Gujaratis, these indentured labourers worked as slaves to Dutch and were deployed in railways, dockyards, coal mines, municipal services and other trades till a second lot of traders and shop owners came as free passengers. They sailed in the ship and reached the land (alien) after three months with their pots and pans, a few pieces of clothing and perhaps a blanket yet they maintained the identity of their land of origin to their children and grand-children. They formed a new form of socialization which went in name of *jahajibhai* (ship brotherhood) or *ham watani* (fellow countrymen). Vijay Mishra calls them as “people of old diaspora”. They carried with them ‘A *Ganapati icon*, a dog-eared copy of the Gita or the Quran, an old sari, or other deshi outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage or in modern times, a video-cassette of the latest hit from the home country.” Their Hindu kits like *Ganga Water, Hanuman Chalisa, Tulsi Plant, Satyanarayana Katha* also worked in maintaining the cultural identity.

2.The Second Phase of Indian Diaspora The Second Wave of Diaspora belongs to migrants who ventured out into the neighboring Countries in 1960s as professionals, artisans, traders and factory workers in search of opportunities and trades. In 1970s, there was a great outflow of semi-skilled and skilled labour in the wake of oil boom in West Asia and Gulf countries and some of the entrepreneurs, storeowners, professionals, self-employed businessmen went to the First World countries like USA, UK and Australia. Organised commerce was introduced in Africa and traders and businessmen on the basis of their hard work and business acumen changed the face of adversity into opportunity. They have contributed to development of economy, industry and cultural diversity of these countries. They emerged as a champion in fighting against racism, violence, discrimination and many other difficulties. Vijay Mishra calls them as “modern diaspora” and Professor A. K. Singh in his article, *‘From Gunny Sack to Ruck Sack: Proposals Pertaining to Indian English Diasporan Discourses’*, categorizes them as “colonial” or “ruck sack” diaspora who feels no “persecution and seek foreign land for better opportunity. Diaspora is their desired agent.” They have not left their land under any compulsion like their forefathers but they have opted their ‘sojourn’ out of their choice and freedom and they love to live in the foreign land for their academic record and that of opportunities of their engagement

3.The Third Phase of Diaspora started in the mid-nineteenth century in India belongs to the migration from ‘homeland’ to industrialized and economically advanced countries like USA, Canada, UK and Australia and it draws “the success story” of Indian diaspora which comprises professionals and the educated elite of India. It is a period of time when India has become a global player in building “the model minority” or an image of South Asians as “good immigrants” in the world. They are doctors, engineers, software engineers, management consultants, financial experts, media people, professors and writers who enjoy the distinction of being a proud Indian community. In September 2000 under the chairmanship of Dr. L. M. Singhvi, the Member of Parliament, a comprehensive report on the Indian Diaspora was prepared for sensitizing the problems and expectations of their mother country between the Indian diaspora and India. It was meant for cultivating the conducive environment in India to utilize their human resources. Since 2003, the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Overseas Indians' Day) sponsored by Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, is celebrated in India on 9 January each year, to "mark the contributions of the Overseas Indian community in the development of India" and the annual *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards* are bestowed.^[61] As of January 2006,^[62] the Indian government has introduced the "Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI)" scheme to allow a limited form of dual citizenship to Indians, NRIs, and PIOs for the first time since independence in 1947. The PIO Card scheme is expected to be phased out in coming years in favour of the OCI programme. Recently various facilities regarding bank account, deposit and investments, the remittances on income tax clearance, International credit cards etc are being provided to these NRIs and PIOs.

Some of the shining pearls of Indian diaspora of late twentieth century “success story” are Sam Pitroda, Chairman and CEO of World Tel, Amar Bose of Bose Corporation, Vinod Khosla of the Venture Capital King, Sabeer Bhatia of Hotmail.com fame, Vinod Dham,

the Father of Pentium Chip who figured in the most prestigious professional magazines like *Siliconindia*, *Forbes* and periodicals like *Business Week*, *News Week*, *India Abroad*, *Business Times* in USA., Laxmi Chand Mittal became the Third richest man in the world in the list of Fortune 500 recently, Sir Ben Kingsley of Indo-Kenyan descent is a notable Oscar-winning actor, Navanethem Pillay, an Indian South Africandescent who served as the U.N High Commissioner for Human Rights, Madhur Jaffrey is notable Indian-born British Indian actress, food and travel writer, and television personality, Kalpana Chawla was a notable first Indian American astronaut, Harjit Sajjan, is an Indian Canadian politician and former Lieutenant Colonel with the Canadian Armed Forces. He is the current Minister of National Defence, Canada's Lilly Singh, known by her YouTubeusername "IISuperwomanII", is by far the most popular YouTube personality of Indian origin, Waheed Alli, Baron Allis multimillionaire media entrepreneur and politician of Indo-Caribbean heritage, Sri Prakash Lohia, founder of Indorama Corporation and sixth richest person in Indonesia according to Forbes, Manoj Punjabi is an Indian Indonesian film and television producer and owner of the biggest production house in Indonesia, V. Sundramoorthy is a former Singapore international footballer and currently the head coach of S. League club Tampines Rovers, Deepak Vinayak is a public figure from Melbourne, Australia and Anand Satyanand, the former Governor General of New Zealand both are of Indian descent. The Indian diaspora has also proved by some of the finest writers in English language like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, A.K. Ramanujan, Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh etc.

Thus, the paper has attempted to present Diaspora and its meaning covering Indian and Indo-Anglian milieu along with the details of all chronological records of Indian Diaspora. As a given record of people above, we see many people of Indian Diaspora have reserved their places in USA, Canada, UK, Australia and many more developed countries in different disciplines of life like politics, medicine, technology and creative writing and they build a rich and significant space in the world of diaspora. They have proved enough to let India have her global identity and themselves to be known as "Global Indians".

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