



CLOSE LOOK ON THE THEORIES OF DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on exploring the theories on diaspora opined by various theorists. The literal meaning that one can say for the word 'Diaspora' is 'Dispersal'. But theorists find the subtle differences in meaning. Nicholas Van Hear says, "Dispersal may also result from a combination of compulsion and choice, and diasporas emerge as a result of cumulative processes and crises". Theorists are well versed enough to deconstruct the word "diaspora" and opine their theories on it. Mostly those theories are developed on the basis of the reason for migration. They probe into the problems that are faced by the immigrants and they analyze the reasons behind their migration. As a result of their analysis, theories are born. This article focuses on the theories proposed by various theorists such as Willaim Safran, Nicholas Van Hear, Steven Vertovec, Robin Cohen, Jasbir Jain, M.L.Raina, George Steiner, Bed P. Giri, and so on. Many theorists have categorized and given some types of diaspora with the help of its characteristics by women) and gynocriticism (criticism of women's writing).

Key words: Diaspora, Expatriate, Diasporic writing, acculturation, assimilation

Diasporic literature is influenced by the migratory experiences of displaced communities. As Kim Butler says, "The word "diaspora" is defined, at its simplest, as the dispersal of a people from its original homeland." This literature reflects change in social, political, and cultural realities while retaining a connection to a common cultural heritage. The characters and the events which are shown in this literature represent the people who struggle to assimilate into the new land and new culture. Serious concern for theorizing diaspora came to exist from the past one century. Many theorists came forward to opine their ideas on diaspora and even they categorized different types of diaspora on the basis of the reasons behind the migration. It can be said that the meaning of the term diaspora has been expanded because of their theories.

Various theories on Diaspora:

M.L.Raina, in his article "Home, Homelessness and the Artifice of Memory", says, "Dislocation can occur as a physical movement from home into alien territory forced by war and persecution. Displacement and exile have enjoyed a special privilege in literature. Bereft



of the soul, estranged from the familiar, banished from the community, expelled from the home country, lost in the Diaspora – such tropes have formed a constant axle of poetry and novels for centuries” (18) . He also quotes Boym who opines on diaspora thus:

“Diasporic intimacy does not promise a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and the homeland.. Just as one learns to live with alienation and reconciles oneself to the uncanniness of the surrounding world and to the strangeness of the human touch, there comes a surprise, a pang of intimate recognition, a hope that sneaks in through the back door in the midst of the habitual estrangement of everybody’s life abroad.”(19).

Gabriel Sheffer, in his book “Modern Diasporas in International Politics”, says that it is a mistake to have the concept of diaspora only for the Jewish people because many others have existed even before them, for example, Nabatheans, Phenicians or Assyrians. He differentiates his terms Stateless Diasporas (migrants who are without States of origin) and State- based Diasporas (migrants who are with States of origin). He identified three criteria that could be proposed for defining diaspora:

1. The maintenance and the development of an own collective identity in the “ diasporised people;”
2. The existence of an internal organization distinct from those existing in the country of origin or in the host country;
3. Significant contacts with the Homeland: real contacts (i.e Travel remittance) or symbolic contacts as in the sentence: “the next year at Jerusalem” at the end of the prayer for Pessah(Easter);

Michel Bruneau proposed typology based on the diasporic organization. He defined three major types :

1. The entrepreneurial diaspora: in which people migrate for the development of their business. For example, Chinese, Japanese and so on.
2. The religious diaspora: this diaspora confines to immigrants who migrate for their religious purpose like Jews. Forced migration can be seen in this type of diaspora.
3. The politic diaspora: as the term indicates, the reason for the immigrants was politics, for instance, Palestinians.

Bruneus’s theories are somewhat coincide with Robin Cohen’s. Cohen classified four types of Diasporas as per the reasons for migration:

1. Labour Diaspora: people who were made to migrate as slaves and servants to the countries in order to work in their plantation. For example, Africans and Indians. Here too forced migration can be witnessed as in the 'Religious diaspora'.
2. Imperial Diaspora: It lights upon the people who migrate to other countries for colonizing them. For instance, British and Portuguese. Voluntary diaspora is evident in this type.
3. The Trade Diaspora: This type resembles Bruneau's first type, 'The Entrepreneurial Diapora' where the people migrate for developing their trade.
4. The Cultural Diaspora: This diaspora highlights the cultural transformation or acculturation of the immigrants. The foremost problem that any immigrant faces in the new land is cultural shock. They cannot assimilate into the new culture as soon as they land. They need a few days or months or even years to absorb them. In some cases, it can be evident that cultural shock becomes a strong reason for the immigrants to move back to their native country.

Nicholas Van Hear proposes three minimal criteria:

1. The presence abroad is enduring, although exile is not necessarily permanent but may include movement between the homeland and the new host countries
2. The persistence of the presence abroad although the exile is not necessarily permanent since movements between the lands of origin and new home countries can develop
3. There is some kind of exchange – social, economical, political or cultural – between or among the spatially separated populations comprising the diaspora.

He also quoted Massey in his article "Diaspora formation". Massey talks about the *initiation* of the migration. According to him, economics plays an essential part in diaspora. He lights on 'neoclassical economics' and "new economics" which form as initiating reason for migration. As per the former, immigration takes place because of income levels of the people and as per the latter, "migration stemmed from labour demand in industrialised societies;". He also adds that such migrations are taking place in "circumstances of stress". Nicholas even adds another reason that people migrate "for most to seek safety in other parts of their country, for a substantial number to look for refuge in neighbouring countries, and for a smaller number to seek asylum further afield.". If the people migrate to nearby territories, it is termed as *near diaspora* and if it is to further afield, then it is *wider diaspora*. These approaches are made or termed on the basis of the reasons of their migration.

William Safran should not be left out when there is a discourse on theories of diaspora. He has been highly quoted by many other theorists. Satendra Nandan has cited Safran in his article "Diasporic Consciousness". Safran has listed six characteristics of diaspora:



- 1) Immigrants who are dispersed from the 'center' where they actually belonged to at least one or two 'peripheral' places.
- 2) They may maintain their memories and vision about their homeland.
- 3) They cannot completely assimilate into the host countries.
- 4) They long to return to their ancestral home when the right time arrives.
- 5) They are committed to maintenance or restoration of their home land.
- 6) They continue to have their relationship with their homeland (53)

Steven Vertovec, in his article "Three meanings of 'diaspora', exemplified among South Asian religions", puts forward three meanings of diaspora : 'diaspora' as *social form*: history and geography of the immigrants, 'diaspora' as *type of consciousness*, state of mind and sense of identity, in other words, it deals with the psychology of immigrants and 'diaspora' as *mode of cultural production*.: production and reproduction of transnational, social and cultural phenomena, in other words, assimilation and acculturation of the immigrants.

He quotes James Clifford who speaks about the language of diaspora which seems to be replacing the discourse of minority. He feels that the term diaspora has become a loose reference such as "immigrants, guest-workers, ethnic and 'racial' minorities, refugees, expatriates and travelers - - threatens the terms's descriptive usefulness" (1). While explaining *Social form*, he also quotes Martin Baumann "[who] indicates three quite different referential points with respect to the historical Jewish experience 'in the diaspora': these are (a) the *process* of becoming scattered, (b) the *community* living in foreign parts, (c) the place or geographic space in which the dispersed groups live" (3). He combines Safran, Cohen and Sheffer and proposes three criteria : (a)Social relationships,(b)Political orientations and, (c)Economic strategies . While defining social relationship, he sums up the theory proposed by William Safran.

Indian Diaspora and Diasporic writing:

Giri refers to the idea of Vijay Mishra on the Indian diaspora. He says that Mishra presents the "late modern" in the West in terms of metaphor of border... Members of this new diaspora... have accumulated a host of traumatic memories in the face of pervasive metropolitan ideologies of singularity (national, linguistic, racial) – ideologies that are opposed to the necessarily subalternised, racialised, hyphenated, and hybridized conditions of diasporic life." (249). Mishra in his article " The Literature of the Indian Diaspora" uses the term "Diasporic Imaginary" for referring to "any ethnic enclave in the nation- state that defines itself ...as a group that lives in displacement". But Giri senses that the term "ethnic enclave" appears to be mystifying and the relationship of ethnic diasporic enclave with imaginary "must be sought in its process of self – representations, which, arguably, disclose the characteristics of self-other hostility, social alienation, narcissism, and so forth"(245)



Mishra, in his article “The Law of the Hyphen and the Postcolonial Condition,” emphasizes the hyphenated identities of authors and their works. He says, “ the hyphen – Indo-Americans, Indian-Americans, Hindu-Americans, Muslim-Britons – signals the desire to enter into some kind of generic taxonomy and yet at the same time retain, through the hyphen, the problematic situating of the self as simultaneously belonging ‘here’ and ‘there ’”(185)

Veena Noble Dass categorizes expatriate writers into two. The first one is those writers who are born in India and settled outside India. The second one is those who are born outside India and settled in India. The common factor that one can find between them is they select themes relating to Indian culture and tradition and loss of identity. She says, “when an Indian English writer comes in contact with an alien culture, he becomes aware of his rootlessness, and thereby the inadequacy of his mission. He feels that he is a stranger, a foreigner and an expatriate. Confrontation with the west leads him to a discovery of his own country, of his own self. The concept of Indianness forms an identity for these Indian expatriate writers.”(39)

As per George Steiner, the word “Expatriate” itself has acquired much importance in the modern times. He says, “An Expatriate focuses on the native country that has been left behind. The expatriate dwells on the “Ex” status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates his presence in the new country. Expatriate sensibility is a widespread phenomenon in this century” and he describes the expatriate writer as “the uncontemporary every man” (10-11). Jasbir Jain opines on diasporic writing as “Diasporic writing too is double- faced: there is the preoccupation with home for a variety of different reasons, but there is also the cultural representation of a society...But the major tasks which are incomplete are the attainment of equality, the inability to do away with ghettoisation, and to ensure the presence of a dynamic culture of origin....The other extreme is the minority which is denied the privilege of belonging. Acceptability – both emotionally and politically- by the culture and country of adoption is an important aspect of all migrations.”(31-33)

Conclusion:

Diaspora has become a major talk in the field of literature as many writers have come forward to pen their works on the theme of diaspora. Migration has a very old origin since the exile of Jews. But theorizing diaspora has become the latest trend in the field of criticism. Many theorists like William Safran, Nicholas Van Hear, Steven Vertovec, Robin Cohen, Jasbir Jain, M.L.Raina, George Steiner and Bed P. Giri have opined their theories on diaspora and have tried to bring out the actual meaning of the word ‘Diaspora’. Even though a concrete definition on diaspora cannot be given, these theorists have endeavored to theorize it



by considering and analyzing the 'Reasons' behind the migration. Only the 'Reasons' are brought out and emphasized to be the broad meaning of diaspora.

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