

Migration And Indian Diaspora



Mrs. Suchismita Tagore Mukherjee^{1*}, Dr. Samapika Das Biswas², Dr. Bonani Chakrabarty³

^{1*}Research scholar IEM-UEM, Kolkata

²Supervisor, Associate Professor IEM, Kolkata

³Joint Supervisor, Assistant Professor IEM, Kolkata

Abstract

Diaspora refers to the spread of group of people from their original homeland. People migrate from one place to another often with the intention of establishing a new residence. When they move within the same country, it's internal migration. International migration, fundamentally immigration can happen due to various factors, including economic, social, political and environmental reasons.

The Indian diaspora refers to the global community of people of Indian origin or descent who have settled in various countries of the world. It is one of the largest and most widespread diasporas globally. It can be traced back to historical migrations, including the Indian indentured laborers who were sent to various British colonies during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Indian diaspora has also grown through voluntary immigration for reasons such as education, employment, and business opportunities.

The Indian diaspora is not only significant in terms of its size but also in its contributions to the host countries and the maintenance of Indian culture and identity abroad. Indian diaspora communities often maintain close ties with India, engage in cultural and economic exchanges, and serve as a bridge between the host countries and India. This diaspora has made significant contributions to various fields, including business, technology, politics, and culture, in countries across the globe.

Diaspora populations face unique mental health challenges stemming from migration, acculturation, and social determinants, potentially leading to higher rates of mental disorders and difficulties accessing culturally appropriate care.

Migration is the broader concept of people moving from one place to another, while immigration is a subset of migration involving individuals or groups moving across international borders to settle in a new country. The Indian diaspora represents the Indian origin communities spread across the world, reflecting a long history of migration and immigration for various reasons.

Key Words : migrant, immigration, Indian, diaspora, cultural identity, displacement,

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of 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. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth.

Salman Rushdie terms Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo* in the *Guava Orchard* as a proof of the fact "that India's encounter with the English language continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts." (Desai, 06) Kiran Desai the daughter of the famous writer Anita Desai and winner of Man Booker prize of 2006 for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Her first novel *Hullabaloo* in the *Guava Orchard* (1998) won her the 1998 Betty Trask Prize from the British Society of Authors and is set in rural

Shahkot in a non-specific time, though there are a couple of historical references which may help chronologise the 'hullabaloo' in Shahkot. Sampath's flight to the orchard was contemporary with Coca-Cola's return to India in 1993. The reference to the popular Bollywood film *Love Story* is the other instance. It is pastoral in ambience so much so that the novel is reminiscent of R. K. Narayan, his benign Malgudi and Sampath and Pinky and Ammaji and Mr. Chawla recall many of Narayan's much loved characters from his novels and short stories set in pre and post-Independence India. Narayan wrote and depicted a world much less complex in its ethos. Writing in 1998, from a diasporic perspective, Desai subjects Shahkot and its residents to a treatment unique to someone distanced from the land and its culture by time, distance, memory and culture. Hence diasporic writing functions towards re-visioning history and this re-visioning happens through different modes in different diasporic writers. We sense in Kiran Desai as one would in Salman Rushdie an easy detachment from the complex politics that drives the culture as "the narratives of diaspora are

framed by memory and distance and motivated by a desire to construct their own reality." (Jain,87)

In "Malgudi Days," migration and immigration are occasionally touched upon as part of the characters' experiences. While the collection primarily focuses on life in the fictional town of Malgudi, there are instances where characters either temporarily move to other places or encounter individuals who have migrated to Malgudi.

Narayan was not personally exposed to alien cultural practices. His texts need a close understanding of the religious and cultural practices of the Indian people to decipher the meaning.

"Malgudi Days" by R.K. Narayan is a wonderful collection of short stories that often explores themes of migration in the context of small-town life in India. One notable story that touches on migration is "The Edge," where characters grapple with leaving their familiar surroundings for the unknown prospects of the city. Another story, "Engine Trouble," also deals with themes of displacement and migration when the protagonist, a railway engine driver, faces the prospect of being replaced by diesel engines, symbolizing a shift in technology and livelihoods. These stories reflect the broader theme of change and adaptation in a rapidly evolving world.

With R. K. Narayan one notable example is the story "Naga," where the protagonist, Rama, travels to a distant town in search of work and encounters the mysterious and otherworldly Naga. This story reflects the theme of displacement and the quest for identity that can be associated with migration.

Also, in his, "An Astrologer's Day," the central character is a man who has migrated to Malgudi and is making a living as an astrologer. While the focus is on his profession and the mysteries surrounding him, the character's background as an immigrant adds depth to the story.

In several stories of Malgudi the characters tend to grapple with the clash between traditional and modern influences, leading to a cultural displacement. This theme explores the changing dynamics in the socio-cultural fabric of Malgudi. While displacement is not always the primary focus, Narayan explores the challenges characters face when confronted with changes in their lives. The stories delve into the character's attempts to find a sense of belonging or equilibrium in the midst of these shifts.

This attempt to strike an equilibrium in the middle of shifts between two worlds, the homeland and the adopted one forms a significant feature of the immigrant existence. This is the germ of the formation of diaspora.

The literature produced by the Indian diaspora writers puts forth more of the negotiating aspects of culture and identity than that of the writers who were born and brought up in India. As diasporans,

the writers themselves revolve around such conflicting cultural backgrounds. Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian American author writes mostly about the negotiation between two different cultures, Indian and American. Her novel, *The Namesake*, is a chronicle of two worlds of the displaced characters and their conflicting cultural identities in the multi-cultural social order. One of the most significant characters of the immigrant existence is the blend of the - the homeland and the adopted one. The admiration for one's culture and roots is never out of mind and the first generation migrant always expects his children to admire the same roots and culture. The immigrant children are made familiar with the cultural products of his country by the parents-myths, stories and literature. At the same time, the importance of the cultural shades of the adopted land cannot be negated. Since the future of the second generation lies there, they must be made to learn the customs of that culture too:

"Most of the toys of her baby boy Gogol come from yard sales as do their furniture, curtains, toaster and the like.

At first Ashima is reluctant to introduce such items into her home, ashamed at the thought of buying what had originally belonged to strangers, American strangers at that. "

Amitav Ghosh is an empathetic diasporic writer. He has addressed the sensitive issues of diaspora very empathetically through the different characters he has created in his different novels. In every one of his novels, we find that he has very sensibly handled the pain, agony, alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity of the migrants who are compelled to leave their own lands and are forced to live in some other parts of the world for survival. Diasporic literature also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of culture

Amitav Ghosh frequently explores the theme of migration in his novels, often linking it to history, colonialism, climate change, and displacement. Here are some notable works where migration plays a key role. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) examines the idea of borders and migration through the experiences of a Bengali family moving between Calcutta, Dhaka, and London.

It highlights the partition of India and Bangladesh, showing how migration is often forced by political circumstances. The novel also questions whether migration truly provides freedom or if people remain trapped by memories and historical violence. In *The Glass Palace* (2000), the book follows the forced migration of people from Burma to India during British colonial rule. It depicts the exile of the Burmese royal family and the struggles of Indian soldiers who serve in the British army. The story explores how migration is deeply tied to colonialism and war. In *The Ibis Trilogy* (*Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*,

Flood of Fire) the series portrays the 19th-century migration of Indian laborers to Mauritius as indentured workers. It explores forced migration due to economic hardships and colonial exploitation. The trilogy also shows how migration affects identities, relationships, and cultural transformations. In the novel *Gun Island* (2019) the theme of migration links to climate change, showing how environmental disasters force people to move. It follows migrants from Bengal to Italy, highlighting the struggles of refugees and the impact of globalization. The book portrays migration as a continuous human experience shaped by both historical and modern forces.

In Ghosh's works, migration is not just physical movement but also a shift in identity, belonging, and historical memory.

Goat Days is a novel which has an inner vigor to take the reader to a different level of complacency. Throughout the novel, this smugness is like an aura over the head of protagonist who is Najeeb. At the same time this complacency is achieved to the hero as well as reader at the end of the novel when Najeeb is returned to his home town. Throughout the novel, Najeeb is confused directly or indirectly whether should he be in the present or in the past.

Diasporic writings have some main factors like fragmentation, remembrance, lost memories, nostalgia, fractured dreams etc. All these major and minor factors make a diasporic novel a strong piece of literature. The term diaspora is the dispersion of population from different countries. This is also called as migration in other words. This migration or dispersion can be reason for settlements in foreign countries which may lead to cross cultural exchanges between different cultures and habits. Migration of people from one place to another is either it can be international migration or intra-national migration. In both cases emigrants expects a good standard of living in the new country. It may be true or may not be also. The complacency of Life amidst the misfortunes can have far reaching effects.

In the novel *Goat Days*, Benyamin's portrayal of the hero Najeeb is quite remarkable or exceptional because the author himself was a migrant labourer in the Gulf country. And secondly, this a real incident which the protagonist himself narrated to the author. Thirdly, Gulf migration have a great impact on the people of Kerala. It is hardly difficult to find a house in Kerala where any of them doesn't have a relation with Gulf countries. This is one of the main reasons where Kerala's foreign revenue is higher than all the other states. Migration is one of the causes of social and demographic change. C.J Lewis comments that: "Migration is a two-way process; it is a response to economic and social change and equally it is catalyst to change for those areas gaining and losing migrants." (Lewis. 01)

Goat days is not just a simple depiction of migration literature but it's something which penetrates into the readers heart, which shakes the entire thought process of the reader.

Because this is a real story and the experiences and incidents which are depicted in the novel are raw life experiences of a common man who have all the feelings like any other human being.

Migration is the movement of people from one place/country to another in search of better job opportunities or educational purposes or occurs due to political and social conflicts. This brings about a change in their social, cultural and psychological circumstances, which often makes them feel alienated in their lives. They experience a sense of disillusionment and loss of identity, which gradually leads them into psychological trauma where they start to question their identity. Benyamin's *Goat Days* portrays the life of Najeeb, a poor Malayali who in the hope of earning money decides to work in the Gulf. However, his journey of hope soon transforms to despair with the cruel treatment of his sponsor. He finds himself, alienated among the herd of goats and yearns to meet his family. His desolation pushes him into a psychological trauma where he starts to identify himself with the goats. This alienation and identity crisis faced by Najeeb, the protagonist who represents the hopes and desires of every Malayali who yearn for a sumptuous future, which they believe will be offered in the Gulf. Moreover, the novel is set in the background of the Oil Era in the Gulf which gives every Malayali the dream of a secure future.

Migration is not only a physical process of moving from one place to another but it is also a psychological reaction too. Migration, Julia Mirsky writes: "Mourning in migration is not seen as a state, but rather as a process similar to the one all mourners go through, from an initial denial of loss, through realization and reconciliation with the reality of loss." (Mirsky,14)

References

1. M. Vijayakumar, Anu Baisel, Ezhil Kumar, Christopher Rajasekaran *Negotiating Aspects of Culture, Communication and identity in Indian Literary Texts : An Analytical Study*, (IJTEE) ISSN:2278-3075, Vol. 8, Issue 7C2, May 2019
2. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, <https://warwick.ac.uk>
3. Priya Joseph, *Diasporic Reimagining of Culture in Kiran Desai's Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, IJAIR, Vol. 6 issue 1 (35): Jan -March 2019, pg. 68-71 ISSN 2394-7780
4. Kumar Suresh Surya, *Migration and Identity Crisis in Benyamin's Goat Days*, Smart Moves Journal IJELLH 8 (5), 42-50, 2020

5. Naha Abhijit (2023), A study on Empathetic Perception of Amitav Ghosh as a Diasporic Writer, Quest Journals JRHSS Vol. 11. Issue 4 pg 26-31
6. Narayan, R. K. Malgudi Days, Indian Thought Publications, first Indian Edition 1996, 85th Reprint, 2021