



Travel and Diaspora: "Journey of their Own"

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ABSTRACT

Journey is a common phenomenon between travel and diaspora. They begin with a journey. Diaspora journey, although a physical one, sometimes or always drags the person emotionally and psychologically. The person is travelling physically but metaphorically he is a traveller of his own place. He writes about the plight of displacement and non-belongingness. The displaced and migrated personality is distorted and this distortion leads him to share his plight and trauma of exile through writing. The writing becomes the means of purgation where the diasporic writer shares his pain of leaving and going away from his homeland and loved ones. Travelling also comprises a journey, displacement and dislocation from native land to foreign land. However, travel writing is quite contrary to diaspora writing as it is based on the expressions and observations of the author. Moreover, it is an outlook journey based on the impressions and reminiscences of the traveller. The diasporic write-ups are fictional, novelistic, plot-based and signify the inner journey. The travel write-ups are factual, fiction and original. The present paper aims to study the difference between travel writing and diaspora writing. The paper also looks at diaspora in terms of travel, and journey as a metaphor for travel and diaspora.

Keywords- Diaspora, Travel Writing, Exile, Nostalgia, Repatriation

Since the beginning of human civilization, diaspora has emerged as a basic phenomenon in human life. People are dislocated for various reasons, as the urge to attain all the lavishness of life is always emancipating them. Basically, they migrated for commercial purposes. However, some people migrated from their native land involuntary as they are the victim of the circumstances. They were forced to be migrated from their native land to work as an indentured labourer in the native land. They had been exploited as they were poor and marginal. The process of migration has now become a transnational engagement in the era of globalization. The societies meet and clash on various local and global issues. Sudesh Mishra has divided the Indian diasporic community into two categories 'the old and the new' in his essay "From Sugar to Masala." Mishra is of the view that,

"This distinction is between, on the one hand, the semi voluntary flight of the indentured peasants to non-metropolitan plantation colonies such as Fiji, Trinidad, Mauritius, South Africa, Malaysia, Surinam and Guyana roughly between the years 1830 and 1917; and the other the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes to thriving metropolitan centres such as Australia, the United States, Canada and Britain." (Mishra 276)

Diaspora is time travel and the plight of the journey and its aftermath remains in the mind and heart of the author. Diaspora substantially reflects the change in the process of evolution, time and space. The yearning to return to the home place is never satisfied as the diasporic fraternity is devoid of this charm. Once migrated, one never gets a chance of repatriation. The exiled and displaced personality looks forward to the identity, culture and past. It is the journey of self-actualization through introspection. Diasporic travel leads to 'metanoia' which is the journey of change of one's heart, mind, soul and the way of living and observing life. The expatriation fundamentally leads to spiritual awakening, conversion or change of the self. The transportation also affects the purpose, and observation of one's own mental and physical state, the act of looking within oneself. The act of 'soul searching' has become a popular term for the migrated personalities.

The diaspora literature and travel literature are twins, they are relatives. Diaspora tells about the nation and undergoing changes of the author's motherland while travel literature tells about the facts, figures, and observations of the alien land, to which the author is travelling. For a better understanding of the context, Ghosh's travelogue *In an Antique Land* and novel *River of Smoke* are relevant as his characters float from one place to another; he himself is diasporic and a well-traveled man. His themes are diasporic, past-centered, exploring new ethnicities, facing the fear of border crossing and above all the sense of rootlessness in his characters.

Diaspora substantially signifies the migrant's belonging to the homeland, a quest for identity, search for roots and soul searching. Suggesting about the diaspora, Robin Cohen aptly remarks, "communities of people living together in one country who acknowledge that 'the old country' a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore-always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions" (Cohen ix). Diaspora emerged from migration which appears as a tool to understand the diasporic theory. *Comparing Postcolonial Diaspora*, a critical book on diasporic theory suggests that "diaspora is a travelling metaphor associated with the tropes of mobility, displacement, borders and crossings" (Procter *et al.* 1). Diasporic subjects are the travellers of the culture and society of the host nation, they clash with the host culture and continuously strife for their lost identity. They struggle hard to create a fresh identity for themselves. *Nostos* or homecoming becomes a halo around them which they always yearn to trespass. They want to return to their homeland.

The word traveller refers to a person who travelled from place to place. He is on a continuous journey to a distant and exotic land. The word traveller is derived from 'travail' which means suffering and hardships. Modern-day connotation of traveller is not the same as the middle ages or before the industrial revolution. In the middle ages, most of the travellers were pilgrims and they had very rigid and uneasy journeys. 'New Age travellers' and 'Gypsies' are habitual travellers and travelled routinely as a way of life. According to Belton, they can claim 'traveller ethnicity' (2005). Lawrence Stern, one of the four wheels of English novel categorize the travellers as idle travellers, inquisitive travellers, lying travellers, proud travellers, vain travellers, splenetic travellers. He defined himself as sentimental traveller.

Migration involves travelling and travelling also brings migration but it is impermanent as the notion of coming back is always fresh and attached to the traveller. A traveller is a person who is by choice a migrant. He is not exiled. He knows that he will return to his homeland when he wishes to. A traveller acts as a catalyst as soon as he crosses the border. Beyond the border, there is an entirely new world that has to be explored. Within the national boundaries, there is not much anxiety and trouble. The mind and heart are at peace as the sense of belongingness prevails within the national boundary. As soon as the native boundary is trespassed; restlessness, curiosity, and apprehension occurred and interrupted the host culture and people. Traveller becomes a bridge between the native and host society. He becomes a translator, mediator, guest and host at the same time. He straddles between the cultures, languages, and customs. Travel is compelling metaphor for knowing. A traveller is a follower of cultural relativism. He sees the alien society and its culture through unbiased eyes. He doesn't compare the host culture with the native culture. Although, he takes the baggage of his own culture with him but he honestly recognizes the alien land. He doesn't have the burden of his identity and he is also not the victim of identity crisis. Moreover, in a true sense, a traveller becomes a traveller when he returns back to his homeland. On repatriation only, the traveller can decode all the information, observations and assumptions that he gathers about the alien land. People tend to travel alone and love to feel nature and become part of the sublime in a solitary state only.

Nostalgia, yearning for roots, and longing for the motherland are the key elements present in diasporic literature. Diasporic writings time and again approach the perspectives of loss attached to exilic subjects. However, rootlessness, alienation and exile are the central themes of almost all the diasporic texts, these are not the only themes discussed in these texts. They are further read as sociological studies on diaspora. They discussed plethora of other details related to identity and identity politics. Stories related with forced labour, exile and migration are also questioned as they are

related with a larger group that nonetheless has subaltern existence. They are also the platform to discuss 'cultural shock' which migrant people receive on entering or crossing the alien boundary.

Hybridity is one of the common features in both the literature of diaspora and travel. In diasporic texts, there is a challenging discourse between the homeland and the land of adoption. Migrated beings have now turned into travellers as the world is now shrunk due to increasing globalization. There remained no difference between the ancient homeland and the land of exile.

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