

Formation of Diasporic Consciousness and Ideology

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Abstract

Though Diaspora has gained its relevance in the postcolonial, multicultural, and globalized world with its inception in Jewish dispersion in Babylonian times through the Roman destruction in Jerusalem yet it distinguishes itself from the phenomena of immigration and migration. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *The Post-Colonial Studies: Reader* (1995) argue that, "These words focus on movement, disruption and displacement rather than the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection that come to characterize the Diasporic society. They describe the diversity of 'strangers' rather than the difference of the relocated Diasporic subject". The paper in context seeks to identify the process through which the diasporic consciousness and ideology get formed.

Keywords: formation, though, diaspora, tiffin

Introduction

The baffling and confounding history of Renaissance and Reformation, unprecedented development of science and technology, some major revolutions of the world, apocalyptic wars, Kantian turn to philosophy, waves of Nationalism, Imperialism, and Colonialism, Linguistic turn to the theory of Epistemology, and the political and economic realities of Globalization have entailed profoundly upon the making and shaping of history and historical of the world. They have on the one hand given rise to the phenomenon of crisis but on the other they also negotiate with it. The phenomenon of Diasporic reality is diachronic in nature as it is located within the cusp of national politics which involves almost all major components which constitute the fulcrum of the sociological reality of literature and the formation of genre. The emergence of Diaspora as a genre has been triggered by the phenomena of empire and colonial invasion which have essentially been guided by national and international politics, economy, and culture. James Procter in his research "Diaspora" in John McLeod's *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (2007) writes:

Diasporas are more commonly associated with movements through and between locations, and even with dislocation. In fact, the concept of Diaspora has been developed by many postcolonial critics to challenge the supremacy of national paradigms. In postcolonial studies, 'Diaspora' can appear both as naming a geographical phenomenon-the traversal of physical terrain by an individual or a group-as well as a theoretical concept; a way of thinking or of representing the world ^[1].

The genesis of discourses on Diaspora has not only been political but also been cultural in nature as Edward Said notes in the concluding section of *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), "Movements and Migrations" "Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale" (407). Similarly, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *Empire Writes Back* (1998) reinstate, "Colonialism itself was a radically

Diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world" (69). Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) employs the metaphors of circulation, movement, passage, and journeying to refer to the condition of Diasporic realities. Similarly, Makarand Paranjape's *In Diaspora* (2001) reinstates the fact that the birth of Diaspora is located with the textures of "religious empires, global empires, imperial dynasties and nations" (4).

Though Diaspora has gained its relevance in the postcolonial, multicultural, and globalized world with its inception in Jewish dispersion in Babylonian times through the Roman destruction in Jerusalem yet it distinguishes itself from the phenomena of immigration and migration. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *The Post-Colonial Studies: Reader* (1995) argue that, "These words focus on movement, disruption and displacement rather than the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection that come to characterize the Diasporic society. They describe the diversity of 'strangers' rather than the difference of the relocated Diasporic subject" (425). The Diasporic subject faces ambivalence and hence it looks into two different directions-towards an historical cultural identity on one hand, and the society of relocation on the other. Salman Rushdie calls it the emergence of 'Imaginary Homelands' where the identity of the Diasporic subject is actively inscribed. Edward Said enunciates that the sense of loss, the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home but he also emphasises upon the fact that Diaspora brings profound creative empowerment. Thus, the realities of dispersion, diffusion, and heterogeneity, migration, movement and scattering interrogate the monolithic nature of culture and identity.

Diaspora also problematizes the concept of a national identity. The cutting across national boundaries, the dispersion, the spreading out, the diffusion through space and the occupation of many different kinds of national groups disrupts the process, so important to nationalism, of

establishing metaphysical links with a particular geographical location with a particular community that lives within those borders. A very different range of filiations and links are established and perpetuated by the Diasporic communities. If nation-state characterizes modernity and its dissemination the principal object of colonization then Diaspora has come to problematize not only the sacred unity of the nation but also the fundamental ideologies of modernity itself. So, it is found that Diaspora has a profoundly disruptive affect upon the whole edifice of European epistemological and political power because it disrupts modernity, it disrupts the idea of nation and national identity, it disrupts the notion of unity and coherence to rational subjectivity and it becomes a prominent feature of contemporary post-colonial world.

Diasporic identity demonstrates the extent to which identity itself must be constructed and reconstructed by individuals in their everyday life. A choice of identification, of belonging to a group, to a nation-based community which they may never have visited geographically. There are many occasions like this when the fluid categories of identity become fixed for a brief moment. But this tells us something about subjectivity itself. Subjectivity is fluid, a function of different roles, and what we find in Diaspora is an uncovering of the very fluid and constructed nature of identity and also the operation of individual subjective agency in that process of identification. However, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1995) explain: Diaspora highlights the global trend of creating, constructing and reconstructing identity not by identifying with some ancestral place, but through travelling itself. While the Diasporic subject travels, so does culture. A travelling culture means a culture that changes, develops and transforms itself according to the various influences it encounters in different places. Thus, while Diasporachange their countries of arrival, so are their cultures changed in turn. In this respect, the most explicit binary, that apparently existing between 'indigenous' and 'Diasporic', becomes disrupted, as James Clifford shows, by the 'articulation' of identity through movement and travel ^[2].

Over-used and under-theorized-this is the claim which most attempts at formulating new theories of Diaspora make. This leads to an impasse; almost all theories of Diaspora already think Diaspora to be a contested territory, a veritable ensemble of competing and adversarial epistemologies, ontologies and ideologies, and yet each new attempt, paradoxically though, tries to fix Diaspora within new limits even while avowing its contested nature. "This act of positing a new critical site," writes Sudesh Mishra, "through the inscribing of parameters is, paradoxically, at odds with the site-violating implications of its primary signifier or object, since *diaspeir* is Greek for 'scattering (*speir*) and was originally employed to explain the botanical phenomenon of seed dispersal" (Mishra 2004:14). Besides this, theory tends to enact its own brand of politics of inclusion and exclusion in the diasporic space. For one kind of theory some writers are Diasporic and others are not, whereas for another kind those who have been excluded are more Diasporic than those who have been included. Can we, as theorists and literary critics, say that one particular Diasporic or *pravasi*writer's pain of separation from the motherland is more authentic than that of another whose pain is plain dissembling? These are troubling questions which rear their head as over-theorization leads us to a cul-de-sac. My own

stance is not anti-theory per se; however, the blind spots we are likely to confront in attempting to think a theory of Diaspora do make us wary of constructing a totalizing theory of Diaspora derived from certain paradigmatic features of Diasporic populations, If at all we should have a theory of Diaspora, then it has to be a theory which is not grounded on any foundational fallacy, is not exclusionary, is not author-centred, and does not make Diaspora ludic.

"In an era of globalization, we are all becoming Diasporic," claims Stuart Hall in an interview (Hall 1992:402). Similar claims have been made by Rushdie, Edward Said and George Steiner also. If on the one hand Stuart Hall's claim foregrounds the contemporary world reality in the transnational moment, on the other, it also evidences promiscuously latitudinarian and celebratory claims made with regard to ontological diasporization brought about by the processes of globalization. Given the fact that the extremely malleable semantic domain of the term *Diaspora* is being stretched in different directions resulting in frequent slippages between significations of Diaspora, exile, refugee, immigrant, migrant, nomad, and-in the Indian context-the privileged Non Resident Indians (NRIs), the *pravasi*Bharati and now the PIO, and the talk of so many types of Diaspora such as 'classical Diaspora', first, second and third generation Diasporas, 'trading Diaspora', mobilized Diaspora', 'catastrophic Diaspora', 'victim Diaspora', and now 'cyborg Diaspora' and so on, many thinkers have stressed the need to police the capacious and captious boundaries of *Diaspora* through its rigorous theorization. In their introduction to *Theorizing Diaspora*, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur caution against uncritical and unreflexive use of the term Diaspora: "...[T]he term "Diaspora" risks losing specificity and critical merit if it is deemed to speak for all movements and migrations between nations, within nations, between cities, within cities *ad infinitum*" (Braziel and Mannur 2003:7). In doing so, they emphasize the need to theorize *Diasporas* so that it can be employed as a reliable methodological category.

However, if the dispersion of the term *Diaspora* in anthropological, sociological, ethnographic and literary-critical discourses is suggestive of its taxonomic looseness, then its theorization too poses many problems. Theories often tend to become overarching generalizations and a theory of Diaspora is likely to become a privileged point or origin from which Diaspora might be judged. Looking down on Diaspora from the elevated plane of disengaged theory will not allow us to think of Diaspora as a site of difference and becoming. I believe such aporias mesmerize and almost paralyze any discussion of *Diaspora* and obviate the very possibility of any settled definition, solution or resolution.

A survey of the terminological provenance and theoretical genealogies of Diaspora studies, starting with the work of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, R. Radhakrishnan, Sura P. Rath, Vijay Mishra, Robin Cohen, and N. Jayaram among others reveals how the conflicted territories of home-location, nation-postnation, inside-outside, citizen-stranger, pure-hybrid, roots-routes, centre-periphery, sameness-difference, subject-object etcetera intersect and collide at the aporetic intersection where Diaspora finds its multi-vocal and multi-referential signification. These binaries bring with them traces of their past configurations also. Their affiliations with post structuralism, postmodernism and Post colonialism add still greater complexity to the already multi-accented term

Diaspora. This deliriously overflowing complexity of the term *Diaspora* is responsible for its appropriation and recuperation in a variety of disciplines and discourses. This complexity threatens to bring about disintegrating dispersal of *Diaspora*, diasporization of *Diaspora*, so to say, as Rogers Brubaker points out:

As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted, this has resulted in what one might call a "Diaspora" Diaspora, dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space (Brubaker).

Going into the genealogies of Diaspora studies, we find that the earliest attempts at understanding Diasporas invariably treated them as bounded entities. Significant in this regard is William Safran's construction of a working definition of Diaspora in terms of an "ideal type". Safran's model, as James Clifford illustrates, enlists six main features of Diasporas as "expatriate minority communities." These features are "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) Country, desire for eventual return, on-going support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (Clifford: 305). What emerges from such formulations is that the Diasporic subjects have homogenous, collective identities bound together by shared feelings of alienation and having a very strong nostalgic longing for the place of origin. However, as Clifford points out, we must be wary of constructing our working definition by recourse to an "ideal type" because even the "pure" forms 'are ambivalent, even embattled over basic features' (Clifford 1994:306). Moreover, discussions of paradigmatic cases are generally rooted in a conceptual homeland as such paradigmatic cases obviously allude to the Jewish Diaspora. Grounding himself in a "nationalist space", Makarand Paranjape also takes almost similar position when he suggests that the Diaspora "must involve a cross-cultural or cross-civilizational passage. It is only such a crossing that results in the unique consciousness of the Diasporic. In other words, there has to be a source country and a target country, a source culture and a target culture, a source language and a target language, a source religion and a target religion, and so on. Also, the crossing must be forced, not voluntary; otherwise, the passage will only amount to an enactment of desire-fulfilment. Or, even if voluntary, the passage must involve some significant tension between the source and the target cultures" (paranjape 2001:6). To define Diaspora in such specific way by preparing lists of their characteristic features appear reductionist.

Counterpoising such schematic theories are the stances of thinkers like Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, AvtarBrah and R. Radhakrishnan. In their formulations, categories such as hybridity, palimpsest identities, displacement, decentrement, difference, alterity etc. which have strong affiliations with poststructuralism, postmodernism and Postcolonialism become celebrated reference points. For Homi Bhabha Diasporas are, "Gatherings of exiles and *emigres* and refugees; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at eh frontiers; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present" (Bhabha 1994:139). Diasporas inhabit liminal, interstitial spaces and their inter-subjective

and intercultural experiences constitute them as hyphenated, hybrid subjects. This hybridity is not natural and organic hybridity which fuses and blends and reconciles the codes of culture, race, colour, ethnicity, and gender which inform it; it is self-reflexive hybridity and is an outcome of a conscious negotiation with and contestation between its *informing* elements. The hyphenated existence of the Diasporas draws attention to the fluid identities which are continuously reconfigured in on-going negotiation with the changing political environment. According to Stuart Hall, the Diaspora experience "is defined, not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with the through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" and Diaspora identities "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1993:402). This indeterminacy of the fluid Diasporic identities, in the words of Jacqueline Lo, disrupts neat "homology between cultural, racial and national identity" (Lo). The hyphen also draws attention toward the suppressed histories of cross-cultural and cross-racial relations. This self-reflexive hybridity, in Bhabha's words, an "insurgent act of cultural translation" (Bhabha 1994:7), is rife with the subversive potential to unsettle hegemonic relations as it focuses on processes of negotiation and contestation between cultures. Hybridity and hyphenation "offer an alternative organising category for a new politics of representation which is informed by an awareness of Diaspora and its contradictory, ambivalent and generative potential" (Jacqueline Lo). For this reason Bhabha thinks that the in-between (third) space occupied by the Diasporic subject is pregnant with creative possibilities: "...[I]t is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence" (Bhabha 1994:7). Like Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and Edward Said also visualize creative potentialities in the exilic condition. For Avtar Brah the "Diaspora space is the intersectionality of Diaspora, border, and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed..." (Brah 2002:208). According to Brah, the 'Diaspora space' is a highly contested site. The lure of eclectic hybridity, however, in its equation with fusion music, fusion of cuisines, fusion of cultures, as it obtains in postmodern pastiche culture does tend to empty term 'hybridity' of its political content and historical specificity and exposes it to the charge of occluding the pain and grief of living in Diaspora.

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