

Reminiscence surfaces diasporic consciousness: A comparative analysis of indigenous and overseas episodes of Zulfikar Ghose's "This Landscape, These People"

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Abstract

There is no necessity for the interrogation: 'Does Zulfikar Ghose portray diasporic consciousness through his poems?', because his poetic works substantiate the theme of diasporic consciousness and the poem, "This Landscape, These People" serves as a paradigm. "This Landscape, These People" is enriched with the theme of diasporic consciousness and, the research paper strives to accumulate the images representing the exiled position of the poet. Zulfikar Ghose, a living Pakistani American writer, is renowned for landscape poetry as well as for magical realism writing. In "This Landscape, these People", he explicates and distinguishes the void independence that he gets in his romantic age in the alien land and the solace that he experiences in his indigenous country. The cultural difference and behavioural changes of the indigenous people and the foreign people are disclosed through his succinct language and style of composition. Furthermore, the paper traces every single reminisced image which depicts the pleasant as well as the unpleasant experiences of Zulfikar Ghose in the motherland and the exile land.

Keywords: reminiscence, diasporic, consciousness, alien and indigenous

Introduction

Zulfikar Ghose is a Pakistani-American, born on 13 March 1935 at Sialkot in India. His writing includes novels, poetry, and criticism on cultural alienation. Ghose was brought up in a Muslim family in Sialkot and then moved with his family to England when he was seventeen. In 1959, he was graduated at Keele University in England and married Helena de la Fontaine who is an artist from Brazil. He moved to the United States in 1969 to teach at the University of Texas. *The Loss of India* (1964) and *Jets From Orange* (1967) are his two volumes of poetry. His autobiography titled *Confessions of a Native-Alien* was published in 1965 and his first two novels are *The Contradictions* and *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, were published in 1966 and 1969 respectively.

In an interview with Bruce Meyers, Zulfikar Ghose has uttered that he is obsessed with place – 'landscape'. The poetry of Ghose encompasses imagery and motifs from three continents namely Asia, Europe and North America. He has inclination towards Europe but his poetry picturizes his daily life in South Asia and memories of early life and his family members. The poetic writings of Zulfikar Ghose have been categorized into three sub-divisions: firstly, his landscape poetry with British descent lines and images of his beloved London; secondly, poems with memories of the past containing the images of South Asia, and eventually, poems with a historical sensibility that grants the poet-speaker with a sense of time and historic moments. His writing severs as a bridge between diasporic South Asian poetry from Britain and diasporic South Asian poetry from North America to some extent.

The word 'diaspora' has been originated from Greek word which means 'scattered' or 'separated'. Exclusively, from the mid of 1990s the word diaspora has been assigned to represent the people who live away from their nation. In English literature, the terms such as exile, immigration and expatriation

are used as the alternative words of diaspora. In this connection, Salman Rushdie has professed his view on diasporic phenomena as "Exiles or immigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (83). Diaspora emphasizes the emotional and psychological state of struggle between two geographical and cultural phenomena, in addition to the scuffle between regression and progression, dislocation and relocation. As for us diasporic consciousness is concerned, it is intertwined with the sense of loss, nostalgia, alienation, isolation, shock and feeling disconnected from the new environment.

"This Landscape, These People" is an epitome of reminiscence surfacing diasporic consciousness, and reminiscence is explicated as a spoken or written description of something that somebody remembers about their past life. The poem projects and illustrates Zulfikar Ghose as the narrator with diasporic and indigenous thoughts. It is one of the landscape poems of Zulfikar Ghose which has England as its one setting and India as the other. The poem has an autobiographical tone in which he realizes his state of exilement and makes distinction between his life in Indian and England. It portrays Ghose as a teenager of seventeen years when he is in the indigenous land and eighteen when he is engulfed by the sense of alienation in the foreign land, England.

Diasporic consciousness is a prevalent motif of Zulfikar Ghose's "This Landscape, These People". It juxtaposes immigrant and indigenous lives of the poet. The poem begins by picturising the exile state of the poet. He sobs that the expatriation has completely snatched his independence. He walks among the silver birches of Putney Heath and it is his eighth spring in England. He steps over the stones and moves on his way merely to find that everything is strange to him. He could not touch anything other than the earth because of the

disconnectedness. He does not wish to be noticed by anyone and simply he desires to be a fish - making only movements in eyes. He has recorded his alienated and isolated state through the following poetic lines:

Stepping over turfs and stones; being stranger
 I see but do not touch: only the earth
 Permit an attachment. I do not wish
 To be seen, and move, eyes at my side, like a fish.
 "This Landscape, These People" (3-6)

Since he has very less attachment with the new continent, he just takes a watch over the native English people and their land. He describes them as "[...] strolling with stiff country sides? "This Landscape, These People" (8). He says that the English men walk with stiff gait which presents their rigid and fancy picture of their habitual life. He could not find a casual behaviour among the English men as he has found among the Indians. Ghose leans against a tree to signify his state of loneliness in the foreign country. Even the spring acts an alien to him and thus it has caused wrinkles in his skin. He desires to relish the pleasure of being in a new environment but it is hindered by the formal postures of the native people. However, due to his overwhelming vibrant spirit, he is tended to leap the hedges and duck under the chestnut boughs: "I leap hedges duck under chestnut boughs," "This Landscape, These People" (11). It reveals that he has used nature as a comforter to get rid of the diasporic consciousness by leaping the bushes and ducking under the branches of the trees.

Ghose exceptionally portrays the bittersweet diasporic experience that he has tasted in England. The poet does few comparisons by making avail of the literary device, simile to picturize an absolute sense of loneliness and disconnectedness in the unknown land. He has penned that the new country was like "[...] a museum, [...]" "This Landscape, These People" (13). For an instance, generally a child in a museum is not allowed to touch anything that he sees because it is exhibited in a glass case. In fact, museum is meant only for exhibition, so the child keenly watches everything that he finds in the museum which is obviously strange to him. The poet too experiences the same when he observes the country and its people. He continues to contrast and explode his sufferings out of alienation by saying that England is an antique chair with a rope across which signifies that permission is denied to use it. Similarly, Ghose also could not sit anywhere and therefore he paces; this implies his state of inhibition with mere freedom. He walks up and down and gets a feeling that as if he is seeing England in a picture which indicates his little attachment that he has with the land. The diasporic consciousness has removed the reality and the poet has expresses his sheer diasporic consciousness through the lines:

A child at a museum, England for me
 Is an exhibit within a glass case
 The country, like an antique chair, has a rope.
 Across it, I may not sit, only pace.

 Through galleries of ferns see England in pictures
 "This Landscape, These People" (13-16, 18)

The poet has employed a remarkable technique of juxtaposing two countries to demonstrate his detachment with the alien land

as an Indian expatriate and his attachment with his motherland. He sketches a filmy portrait of the homeland experience that has relished him. He says that he swam in the beaches of Bombay and pulled coconuts from the tall trees when he was seventeen. To import the idea of plucking coconuts from the tall trees, Ghose has utilized hyperbole and utters - "Pulled coconuts from the sky, [...]" "This Landscape, These People" (21). In his motherland, he has had the freedom to walk with the heavy noisy steps. His indigenous country has never given any inhibition and discomfort to him; therefore, he swayed in his romantic age with no respect to others. The poet himself honestly confesses his impudent temperament that he had in his teenage. In one perspective, it reveals that the motherland grants all sorts of liberty to a citizen, and in the other perspective, it divulges that the foreign land takes off the primary freedom that one has as a human being.

In the poetic work, Zulfikar Ghose portrays Indians with respect to their culture and extrovert behaviour. In addition it reminds the readers that their daily life is a happy struggle for survival. It is apparent that the poet has infused the diasporic consciousness by displaying both the countries and its people with varied cultures. Exhibiting the differences have enabled to trace out his lacking in the new land which gives a clear picture of his diasporic consciousness too. He describes Indians as gregarious people by picturing a troupe going to a town "[...] with furi tight-rope walkers, eye gay / and bamboo and rope on their bare shoulder;" "This Landscape, These People" (26, 27). The poem explicates a vivid picture of a snake chamber with a long grey beard and cobras on his turbaned head. The people march through the village and the children beat the drums to make the villagers gathered. Thus, the poet sketches a vigorous image of the vibrant India villagers to differentiate it from England.

He continues to sketch the images of the people who are moving from village to village. Ghose adds that the jugglers have joined with the villagers to entertain them. The jesters amuse the viewers "[...] with tongues obscene as crows, [...]" "This Landscape, These People" (34). The poem reveals that the attitude of the Indians is completely contradictory to that of the Europeans. He has not only displayed the picture of human beings but also the images of animals. The stray dogs leaning against jackals and an image of a cow in the poem provide an explicit description of the harmony that exists between the creatures of the non-human world. The poet says that the creatures of the non-human world stamp and shout and has changed the calm environment into a vibrant and noisy one. As he progresses in his depiction about the people moving from a village to another village, he slowly shifts his idea to the town mood. It is understood that the people march to the town where the poets recite epics and make the people gay. Reciting the epics severs as a feast to the ears and aesthetic sense of the crowd. Even the recitation and the village episodes picturised in the poem differentiate the Indians and the English.

The distinction made by Ghose about his living in India and Europe emphasize the quality of independence that he has experienced in both the countries. In England, he could make only a watch over things but in the indigenous country he has pulled coconuts from the tall trees. In addition, he has plucked and tasted the pomegranates which have turned his tongue purple, and he has chillies to 'burn' his mouth. He has used the word, 'burn' to express the spiciness of the chillies. He has found stones to kick and play with them; such minor

activities have assisted him to be amused and feel the independence of his homeland. The poem also evidences the deep Indian culture interlocked in Ghose's attitude even though he is taken to the alien country at his early romantic age. It brings out the fact that living in the motherland for so many years can have very less impact on the behaviour of the human being because they do not realize its worthiness to a remarkable level but being separated from the motherland can cause severe effect and remain as a diasporic consciousness. Therefore, he proudly confesses that he was born to this country and with much impudence he affirms that everything is his. Through the following poetic lines the poet has registered the phenomenon that has amused him and enabled him to experience the liberty in the continent where he has had his first breath:

Born to this continent, all was mine
 To pluck and taste; pomegranates to purple
 My tongue and chillies to burn my mouth stones
 Were there to kick. This landscape, these people
 "This Landscape, These People" (49-52)

"This Landscape, These People" has multiple ideas with regard to the diasporic consciousness. Zulfikar Ghose has juxtaposed his experience in India as well as in England. Being an inhabitant of both the countries have rendered him memorable scenes and distinguishable differences on the basis of people and their culture that prevails in extremely two dissimilar countries. His explication gives filmy images of the vibrant India and the fancy England. Spending years in the countries have granted unforgettable pictures on independence, loss of liberty and above all they have stirred up the diasporic views and thoughts.

Initially, the poet feels discomfort of being an Indian expatriate in Europe but towards the end of the poem he has penned his intimate rapport with England. He says that he meets England as a secret lover and plucks leaves and, eventually he admits that "Stranger or an inhabitant; this is my home" "This Landscape, These People" (72). Although he has adapted to the estranged life gracefully in course of time, still he realizes the difference that the countries make and has made in his life. In the beginning days of his excitement, his life had been a miserable and now the same country has satisfied him with its richness and liberty. However, nostalgic perception is predominant in the poem and it kindles the diasporic consciousness of the poet undeniably. Thus, the juxtaposing style of the poet has instilled a diasporic and indigenous consciousness to the poem.

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