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**LOST IN TRANSITION- QUEST FOR IDENTITY
THROUGH DIASPORA**

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Abstract

The conceptualization of migration in literature which more often than not precipitates tragedy and in turn the dilemma in identity is associated with the literary concept of diaspora. Popularly categorized with the longing for homeland and its poetics, there is a rhetorical attempt to fathom the void caused due to displacement. The dichotomy of two identities, created due to tension between the former self-clinging to roots of origin and the latter trying to configure oneself within the framework of a new identity, contributes to the amalgamation of distinguishable individualities.

Primarily, Diaspora literature is characterized by a sense of alienation and loss that envelopes the narrative and it is conditioned by the after-effects of expatriation migration. Generally, it revolves around themes of displacement, attempts to trace back existential roots, nostalgia, and the inescapable association of the dire quest for identity that diaspora and migration literature bring on to. It deals with the equivocacy of plurality and hybridization in the domain of constantly changing identities and transnationalism in the process of migration.

The paper attempts to examine the various forms of literature and the way they concretize diaspora, as a result: evoking literary stimuli of longing for homeland due to displacement. It aims to encompass the realms of cultural, economic, social, religious, and political consciousness that change an individual's displacement from one dominion to another. The narrative is shaped into reality with devices of metaphors and zeugma to explain exaggerated realities.

This paper specifically closely reads texts of various literary genres like Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, a graphic novel, Salman Rushdie's essay *Imaginary Homelands* Rohinton Mistry's short story *Swimming Lessons* and Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *Namesake*.

KEYWORDS:

Migration Diaspora, Identity Hybridization Narrative

Introduction

Literature often engages with the theme of migration in the context of the political, social, cultural and economic circumstances of the migrants' nation of origin, provoking their displacement. Additionally, the thought process of the immigrant, thereby conditioned by the contemporary scenario of the foreign land reinforces the motive of the narrative.

Often due to various reasons individuals choose to or are compelled to migrate from one place to another which precipitates a sense of tragedy and in the process creates a void stemming from rootlessness, search for identity and culture shock. Literature attempts to encompass the vacuum generated through whatever is lost in transition.

Diaspora

To trace back the definitions of diaspora it is important to delve into the terminological history of it. The original use of the term, by the Greeks, connotes a triumphalist migration along with colonization (speiro=to sow; and dia=over) from the perspective of the colonizer or occupier. Notions of civilizational superiority underpinned such use of the term.

Diasporic literature can be regarded as an amalgamation of emotionally charged literary texts usually tainted with the brush of tragedy- resonating to confusion and loss; centred around questions of identity and "that are produced in a time of migration or that can be said to reflect on migration" (Adelson, n.d, 533).

T.S Eliot says: "Humankind cannot bear very much reality." Literature in general and diasporic in particular mirrors society's dire need to fill up the vacuum thus created through inescapable ground realities.

Causes of migration

The dislocating force may be direct and coercive or diffused and subtle, such as lack of opportunities for social or economic advancement. It can be caused by momentous events such as mass expulsions or "cleansing" or an inching sense of desperation that overcomes a group or an individual.

The primary factors that cause forced migration include the history of war and conflict. Besides describing the aspects of the economy, individual health, and politics, it paints the society with a tragic hue and permanently metamorphoses the cultural identity of the immigrant thus diffusing individuality. The trauma of war impinging on the individual throughout the process of migration is reflected in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

Colonialism is another vital facet that accelerates displacement along with globalization. Within the framework of a capitalist society, individuals more often than not choose to travel for better career opportunities, lifestyle, and economic enhancement. However, the authenticity of their original culture lingers throughout. Protagonists in various diasporic texts such as Rohinton Mistry's *Swimming Lessons* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake* epitomize the internal conflicts of an individual.

The nation-state model of political organization that characterizes colonial states led to the evolution of postcolonial states along similar lines. Such a model was not suitable for many situations and did not satisfy the political aspirations of several groups. The structure thus imposes alienation, strife, and displacement within and without the borders of the nation-states resulting in a steady stream of displaced people or exiles.

New formulations of diaspora focus on negating or bypassing the limitations created by the nation-state. It is argued that the concept, as well as the actual working of the nation-state, are rigid, hierarchical, and modernist, less suitable to the realities of the present-day, postmodern society.

Hypothesis

The idea of individuality has cropped up mainly in the contemporary modern postcolonial society divorced from the traditionality. It enthuses a pioneering approach towards society keeping in mind individual dream and success. With the trend of the world shifting towards the American multiculturalism (melting pot), there has been a rapid disintegration of cultural identities. This in turn has produced a domino effect worldwide where people migrating are faced with identity crisis and lack of individualism. Cocooned in their cultural upbringing within the borders of their own nation, people find themselves dwindling on their distinct personalities amidst the culture shock.

Individuals who embody the experience of living in a land far away from their place of origin often absorb in sense of alienation as they find themselves different and varied from the larger mass or the majority often have to suffer identity crisis. An immense sense of rootlessness percolates in their existence and they perceive the same as a prolonged exile. The fragmented existence makes an individual question their identity and as a consequence there is a sheer craving for recognition. The same notion of identity in question and need for recognition is conceived and brewed in Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" (Saha, 2015)

"They change their sky not their mind, who cross the sea" (Epistles I.11.27). This explains the dichotomy that is the thought process and minds set of an individual barely changes and remains as conditioned by their own roots in terms of socio-political cultures and more. Whereas the immediate external surroundings of the expatriate in terms of the social, political and cultural setting they are compelled to be absorbed in, differ to a great extent and the horizons are almost parallel and can barely merge.

Diasporic literature, defined by transnationalism encompasses various countries usually country of one's origin and one where the immigrants settle after displacement. The centrifugal force that conceptualizes diasporic literature is identity. The diverse characters question their existential individuality in process of transition, as they adapt in a foreign land. With drastic changes in life, the geographic displacement brings forth parallelism in culture with contrasts gradually emerging in the stark difference between the old past and the new present, glorified with respect to the familiar against the foreign.

The Namesake: Shattering of existing identity and transnationalism giving rise to a new one within the cultural milieu Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian writer writing in English, strikes the exact chord when it comes to dealing with identity in the context of diaspora. The complications of transition and difficulties in settling in a foreign land is accentuated through the fact that the journey is across the two binaries the world is divided in terms of culture—that is from east to west. The concept is solidified through sheer culture shock that individuals in general and a woman (Ashima Ganguly) in particular is left to deal with as first-generation immigrants. They settle from the East Indian state of West Bengal to the United States, and their American-born children who trace back their lineage and roots in India struggle to fathom their identity. Ashima's authentic identity as a Bengali individual is disintegrated as she finds herself as a metamorphosed version of the same individual in the American milieu. The Namesake shelters the duration of three decades thus making the continuation prominent in search for identity, across generations.

The primary question that the novel evokes is centered around identity at an individual level which churns out as the thematic concern of the story. This theme is given clarity while being vividly illustrated by emphasizing on the significance of one's identity which is inescapably connected with culture and upbringing, gender, community and background.

Despite the hardships, *The Namesake* rejoices in the cultural hybridity that results from globalization and the interrelation of modern contemporary society. Lahiri redefines the stereotypical lens that an immigrant is assumed to perceive the world through. The conscious effort on the part of the writer in taking into consideration the existing issues of cultural diversity in the multi-ethnic United States in general and the context of American melting pot in particular is vivid in the novel. The dire struggle to absorb into a transnational identity becomes an urgent issue for immigrants in the very milieu.

The existential struggle of a child – Gogol is specified through daily incidents of his life where more often than not he is embarrassed amidst his American friends because of his Indian surname and other inevitably inculcated Indianness in and around him yet in due course he grows to appreciate and value the aspects of his own culture and the battle that his family fought in the process of settling in a foreign land. Additionally, Gogol the young child is left confused in coming to terms with his individual identity as the cultural amalgamation complicates his understanding of the same. While Lahiri characterizes Gogol as someone confused about his own identity, she as well embodies Gogol as an archetypal transnational agent who survives between two dissimilar worlds with the prospect of curating multiplicity of identities.

Given the nature of mobility of people across nations with variations in culture, Lahiri critiques the definite national and cultural identities, the writer concretizes the idea through the novel that individuals cannot confine and restrain themselves within the narrow concept of national boundaries and cultural barriers in this globalized world characterized by hybridity conditioned by trans-culturalism.

Imaginary homelands- Dichotomy and Plurality in Identity

Imaginary Homelands, an essay by Rushdie concretizes the quandary and perplexity of the writer enveloped in the sphere of diaspora as they battle within themselves to establish an individual identity of their own in an attempt to blur the line between their past personality rooted in their homelands and their present self-trying to accommodate to the foreign culture. There is a dire quest to find themselves and reconnect to their roots as there is an inevitable void formed due to a lack of belongingness. Yet the struggle intensifies, the reconnection fails to a great extent due to inadequate memory. Additionally, there is not just physical and geographical distance but mental as well as emotional distance from home, and roots of origin. They are explicitly separated with their homelands and the unfamiliar culture makes them feel exceptionally alienated. Rushdie goes on to expound in his essay that such past realities are comparatively realistic as they generate the foreign future of the present through unconscious bias and memories. "Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools". (Rushdie,) Rushdie enunciates the void thus generated as a sense of in-betweenness dissolves the idea of belonging to a particular state.

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie appropriately crystalizes the potent cause as to why diasporic Indian writers resort to myth within themselves to come to terms with immediate distance and cultural alienation (Biswas, 2020) "Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools". (Rushdie, 1991) Rushdie enunciates the void thus generated as a sense of in-betweenness dissolves the idea of belonging to a particular state. "Having been across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation. I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained." (Rushdie, 1991) Rushdie throws light onto the transformation and metamorphosis of an individual, with a tinge of optimism.

The hunt for a permanent and stable home of a set of refugees distant from their roots and origin are traced through "The imaginary homeland" only to find a tragic ending. However, the same treasures elaboration in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh intensely depicted the ferocious struggle of the dispossessed who desired to form a new way of living, a new society. Yet the aspirations are barely churned to reality as they fall prey to the disruptive border politics and state-regulated violence. And in the process, their quest for identity is lost in transition. (Saha, 2015)

Persepolis: Hybridity amidst revolution

Persepolis, a graphic memoir, traces Marjane Satrapi's journey in the backdrop of the Iranian revolution and war. Satrapi is a diasporic writer who retrospect's on the social and political strife, violence, and fanaticism that haunts her childhood memories. Similar to many of the Iranian diasporic memoirs, Persepolis unveils the theme of otherness, displacement, and hybridization of the identity of the Iranian individual amidst the ramifications of strife and conflict in Iran (Malek,2006). Marji, the narrator, engages the reader by recounting her first- hand experiences through the memoir. Satrapi while narrating the story often takes thestandpoint of Marji, a young ordinary Iranian girl to divulge the socio-political realities of hertime while placing the reader as an outsider to the wartime milieu of Iran. However, being an expatriate proves to be an impediment in her way of presuming the identity of an Iranian woman.

Marjane, born in Iran, lived there until thirteen years of age when she was forced to translocateto a French school in Austria, in order to escape the harsher implications of war and revolutionon the common people in general and women in particular. The consequences of displacementnot only in terms of geographical coordinates but also in the context of social, political, cultural,religious and economic diversities are etched throughout the graphic novel both literally and metaphorically.

Satrapi's portrayal of the conflict and isolation faced by Marjane in Austria from the perspective of an immigrant mirrors the society dealing with migration and displacement. Herunfixed identity is accentuated by the dichotomy of expressing her interests and the stereotypical expectations society enforces on her, whether it is being in Iran or Austria, or France. In the quest for identity, what is left as the residue is a sense of hollowness, as a resultof the tension between the former self, shaped by the cultural and social domain in the countryof origin, and the latter identity as an immigrant conditioned by the culture shock in the foreignlands.

Thrust into the contemporary Western society which still has a skewed view of the East, Marjane dangles in limbo between the two polar cultures and develops an existential crisis common to diasporic individuals. Marjane cannot align herself with either culture separately as she finds her home after returning quite different from the westernized aspects, she had familiarized herself with. The entwining and amalgamation of two distinct social and cultural selves churn out a third self, a hybrid entity of the two worlds, similar to the third space createdby Homi K. Bhabha. "For me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two originalmoments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge." (Rutherford, 1990: 211). The third space in Marjane's lifeis constructed as a result of her being forcefully indoctrinated into two detached cultures, resulting in a cultural translation. The authenticity of an individual and their cultural, social, and political identity is a by-product of the surrounding society's influence. Displacement forces the individual to be pulled in two contrasting realms defying the magnetic attraction of opposite poles.

Transnationalism endowed with hybridity comes with different linguistic, ethnic, social,cultural, and economic barriers. Satrapi metaphorized the challenges faced by an immigrant through the usage of visual imagery as Marjane is ousted from the Christian institute and viewed as an exotic object of war in the West (Satrapi, 2000). Marjane's metamorphosis into the third space is symbolic of the culmination of transnationalism in the modern world. The ever-growing capitalist mode of economy homogenizes the different concepts of individualityin diverse realms, encouraging a production and profit-based approach towards a successful life, divorced from the distinctive roots of origin and influence. While one might argue for theneed to deconstruct the barriers separating individuals, it also stands true that questioning of self-identity occurs from a certain sense of rootlessness, characteristic of dislocating individuals.

Swimming Lessons: the minority community crossing borders

Rohinton Mistry's *Swimming Lessons* explores the split mentality of a minority community delving into waters of migration for better prospects. Through the example of the Parsi community in India, which is yet to carve out a favourable sphere, Mistry portrays the inability of the double immigrants to feel a sense of belonging either in India or in a foreign state. The two narratives of the present state as an immigrant in Canada and the past memories in Bombay still lingering, run concurrently. The state of helplessness and isolation is evoked by the narrator as he seems to precariously balance his identity on the brink of two realities.

While the postcolonial hangover was still transmitting its effects, the South-East Asian countries had to keep pace with the rapidly advancing West. There was branching out of people as they clambered for an opportunity at a better life. The narrator in Mistry's short story fails to create an attachment to his new world in Canada as he suffers from an inability to distance himself from his past life. Every nitty-gritty of daily life in Toronto serves as an indicator of past memories from the swimming pool to the old man. As the narrator leaves through the pages of the past, Bombay Chaupatty, grandfather, there is a lack of identification in the present. He highlights and reiterates to himself the negative aspects of his homeland, for instance, the uncleanliness of the beach in Bombay contrasting to the clean Canadian swimming pool. This seems to be an attempt to justify to one's own self the reason to endure the rootlessness in the foreign land. The readers associate the surroundings of Canada with its relation to the narrator's life in the past. The divide gets blurred in an attempt to both associate with the present and dissociate from the past.

The narrator's life in Canada serves as an eye-opener to the South-East Asians looking forward to a steep arc in their career by settling abroad. While a modern outlook towards life might do away with differences of colour, race, and nationality, the deep-seated psychological insecurity of being treated as an inferior amidst the white supremacy in the West, establishes itself as a setback in the process of migration. The narrator's inner conflicts prevent him from assimilating into the multiculturalism of Canada. He concerns himself with the lack of memories in Canada while building a foundation for integrating into the new lifestyle.

Mistry's portrayal of the Parsis in India, feeling apprehensive and threatened by a possible swamping into the dominant Hindu culture, forgoing their traditionality, reflects the position of minority communities throughout. Their migration to foreign lands is on the basis of discovering other favourable opportunities. This sudden emigration leads to experiencing an alarming level of identity crisis for they have been unable to establish an identity for themselves either in their settled state or their current country of living.

Conclusion

The complexities associated with individual identity in modern life and diasporic contexts has been embodied in the literary genre through generations. Psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers have all pondered on the quirks of deep-rooted anxiety, alienation, in-betweenness, insecurity, and identity crisis in diasporic individuals. The modern man's hunger for exploring the world at large and dissecting prospects for advancement have rendered them rootless when confronted with the abyss of helplessness and identity crisis.

"Culture as identity" thus refers to the attempt to represent the person or group in terms of a reified and/or emblemized culture. It is a political exercise, manifest in those processes which we frequently describe as "ethnic," the components of which are referred to as "symbols." "(Cohen, 1993). The culture one belongs to defines the social pertinence, individuals after migration are mostly labelled as the cultural product of their roots rather than their isolated individual self.

Diasporic identities are moulded in diverse spaces, which are at times interrelated and occasionally discrete and parallelly competing. Each different location is involved to a collective sense of belongingness and to a sense of yearning for roots and home land and shared memory of displacing (Cohen, 1997). In a postmodern society and a contemporary world enveloped with capitalism and characterized by globalization, individual identity, the quest and establishment of it is a crucial factor. Diaspora as whole catalyzes the lack of clarity of one's own identity. Despite there not being a socially recognised identity the struggle for finding one defines the distinct existence. While not conforming to any strictly rooted identity along with the multiplicity and plurality of the truth surrounding their existence, the individual's battle with one's own self to carve out a unique forte for themselves in an unversed socio-cultural milieu, concretize their individuality.

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