

Diasporic Dreams and Realities in Indian Context : A Review

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Keywords:

Diaspora,
displacement,
Exile, hybridity and
hyphenated reality,
migration

Abstract: The present paper reviews the meaning of diaspora and presents a theoretical framework to understand the key concepts involved in a diaspora. Touching briefly upon the diasporic issues in global context, it chooses to analyse the Indian situation. The paper explores the conceptual studies put forward by some Indian authors and then proceeds to analyse the thematic issues raised by some renowned diasporic Indian writers through their works. The paper concludes by suggesting other related pertinent fields where diasporic studies can be carried out in near future. The studies selected for this review paper are qualitative and take up the theoretical aspects of diaspora. The scope of the paper is limited to Indian diaspora and select authors and theoreticians. There is a need for comparative analysis of diaspora within Indian context from Northern states like Punjab and southern states like Kerala where the mindset and the occupations are quite different. The study also reveals a dearth of quantitative data for variables like linguistic changes, cultural symbols and their preservation, the reaction of home communities towards diaspora and the future challenges in the wake of new state policies of Trudeau and Trump. Further studies can also explore the effect of diaspora on ecosystems and their sustenance.

INTRODUCTION

There have been mass movements to new lands since the days of Genesis. Every religious and cultural text speaks of lineages, creation of kingdoms, exploration and then settlements in new places and the conflicts in new lands. The conflict is with the forces of the wilderness in case of lands hitherto uninhabited by humans but the Crusonian islands are a mere fantasy in present times when this diaspora is not to the exotic lands like the colonising powers of Europe rather to the economic and advanced zones of the world which seem to guarantee a potential for great material growth. There has been exodus to the Global North owing to technological and worldly advancement and the polity of these countries is working hard to develop suitable strategies for curbing this trend. The diaspora is competing regularly with the mass expulsions forced by the armed conflicts in different parts of the world posing a serious concern of refugeeism and breeding the issues of identity crisis, assimilation and anti-assimilation by host cultures, violence and racist intolerance and the climate concerns due to an overdrawn population. Having penetrated into all the branches of humanities and social sciences, the scientific disciplines also feel forced to find solutions for combatting distress caused by a large scale diaspora in different parts of the globe.

DISCUSSION

The term diaspora as a theoretical construct deals with the specific problematics associated with transnational movements of people, capital, commodities and cultural iconographies. According to Stuart Hall, cultural and diasporic identities n orientation towards the place of origin, a specific history of migration, the internal solidarity among members of the diaspora group, and the lived realities in the countries of residence. People who consider themselves part of a diaspora often feel connected with each other via ancestry, history, religion and/ or culture. This belonging is usually understood as familial and intergenerational. The substance, relevance, and extent of this feeling of belonging – as well as the characteristics to which it refers – are all subject to constant societal change.

"Diaspora" is often understood as a transnational community of people who maintain a collective identity and connection to their ancestral homeland, despite being geographically dispersed (Safran, W.1991). This historical displacement of a population is due to various reasons such as economic, political, or social factors (Clifford, J. 1997). The scattered people retain a connection to their place of origin through cultural practices, language, and shared identity (Cohen, R. 2008).

Displacement and migration are central themes in the study of diasporas, often intertwined with the experiences of individuals and communities as they navigate new environments while maintaining connections to their place of origin. Displacement refers to the forced or involuntary movement of people from their homeland due to factors such as conflict, persecution, environmental disaster, or economic hardship. It often involves significant disruption of individuals' lives and can lead to the formation of diasporic communities. Edward Said cites instances of forced displacement resulting from the Holocaust or the creation of a land like Israel. For him, this occurs when people are compelled to leave their homes due to violence, war, or political oppression. Palestine has emerged as a conflict zone and propels refugeeism and diaspora simultaneously. In comparison, South Asian countries witnessed a diaspora during colonial subjugation which developed into a kind of dissatisfaction resulting in another diaspora for prosperity, advancement and a new identity in a multicultural milieu. Kothari, Rita highlights economic reasons for such displacements in her book *The Other Global City*.

Migration is voluntary or involuntary movement of people encompassing both the reasons for leaving one's homeland and the experiences of settling in a new country. Voluntary migration for better living conditions, education, or career opportunities leads to the formation of diasporic communities that maintain cultural ties to their country of origin (Cohen, R). Understanding the interplay between displacement and migration provides a comprehensive view of how diasporic communities form and evolve, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities faced by individuals as they navigate their new and old worlds. Indian diasporic writers often explore themes of alienation in their works, reflecting the

complexities of identity, cultural dislocation, and the search for belonging in a new environment.

Christine Ivanovic in her article, "'We are Translated Men': Translational Literature and Migration," published in *Austrian Studies* (2018) explores how literature addresses the experiences of migration through the lens of translation. Ivanovic argues that translational literature-texts that navigate between languages and cultures-illuminate the migrant experience by emphasizing the fluidity and adaptability required in such contexts. She highlights how these works challenge static notions of identity and belonging, offering a dynamic perspective on the migrant's journey. Ivanovic's analysis reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and displacement, underscoring the transformative power of translation in understanding and representing migratory experiences.

Irfan Habib offers a comprehensive historical analysis of the Indian diaspora, focusing on the migration patterns, cultural adaptations, and socio-political impacts of Indian communities abroad. Habib explores the historical roots of diaspora movements and examines how these communities have navigated identity and integration in various host countries. He highlights the interplay between migration, economic opportunities, and cultural preservation. Habib's work sheds light on the complex dynamics of diasporic identity and the significant contributions of Indian migrants to global societies.

Rita Kothari has explored linguistic and cultural issues within the diaspora communities. She examines the role of language in the Indian diaspora and how translation and linguistic practices shape cultural identity and politics (*Translating India*) whereas her *The Other Global City: Migrant Life in Mumbai* provides a nuanced exploration of migration and urban life in Mumbai, offering insights into the experiences of migrants in one of India's most vibrant cities. Kothari employs a combination of ethnographic research and theoretical analysis to illuminate how migration shapes both individual lives and the city's social fabric. The book delves into issues of identity, economic disparity, and cultural adaptation, revealing the complexities of life for migrants who contribute significantly to Mumbai's global status. Through vivid case studies and personal narratives, Kothari captures the resilience and challenges faced by these individuals.

Through "Diasporic Identities and Cultural Politics: The Indian Experience," Santosh Das examines how the Indian diaspora navigates complex cultural and political landscapes. Das argues that diasporic identities are fluid and continuously shaped by both the host and home countries. The article highlights the negotiation of cultural politics within the diaspora, emphasizing how these identities are constructed through transnational interactions and cultural exchanges. Das provides a detailed analysis of how Indian migrants maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to new social environments. This work contributes to understanding the dynamic and multifaceted nature of diasporic identity formation (Das 29-44).

Ravikumar Jain's article, "The Politics of Belonging: Indian Diaspora and Cultural Identity," delves into the intricate dynamics of cultural identity within the Indian diaspora. Jain explores how diasporic individuals negotiate their sense of belonging through cultural and political lenses, emphasizing the role of heritage and assimilation. The article highlights the tension between maintaining cultural traditions and adapting to new societal norms. Jain's analysis reveals how these dual pressures shape the diasporic experience, offering valuable insights into the politics of identity in a transnational context (Jain 245-260).

Kumar, Rajesh investigates how Indian diaspora communities negotiate their identities within the framework of transnationalism. Kumar argues that diasporic individuals inhabit multiple cultural spaces, constantly balancing their heritage with their new environments. The study emphasizes the fluidity of identity in the context of global migration and the impact of transnational connections on self-perception. Kumar's analysis reveals the complexities of navigating cultural and social spaces in a globalized world, providing a nuanced understanding of identity negotiation (Kumar, 500-515).

Pankaj Mishra's article explores the intersection of the Indian diaspora and the global economy, focusing on both the challenges and opportunities presented by economic globalization. Mishra highlights how economic shifts impact diasporic communities, influencing their professional and social dynamics. The article discusses how the diaspora capitalizes on global networks to overcome economic barriers and enhance their opportunities. Mishra's work sheds light on the economic roles and contributions of the Indian diaspora, offering insights into their evolving position in the global economic landscape (Mishra 85-102).

Meena Nair's article examines the concept of cultural hybridity within the Indian diaspora, focusing on how diasporic individuals blend and reinterpret cultural practices across borders. Nair argues that cultural hybridity is a key feature of the diasporic experience, reflecting the negotiation between traditional heritage and contemporary influences. The article explores how this hybridity affects identity formation and community dynamics. Nair's analysis provides a comprehensive look at the ways diasporic individuals create new cultural spaces and identities through cross-cultural interactions (Nair 160-175).

From the above theoretical perspectives, one can conclude that in India the dominant issues are economic upliftment and cross-cultural interactions. The review also includes textual analysis of a few Indian authors acclaimed for their diasporic experience. Indian diasporic writers often explore themes of alienation in their works, reflecting the complexities of identity, cultural dislocation, and the search for belonging in a new environment. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* delves into the alienation experienced by the protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, who struggles with his dual identity as a Bengali-American. The novel explores the generational and cultural gaps between Gogol and his immigrant parents, highlighting the tension between his desire to assimilate into American society and his connection to his

Indian heritage. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni addresses the theme of alienation through the experiences of Tilo, an Indian spice merchant living in San Francisco. Tilo's sense of displacement is rooted in her struggle to reconcile her traditional Indian role with the modern, multicultural environment of America. Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* explores the theme of alienation through the life of Michael, a violinist who grapples with his past and his identity. The novel reflects on the emotional and cultural isolation experienced by Michael, highlighting the sense of disconnection he feels despite his successful career and relationships. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* explores alienation through its complex narrative that intertwines magical realism with the experiences of immigrants. The novel addresses the identity crisis and sense of displacement faced by its protagonists, who struggle to reconcile their cultural and personal identities in a foreign land. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai examines the theme of alienation through the experiences of characters dealing with postcolonial dislocation and the impact of globalization. The novel portrays the emotional and social fragmentation experienced by both the elderly judge and the young cook as they navigate their identities amidst changing societal landscapes.

Most of these authors provide rich, nuanced portrayals of alienation, reflecting the challenges faced by diasporic individuals as they navigate their complex identities in new cultural contexts. A notable comparison which also resulted in fierce criticism of the author can be made with Meena Alexander who appears to find contentment and success in her diasporic land. Her work reflects a sense of agency and adaptation to her diasporic life. : In *The Shock of Arrival*, Alexander explores her experiences as an immigrant in the United States, expressing a profound sense of belonging and creative flourishing despite the challenges of displacement. Her poetry and essays often convey a sense of reconciliation and integration into her new environment, highlighting the positive aspects of her diasporic experience. Alexander's work often celebrates the complexity of her identity and the vibrant opportunities available in her diasporic context, portraying a nuanced and affirmative view of her new home. Meena Alexander examines the multifaceted experiences of immigrants, including the disorienting effects of displacement and the process of adjusting to a new environment. Her reflections reveal both the difficulties of navigating a new cultural landscape and moments of creative inspiration that arise from this experience. While the work does touch upon the positive aspects of her diasporic journey, it is more focused on the complexities and contradictions of this experience.

As we find mixed response in these Indian narratives where the major focus is on displacement and cultural assimilation, we try to explore the concept of hyphenated reality quite significant in this context. The hyphen itself is a tool for compounding but the focus shifts on sharing same status on both sides of it or feeling a polarity to one end. "Hyphenated reality" refers to the dual existence faced by the marginalized or hybridized communities. It highlights the tension and harmony between two cultural, national, or social identities, represented metaphorically by a hyphen and explores the complexities of living

between multiple worlds. The hyphen symbolizes the connection between two often conflicting cultural worlds, creating a complex identity that is neither fully one nor the other.

Hyphenated identities often challenge traditional notions of nationality or ethnicity. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, discusses how individuals inhabiting these "in-between spaces" experience a fractured self, negotiating between cultures. Anzaldúa argues that this identity struggle leads to a "mestiza consciousness," a hybrid awareness that embraces ambiguity, contradictions, and multiplicity (Anzaldúa, 1987). Similarly, Stuart Hall, in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," explains that identity is not fixed but rather fluid, constantly shaped by history, culture, and personal experience. Hall suggests that hyphenated identities reflect the diasporic experience, where individuals are "twice removed" from their roots first by migration, and second by assimilation into the dominant culture (Hall, 1990). This dual existence leads to an ongoing negotiation of cultural belonging and personal identity.

For many, the hyphenated reality brings both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it allows individuals to draw from multiple cultural frameworks, enriching their worldview and experiences. On the other hand, it can create a sense of alienation or "otherness," where one may feel that they belong to neither culture fully. This internal conflict often manifests in the concept of "code-switching," where individuals adjust their behavior, language, and mannerisms depending on the cultural context they find themselves in (Gumperz, 1982).

The hyphenated reality also extends beyond personal identity to broader sociopolitical contexts. In the United States, for instance, hyphenated identities have long been part of the conversation about citizenship and belonging. The hyphen, in this sense, represents both inclusion and exclusion. While it acknowledges the presence of minority communities, it also underscores their perceived "otherness" within the nation. Scholar Khyati Joshi critiques the limitations of the hyphen, suggesting that it marks people as "forever foreigners," no matter how assimilated they are into the mainstream (Joshi, 2006).

Despite these tensions, many individuals find empowerment in their hyphenated reality. Writers like Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have explored the richness of navigating multiple identities in their works. These authors suggest that the hyphen is not merely a symbol of division, but also one of unity and resilience, bridging cultures, languages, and experiences.

The hyphenated reality reflects the complexity of living in a multicultural world. It highlights the ways in which identity is both fluid and contested, shaped by personal experience and societal expectations. Though the hyphen may represent a division, it also signifies connection—a recognition that identity is not singular but multifaceted.

Assuming that a vast majority now has this hyphenated experience, one imagines the upcoming scenario in a global context. Indian diaspora is experiencing growing transnational networks, economic influence, and cultural hybridity. As globalization deepens, the Indian diaspora will increasingly occupy leadership roles in global business, technology, and academia, contributing significantly to both host and home countries (Sahoo & Pattanaik, 2021). This needs to be revisualised in contemporary times in context of Canada's policy to reduce numbers and support Sikhs, and the presence of Hindus in America affecting Trump Govt. With second- and third-generation immigrants, identity will continue to evolve, blending cultural heritage with new local affiliations. This community will likely strengthen its influence in international policy-making and diplomacy, particularly through soft power initiatives like Bollywood and yoga (Kurien, 2019). India's global identity in the wake of Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel-Hamas struggle also will greatly affect diaspora. However, issues like xenophobia and assimilation challenges may persist, necessitating more robust diasporic solidarity and advocacy. As India rises economically, the diaspora may play a crucial role in shaping bilateral relations and investment flows between India and their host countries (Khadria, 2009). This complex interplay of economics, culture, and politics will redefine the diaspora's global standing.

In an apocalyptic scenario, diasporic communities are especially vulnerable due to their often precarious legal, social, and economic status in host countries. A fictional example of such a warning can be found in **N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy**, where themes of environmental apocalypse, oppression, and displacement are central. In this series, marginalized groups, often forced into nomadic or displaced lifestyles, face extinction as natural disasters threaten the survival of all humanity. Real-world apocalyptic warnings for the diaspora can be linked to issues like climate change. According to *The Global Compact for Migration* report by the UN, diasporic populations could experience increased xenophobia, restricted mobility, and loss of cultural identity during global crises, exacerbating their vulnerability. In addition, the increasing nationalist and isolationist policies in various countries act as a political apocalypse for the diaspora, as seen in rising anti-immigrant sentiments and the rollback of immigrant rights.

To conclude, diaspora as a phenomenon must be studied using an interdisciplinary approach where scholars from different countries research the needs of the community while working for the ways to rehabilitate them in the countries of origin wherever possible. The diasporic reversal also needs to be assessed where recommendations must be made to the host countries to initiate or assist such processes though with the consent of the migrants. Perhaps, literary geni will bring forth more resolutions for the world.

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