



Review Of ReseaRch

ISSN: 2249-894X

Impact Factor : 5.7631(UIF)

UGC Approved JoUrnAI no. 48514



"ISSUES OF INDIAN DIASPORA IN SUJATA BATT'S POETRY"

Prasad Shendre

P.G. Student M.P.A.S.C. College, Pnavel Dist. Raigad.

INTRODUCTION :

The Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India. It also refers to their descendants. The Diaspora is currently estimated to number over twenty million, composed of "NRIs" (Indian citizens not residing in India) and "PIOs" (Persons of Indian Origin who have acquired the citizenship of some other country). The Diaspora covers practically every part of the world. It numbers more than a million each in eleven countries, while as many as twenty-two countries have concentrations of at least a hundred thousand ethnic Indians.

Writers of the Indian Diaspora have been at the centre stage in the last decade chiefly because of the theoretical formulation being generated by their works. Language and cultures are transformed when they come in contact with the others. These writers are often pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land. However, looking at the diasporic literature in a broader perspective it is seen that such literature helps in understanding various cultures, breaking the barriers between different countries, glocalizing the global and even spreading universal peace.

Migration takes place due to various reasons and in the Indian context the migratory movements were governed by historical, political, economic reasons including higher education, better prospects and marriage. However, the Indian community has shown greater sense of adjustments, adaptability, mobility and accessibility. The sense of homelessness which every immigrant suffers is genuine and intense; but in recent times it has been seen that this concept has been minimized and made less intense through their social networking and sense of solidarity. The chief characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt etc. The diasporic writers turn to their homeland for various reasons. For eg. Naipaul who is in a perpetual quest for his roots turns to India for the same. Rushdie visits India to mythologise its history. Mistry visits and re-visits India for a kind of re-vitalization and to re-energize his aching soul. Bharati Mukherjee's childhood memories harken her time and again. All the same it is necessary to realise the importance of cultural encounter, the bicultural pulls which finally helps in the emergence of the new culture. The diasporic writings also known as the 'theory of migrancy' helps generate aesthetic evaluation, negotiate with cultural constructs and aid the emergence of a new hybridity.

Generally, diasporic literature deals with alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest of identity. It also addresses issues related to amalgamation or disintegration of cultures. It reflects the immigrant experience that comes out of the immigrant settlement.

Diasporic or expatriate writing occupies a place of great significance between countries and cultures. Theories are generated and positions defined in order to construct new identities which further negotiate boundaries and confines that relate to different temporary and spatial metaphors. Diasporic writers live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. Interestingly, the terms 'diaspora', 'exile', 'alienation', 'expatriation', are synonymous and possess an ambiguous status of being both a refugee and an ambassador. The two roles being different, the diasporic writers attempt at doing justice to both. As a refugee, he seeks security and protection and as an ambassador projects his own culture and helps enhance its comprehensibility.

Sujata Bhatt is one of the most promising Indian women poets writing in English. The international recognition of her work confirms her valuable contribution to contemporary Indian English poetry. She was born in Ahmedabad, her parents moved to the USA when she was twelve and is now settled in Germany. Her husband is a German writer and radio producer and since 1988, she has been living in Bremen (Northern Germany), working as a freelance writer translating Gujarati poetry and prose into English. Bhatt has been recognized as a distinctive voice in contemporary poetry. Her poem "A Different History" dealing with the issues of globalization and westernization has featured in poetry anthology used for IGCSE English Examination. Her extensive movement across cultures makes her a fit subject for analysis within the contemporary discussions of globalization and diasporic identity. As of now, Bhatt has produced six poetic volumes. These include *Brunizem* (1988), *The Monkey Shadows* (1991), *The Stinking Rose* (1995) *Point No Point* (1997), *Augatora* (2000) and *A Colour for Solitude* (2002). Her first collection *Brunizem* won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) and the Alice Hunt Barlett Award. Subsequent collections have been awarded a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and in 1991, she received a Cholmondeley Award.

A large number of her poems display the conflict of the self between different cultures besides articulation of subjective thoughts, experiences and feelings. Like other contemporary women poets her incessant search for identity forms an important theme of her poems. Loss of identity is a recurrent theme in her poems. Even though English is the language she speaks and chooses to write in, she describes Gujarati culture and the Indian childhood which clings to her as the deepest layer of her identity with a lot of intimacy. The repercussions of this divided mindset, divided heritage and fragmented personality are explored and discussed in her work, most explicitly in her landmark poem "Search for My Tongue" which alternates between the two languages – Gujarati and English. The complex status of English – its beauty and colonial implications are explored in the moving ironies of "A Different History"

Here we get to see the different issues in Indian diaspora reflected in Sujata Bhatt's poetry such as "Search for my tongue", "A Different History" and "The one who goes away" etc. In her poetry, we find a sense of restlessness, loss resulting from displacement and uprooting from one's own home, country, culture, language and environment.

She experiences the pangs of displacement but does not exhibit it the way other diasporic poets do. "Search for my Tongue" is Sujata Bhatt's most famous poem. The poet explores the internal conflict she feels about losing her Indian cultural identity, specifically her fear of forgetting her mother tongue in her adopted country, England. This poem is about Sujata Bhatt being afraid that she was losing her identity as a Gujarati-speaking Indian. It comes from a time when she was in America studying English, and feared she was being 'Americanised', and forgetting her first language (her 'mother tongue'). The content of the poem consists of the poet writes about losing her tongue, by which she means forgetting how to speak her mother tongue because she had always to speak English ('the foreign tongue'). Then, however, as she dreams, her mother tongue re-asserts itself as her first language.

She writes first in Gujarati (e.g.), then she gives us the pronunciation of the Gujarati (e.g. 'munayhutoo'), then she translates it for us (meaning: 'It grows back').

The feelings of the poet are at first distress that she is losing her mother tongue. At first she talks about the two languages as though they were at war, and is fearful the foreign tongue seemed to be winning. She seems to think that the foreign tongue is winning because she is not using it (she

talks about how it will 'rot and die') or because she is consciously not using it ('I thought I had spit it out'). However, she finishes confidently, reasserting her knowledge of her Indian identity. You can sense her happiness when she writes:

'overnight while I dream ... every time I think I've forgotten ... it blossoms out of my mouth'.

The allusion to her 'dreams' has TWO meanings – one, that she speaks Gujarati literally in her dreams, but also, it is her 'dream' (her longing) to speak it always. The poem starts in English – because the story starts with her worrying that English is taking over in her life. But then the entire middle section is Gujarati, a visual assertion that, for her Gujarati is growing back/ re-asserting itself at the centre of her life, and that she is proud of it.

When she writes it phonetically, and then translates it, it is not because English is more important, but simply because she is doing the reader a favour. The result is that the reader reads the story of how Gujarati triumphed over English THREE times!

In her use of language, the poet writes in free verse, so that her poem feels just like a lecture, giving her thoughts as they come out of her head.

She writes in the first person – 'I' – to show that this is a personal battle, but also so other readers in the same situation will be able to read it as though it is their personal poem too. She uses the word 'tongue' in three ways, firstly as the physical tongue in her mouth, secondly as her 'mother tongue' (her language), but also as a symbol of her personal identity and Indian culture. The poem consists of an extended metaphor of her language as a plant. At first she is worried that it is going to 'rot and die' (that she is forgetting it), but then in lines 30-35: it 'grows', 'shoots', 'buds', 'blossoms', representing the poet growing in confidence, remembering Gujarati words, forming them on her lips, and finally speaking them full out fluently in Gujarati.

One a powerful image is of her tongue rotting in her mouth and her 'spitting it out', reflecting the horror and disgust she felt at losing her tongue and Indian identity.

The repetition: 'the bud opens ... the bud opens' symbolises the unstoppableness of the process, but also her excitement that it is happening and that she is re-finding her Gujarati identity. The poem reminds me of how, as I have grown older, I too have lost some of the good habits and practices of childhood – and perhaps I ought to return to them.

Also in the poem "The different history" Sujata Bhatt lights on colourful Indian culture, loss of language, quest of identity. Here she furnishes many examples while peeping into the different history of Indian culture. I think that one of the strongest themes to emerge in Bhatt's poem is the struggle to understand one's identity in a Postcolonial setting. Bhatt writes a two-stanza poem that clearly articulates the condition between what life was like without Colonial rule and how life is altered with it. The notion of the "Gods roam freely" is a symbolic representation of how indigenous identity exists outside of the construction of Colonial rule.

'Great Pan is not dead; he simply emigrated to India' tells that the cultures and religions are transmitted across the globe. 'Great pan' symbolizes the pantheism existing in Indian religion where everything has a god in charge of it, even human. Bhatt talks about the culture and lifestyle moving with people by implying that God Pan is not seized to exist but simply moved to India. This also indicates the similarity between the religions of the Eastern and the Western due to the constant transmitting of cultures and lifestyles. 'The god roams freely, disguised as snakes and monkeys' portrays the acceptance of new religion and cultures in India. 'God' represents the new cultures and lifestyles. Snakes and monkeys were worshipped during the past time, as Indians believed that there were gods laying on them. This indicates that Indians welcomed and worshipped the new culture and lifestyles. This also exhibits the innocence of Indians who allowed foreign religion to enter and 'roam freely' in India.

There is a repetition of 'sin' when the author lists the way people should treat the books. The word 'sin' reinforces the negative commentary and intensifies the critical tone of the poem. Bhatt uses book as an example to show people that the cultures must be appreciated and treated carefully by mentioning the

tradition and custom of India in how to treat the book. Pantheism is, again, underscored in 'you must not learn how to turn the pages gently without disturbing Sarasvati'. Sarasvati is a goddess of knowledge and art, who Indians believed to be laying on the book. Bhatt is telling the people that people should treat books just as the way people treat the goddess of knowledge, highlighting the importance of god and the way people should treat them. It also depicts the emancipation of freedom in valuing one's culture but not liberating oneself with selfishness.

There is a sudden change in the tone of voice in the second enjambment; it is more hostile and aggressive. This change is supported by the rhetorical questions: 'which language has not been the oppressor's tongue? Which language truly meant to murder someone?' This creates a sense of uncertainty and infuriation, which the author felt about the colonization. Bhatt describes her depressions as she realizes that there are neither the oppressors nor the oppressed. No one means to be any of those – no one can be blamed. In addition, the repetition of 'which language' enhances the sense of criticalness and uncertainty in her expression. The repetition and rhetorical questions lead the readers to feel the shamefaced of human history.

Further sense of torment is created in 'and how does it happen that after the torture, after the soul has been cropped with a long scythe swooping out of the conqueror's face'. 'Soul' symbolizes the self-esteem of Indians for being able to speak Indian and follow the Indian culture. Scythe is a tool used to harvest crops by hand, which obviously takes much longer time than by machine. 'Scythe' in this phrase represents the colonization and injustice. This shows that the colonization has cut out the 'soul' of Indian by forbidding the cultures and language. This also reveals that Indians suffered long time during the colonization.

Final tone of the poem is made in the last two lines: 'the unborn grandchildren grow to love that strange language'. Sense of sadness and uncertainty are enhanced as it described Bhatt's realization of cultural consequences such as the colonization does not ruin one's history but begins a new era where a new generation of 'unborn grandchildren' grow 'to love that strange language' – the inevitability of cultural change.

Sujata Bhatt explores the theme of cultural consequence and the loss of language and cultures throughout the poem by describing her feeling about her lost mother tongue and culture. This poem leads the readers to think back about their own history, which may either be painful or happy.

Sujata Bhatt's "The One Who Goes Away" centres on majorly seen themes homelessness, rootlessness, nostalgia, exile etc in the same. Most of people who travel at foreign countries to fulfil the thirst of knowledge, to get job, forgets their land as well as tongue and settle their permanently. However, Sujata Bhatt's views are different than others as she says she is unable to forget to her native culture and language. She exemplifies it by giving examples of mother's way of wearing sari, Indian rituals, culture etc which shows homelessness. Yet, the poet assures the readers that she carries over all her past golden memories with her wherever she goes. Nevertheless she is too afraid of losing her not only tongue but also culture as she says in "Search of my tongue".

In her poetry, we find a sense of restlessness, loss resulting from displacement and uprooting from one's own home, country, culture, language and environment. She experiences the pangs of displacement but does not exhibit it the way other diasporic poets do. She carries with her the seeds of home wherever she goes. Despite her extensive travels, a sense of continuity of relationship with home remains uninterrupted and unbroken. It pervades through her poetry and she expresses her sense of home flamboyantly in the following lines in her poem "The One Who Goes Away":

I am the one
who always goes
away with my home
which can only stay inside

in my blood my home which does not fit
with any geography.

For Bhatt, home is not a mere geographical entity; it is a part and parcel of her identity, her inner psyche. Even when she is away from home, she is in home all the time. She does not let it part from her yet she feels the pangs and ruminates. Home remains central to her consciousness in all circumstances. It is true that her concerns are global, but she returns to the local or native again and again relating herself to them intimately.

Her poem "Search for My Tongue" was written after listening to a tape recording sent by her mother from India to her in Maryland, USA. She conveys her anguish and fears about losing her native language and identity. She is concerned that her own unique personality will fade and cease to exist in the US. She speaks in graphic terms how the metaphor of the tongue would rot in the mouth until it had to be spat out.

I ask you, what would you do
if you had two tongues in your mouth,
and lost the first one, the mother tongue,
and could not really know the other,
the foreign tongue.

The poet says that one cannot use both the languages together and if one has to use a foreign language all the time, one's mother tongue would rot and die in one's mouth. She says that she felt like spitting out her mother tongue completely. But at night, her mother tongue returns in her dreams. It blossoms and blooms like a 111 flower on her tongue and ripens like a fruit in her mouth. Thus, the pull of the mother tongue is so strong that it reasserts itself despite all odds.

The poem comes from a time when she was studying in America. The allusion to her dreams has two meanings – one that she speaks in Gujarati in her dreams and also that it is her dream and longing to speak in her mother tongue. The poem presents a fine example of the expression of diasporic sense of a loss of language and cultural identity. However, Bhatt reconciles English and Gujarati finally asserting that one can never forget one's mother tongue as it would blossom out of one's mouth pushing other languages aside.

Now-a-days or if we peep into the history, we shall come to know that Indian people migrate to foreign countries for the different purposes, may be to have higher education, to improve the standard of life or to shine one's luck. However, we get to see at the beginning they seem to be happy. When they miss their relatives or friends they attempt to contact by using technology. But this happiness is a momentary which ultimately takes them towards loneliness. Also very soon they have to face many problems such as quest for identity, rootlessness, exile, nostalgia etc. At one hand, we consider that the world is being global, however, the host country does not think likewise. They think about themselves only hence our Indian people have to encounter harassment over there, recently an Indian medical student has been killed by a foreigner.

Thus, in Bhatt's poetry, we find a sense of restlessness, loss resulting from displacement and uprooting from one's own home, country, culture, language and environment. She experiences the pangs of displacement but does not exhibit it the way other diasporic poets do. Bhatt's poetry like that of many other Indian women poets writing in English reads like an important social document in which one finds struggle, search for identity, dignity and enlightenment and a yearning for a world.