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CONCEPT OF IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN INDIAN DIASPORA WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Indian diaspora fiction in English must be regarded as a sub-genre of Indian English diaspora literature written by the Indian Diaspora writers. Diaspora emphasise catastrophic origin of people and uncomfortable outcomes. Diasporic writers attempt to 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. Migration takes place due to various reasons and in the Indian context the migratory movements were governed by social, economical problems, higher education, better prospects and marriage. This paper looks into the concept of identity and cultural difference in selected novels of Anitha Desai and Kiran Desai.

Key Words: Diaspora, identity, cultural difference.

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INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai, a famous woman novelist whose novels deal with feminist problems, painful sufferings of women. In all her novels, Desai has proved herself as novelist who gives importance for the concept of identity and cultural difference through her female protagonist, uncovering the layers of women psyche. She has defined the term Diaspora in her novels very well.

Anita Desai's novel Bye-Bye Black Bird deals with an authentic study of human relationship and cultural encounters. Desai highlights the physical and psychological issues of Indian immigrants and explores the adjustment difficulties that they face in England. Desai reads the minds and understands the fact that they are suffering from alienation. It is said that the novel is very close to her personal experience as an immigrant. Dev, Adit and Sarah are three important characters of the novel, who face the problem of defining their identity and cultural difference.

Dev the chief character of the novel who comes to London to pursue his studies, he shows his strong dislike towards men and manners of England. He feels alienated in London. He stays with Adit Sen and his English wife, Sarah. He finds it difficult to adjust with silences and emptiness and never wants to live in a country where he is insulated and unwanted. However Dev takes his final decision not to return to India and adjust to the new environment. His friend Adit Sen came from India lives in England with his English wife Sarah. After coming to England Adit worked as a teacher and finally accepted a little job at Blus skies. He is happy with his job but he always feels a sense of cultural affinity as an anonymous in England. He frankly

admits to be “a stranger, a non-belonger” in England. Finally he takes a boat and returned back to India with his wife.

As for Sarah, she feels alienated because she lives with people who are completely different from her culture. She can be regarded as a solitary as a solitary traveller. If she marries in the same culture it is easier for her to adjust to her new home and people. But interracial and intercultural marriage causes adjustment problem which are not easy to overcome. In Sarah’s case the issue becomes more difficult for she has married a person whose race was totally different from her culture.

Kiran Desai is the youngest female author to win the Man Booker Prize. Her novel *Inheritance of Loss* is based on her experience of leaving India. She herself feels she is a migrated writer who is able to portray the socio cultural picture of Indian migrants and their struggle to find a homeland with a cultural agony. The *Inheritance of Loss* tells the story of marginalisation of migrants they feel unimportant and insignificant in the migrated land. They challenge the so called globalisation in the host country. In this novel the judge Jemubhai Patel and Biju experience a bitter encounter with marginalisation. The judge is an old man who spends most of his years in the west learning their ways and disassociating him from being an Indian yet in England he fails to be an Englishman and in India he fails to be an Indian. The humiliation and shame what he has faced in a foreign land forces him to feel inferior in front of others, Biju has entered into United States on a tourist visa and simply overstayed there and work illegally but that city is full of possibility became a source of cultural agony and pain for him. Both the judge and the Biju have been migrated to the west for a better life and find only a vacuum.

On the other hand we can see suffering of Sai as she shifted from convent school in Darjeeling to Himalayan region and how she suffer emotionally when she loves Gyan. In the whole novel one can see that unfulfillment of Sai soul, her unhappiness. Most of the characters in the novel “*The Inheritance of Loss*” struggle with their cultural identity.

Conclusion

In Diaspora writing we can see the discontent like search for identity, quest for home through self-discovery or self-realisation between the culture of homeland and host nation.

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