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DIASPORA IN PUNJABI LITERATURE: VARIOUS ASPECTS

HIMANI SHARMA

Assistant Professor, Department of English
PMN College, Rajpura

Email Id: himanisharma45@gmail.com



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ABSTRACT

Diaspora is a psychological journey, a dilemma between native country and the new settlement nations. The migrant who journeys from place to place, leaves his native homeland in search of new opportunities, becomes a stranger in other country. He feels himself alienated. Punjabi migrants too become the victims of such mental suffering, racism, colonialism and hybridity. Punjabis living in Canada, Britain, England and other corners in the world feel disgraced when foreigners consider them merely slaves and workers. These mental sufferings are expressed in depth by diaspora writers of Punjab. So the proposed paper is an attempt to analyses such diasporic sensibilities.

Keywords: racism, migration, colonialism, nostalgia, homelessness, alienation.

The term 'diaspora' originally took its birth from the Greek term 'diasperien' wherein 'dia' means across and 'sperien' means to sow or scatter seeds. In simple words, it is dispersion. It can be quoted as-

"The word Diaspora was first used by historians and social scientists to refer to the dispersal of the jews from Palestine, following their defet by the Romans in the year Ad 70...Diaspora is therefore a term applied to a minority, ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains not only sentimental but also material links with its land of origin" (Ojha, 103)

In English, the Bible meaning of the word Diaspora refers to the diaspora of Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. But this word is now employed at the global level. It is used to describe large migration of refugees, language or culture. Every Country has its own diaspora and concerned diasporic sensitive issues. For instance, the Jewish diaspora comprises all the Jews living in countries outside of Israel; the Chinese diaspora, of all the Chinese living outside of China and Indian or Punjabi diaspora is about all the Punjabis living on foreign lands.

Population in India is increasing. So facilities are less in number. Poverty and unemployment are common issues here. So youth of India is migrating in foreign countries, leaving their own inheritance, their motherland. Migration was not much difficult in the beginning of 20th century since rules and regulation of migration were not so hard. Many Indians were migrating in search of better future. People with numerous professions shifted so did the literarians who started their artistic works in their native land and continued with their art in countries like Britain, America and hence were called diaspora writers. With the passage of time, many problems came in front of Punjabis which challenged their identity and they felt tortured with mental pain. This mental pain was expressed through the writings of Punjabi diaspora writers. Punjabi immigrants living in

Canada, America and Britain expressed all these depressed emotions of their Punjabi brothers in their writings. With the passage of time, not only illiterate Indians were shifting whose real motive was to gain employment but variety of people added in this category. Educated students, teachers, lawyers, clerks, doctors, barbarians and populace was involved among these new immigrants. Since these people were conscious, socially and mentally aware so faced various problems. All of them did not migrate for employment and for livelihood. Many of them migrated in order to raise their standard of living and to get better facilities. Their mental and spiritual peace was disturbed as they had to face alienation, loss of identity, loss of inheritance, loss of culture, racism and colonialism. Finding one's identity in an exiled place was difficult; the dilemma that emigrants faced in adopting the new culture made them insecure and vulnerable.

Since the proposed paper is about diaspora in Punjabi literature. So number of instances can be found in the different genres like novels, short stories and verses. I hereby take some stories to reflect the same. In story named 'Bedakhala', protagonist is a victim of racism who got married but always felt inferior before his wife. He is hated by his own children for complexion difference.

"David did not want his friends might know that his father was Indian" (Dr. S.P. Singh, 19)

His wife Marian's father advised his daughter," Keep this black Dog in chains" (20)

Same kind of racism has been shown through stories like Darshan Dheer's 'Rishte', Ajit Atwal's 'Kala Lahoo' and so on.

"Racial oppression is a form of domination physical, institutional, cultural" (Jordan, 543)

This kind of racism is not limited to Canada, America or England rather it is becoming a universal problem. Therefore Punjabi immigrant has been facing it everywhere.

Along with racism, Punjabi immigrants are the victims of colonialism too. Immigrants always live in the danger of losing their existence. Human can never forget his home, his motherland but when the circumstances and situations are totally opposite and there is lack of sympathy, he yearns for his country much. These longings give birth to mental pressure. He yearns for his motherland's soil, rising-setting sun, food, atmosphere, culture, relatives and friends. At this time, he just wants to go back. Story named 'Laal Lkeer' by Raghbir Dhand presents the same longings when one of its characters misses dressing style, scoop shoes, turban, black jacket of his mother land. The same themes are elaborated in story named 'Kho' by Baldev Singh and 'Daldal' by Swaran Chandra. So immigrants feel themselves strangers in such countries. They are the victims of racism and colonialism and just want to go back. Glenn Jordan writes,

"Colonialism and Racism as physical and cultural domination force their victims to literally lose their memory. The memory which is assigned him certainly not that of his people. The history which is thought here is not his own."(299)

Post- colonial writers as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhaba explored these issues through their renowned works - Orientalism and concept of hybridity. Facing the problem of colonialism, Punjabi immigrants are the victims of hybridity. Problem is not with immigrants but with the foreigners. On one side, they want natives to accept and follow the rules and regulations of their country, but on the other side, they want a gap between them and immigrants. Hence they become the victims of hybridity. Foreigners not only consider their culture superior but developed and progressive too. They consider Indian culture far inferior, backward. They never like their eating habits, dressing sense, customs, rituals, weddings and ceremonies. They mock their culture. Punjabi immigrants who always feel proud of their culture, rituals really get mentally tortured and yearns for moving back But the second generation of Punjabi immigrants adopted their culture by copying their dressing style, eating habits, by visiting clubs and pubs. Diaspora writers present these themes in which they show the fear of losing their identity and culture.

Punjabi Female diaspora writers present Indian woman's tragic plight when they find rootlessness and domination in their lives. But some writers take this immigration on the behalf of Punjabi woman in a positive sense as these women feel liberated in developed countries.

“These women consider migrations to other countries especially western countries a way to lead a liberal and comfortable life away from the shackles of traditional Indian ethos that keeps these women on the margins” (Kaur, Tejinder, 117)

To conclude, alienation, racism and colonialism are the major themes in works of Punjabi diaspora writers. All the themes are focused on issues like nostalgia, rootlessness, homelessness, dislocation and displacement. The subject with which I dealt in this paper are how the migrants deal with the question of diasporic consciousness, the role of geographical boundaries in transforming identity, view of woman characters towards their plight, their relationship with their country of origin and their owing to their motherland.

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