INDIAN DIASPORA: LOCATIONS, HISTORIES AND STRATEGIES OF NEGOTIATION

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ABSTRACT

Indian diaspora with its own complexities possesses a dynamics of its own. It is always in a state of re-opening and this constantly reinvigorates the icons from the native space. At times this revisiting is unsavoury and uncharitable, nevertheless, this reopening only adds to the credits of the Indian diaspora. The diaspora-Gandhi link also ensures that Indian diaspora has not forgotten or is still not free from the hold of national icons. The kind of engagement that diaspora has with Gandhi makes it imperative for India to incorporate its views in Gandhian studies. It is another window to Gandhi for us to understand him afresh. The project thus does not end at simply acknowledging the relation of the diaspora with the native land but also proves that his relation sensitises the readers back home.

INTRODUCTION

The term diaspora comes from the words dia meaning "away" and speirein meaning "scatter" or "sow." Connotatively, diaspora has been defined variedly. Initially applied to refer to the dispersal of Jews outside Israel, the term diaspora as per the Oxford Advanced Learner"s Dictionary now applies to "the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country" (Hornby, 347). A distinction is often made between the two, i.e., Diaspora with "D" in the upper case and diaspora with "d" in the lower case: the former stands for dislocation of Jews and the latter stands for cross-cultural displacement in a very general sense. The term diaspora is also sometimes used to connote theevolution of human civilisation all over the world. The origination of the primitive human and subsequent dispersal to establish human societies in different parts of the world signifies diaspora and the diasporic condition.

In the conventional sense, diaspora signifies a homogeneous entity of geographically displaced people such as indentured labourers or slaves basically under the Empire and often referred to as exiled or expatriates. This standard term also includes the descendants of these expatriates under its ambit. Bill Aschcroft *et al*. refer to it as "voluntary or forcible movements of the people from their homelands into new regions" (Ashcroft, 1999, 68-70). According to another source, the term diaspora refers to a journey across civilisations. Vijay Mishra in the introduction of his article entitled "Diasporas" labels post-war South Asian, Chinese, Arab and Korean communities settled in Britain, Europe, America, Canada and Australia as diaspora.

What is evident from the above definitions is that diaspora must involve dislocation in terms of a significant crossing of territorial borders, i.e., movement from one‟s own country into another. But such literal definitions that identify diaspora solely as physical migration, only half explain the ramifications of diaspora. In fact, the term has not one but multiple implications beyond the literal. Now that diaspora is becoming a significant force on the global scene, the term is being approached from new slants, more importantly symbolic ones. Major metaphoric dimensions are applied to its study, more so, related to experience of unsettlement rather than of dislocation and relocation. It is no longer looked upon as a mere demographic shifting but rather greater emphasis is laid on the implications of such a shift. The crossing of borders is significant in terms of cultural changes that it entails, as well as the transformations that the dislocated self undergoes from within and without. The discourse of the diaspora entails so many aspects, such as loss of homeland and longing for it, alienation in new land, fixities, sacrifices, adversities, compromises and redefining identity; therefore it needs to be approachedfrom different stances. And post-nationalism is often seen as the poetics of space against time. Thus, there is an evident shift of interest from the physical to psychological and cultural nuances of diaspora. In the thesis, the term diaspora has been used as a marker of movement across cultures and the dislocation such movement causes.

The development of diaspora through the various stages of its history substantiates the ripening of the diaspora into becoming the very condition of culture. The history of diaspora can be broadly divided into three phases leading to the postmodernist diaspora, namely: ancient diaspora, medieval diaspora and the modern diaspora. The ancient diaspora can be traced to the traditional reference of the term "Diaspora" (with "d" in the upper case) indicating the dispersal of Jews from Israel back in the sixth- seventh century B.C. and later in the second century A.D. from Jerusalem. The Jewish movement thenis defined as a movement of exile, as it was a forced emigration resulting in pain of separation from the homeland and relocation as lost communities in the new lands. The medieval era from about 200 A.D. to 900 A.D. was witness to large-scale migrations, especially due to opening up of trade routes betweendifferent countries. Many tribes relocated themselves in search of better life. Later propagation of religions also became a motive behind exploring more grounds in new lands. The modern era movements during the period of colonialism were largely due to war, slavery and search for economic betterment. People from colonised lands moved to other colonies as indentured labourers or were transported as slaves. Many people belonging to the Third World countries became refugees in other nations as America and UK during the Cold War era. And now in the postmodernist age, the movementfrom one country to another has become the underlying and compelling logic of multicultural/multinational world order guided primarily by economic interests. In all the phases of its history, diasporic experience has brought about complex renovation both in the individuals as well as the native and the host countries involved.

Diaspora has its complexities in terms of its types and degrees of displacements. William Safran in "Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return" identifies six features of the diaspora namely dispersal, collective memory, alienation, respect and longing for the homeland, a belief in its

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restoration, and a self-definition with this homeland (Safran, 83-99). These six features amply point towards the complexities encountered in dealing with the subject of diaspora. Diaspora is not a compartmentalised subject, singular in nature. There are all kinds of dissimilarities inherent in this experience in terms of its ethnic, regional and linguistic composition that result in a helpless state of the diasporic individual hanging in between a space characterised by an irreconcilable gap between the desired and acquired. The irreconcilability is also because the diasporic experience is not just confined to movement from one country and culture to another but rather it is a crossing over numerous precincts evolving from the implications of such a crossing.

The cross-civilisation passage of diaspora has to negotiate with the existence of multiple dualities within its ambit by creating segregations such as "source country and a target country, a source culture and a target culture, a source language and a target language, a source religion and a target religion and so on" (Paranjape, "Displaced Relations", 6). Constant exploration and immense fluidity mark this "away from home" experience. There is a persistent feeling of the sense of "Otherness" with „O" in the upper case for emphasising the extent of strangeness in the diasporic mind. Diaspora is a state of dislocation marked by perpetual confrontation in the diasporic psyche between the place of origin and the place of dwelling and is often viewed as a space of unsettlement, clash and overall disturbance.

Arjun Appadurai in "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" denies any singular or uncontested meta-narratives to approach any social process but rather talks of multiple reference points (Appadurai, 1990, 296-97). And this holds all the more true in case of diasporic studies considering its vastness and the complex negotiations of intense relocation as well as dislocation, assimilation and dissimilation, renunciation/enunciation/denunciation as the diasporic is constantly interrogating, juxtaposing and reconciling. Thus, diaspora is never static. Also, it is not a homogenous whole. The traits in the form of polarities intensify its complexity all the more as the individual is dealing with contradictions such as acceptance and rejection, attachment and alienation, home and homelessness, and so on. The complexity lies not just within the diasporic individual but also within the diasporic communities existing within a nation. This is due to the various ethnic groups entering the host country not only from different corners of the world but also varied cultural groups from the same native origin. As already mentioned, not only do the diversified nationals form individualistic groups but immigrants of common nativity too carry along the diversity practiced in the homeland to the adopted land. This creates diasporas within each diaspora owing to the various permutations and combinations taking place within various ethnic factions. On the basis of various paradigms associated with diaspora, we have another division comprising of psychological diaspora, social diaspora and cultural diaspora, each having its own dynamics.

Thus, to theorise any study under the umbrella of diaspora becomes a challenging task. One needs to categorise everything associated with it in terms of historical, sociological, individual and various other positions and this brings us in confrontation with numerous ironies and paradoxes. It is a state of cultural reconstruction leading to further and more sophisticated articulations of identity, as manifested

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in community, nationhood, and also larger global contexts. It is important to remember to perceive diaspora space at all times exploratory, fluid and dynamic so that intersections within histories, pasts and futures, do not congeal into rigid boundary-laden states.

Critical studies that are increasingly projecting diaspora as a dynamic force usually study it through paradigms of hybridism, duality, multiplicity, pluralism, paradox, polyphonic multiculturalism, cosmopolitan citizenry and cultural exogamy. When so many dimensions go into characterising the diaspora, it attains unprecedented discursiveness. It creates its own distinct interspatial space, which stems from the encounter of cultures, both the host and the guest, but eventually generates its own poetics. This space is often identified as „the third space." Edward W. Soja refers to „third space" as a "tentative term that attempts to capture what is actually a constant shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings" (Soja, Intro. 2). He goes on to add that this „third space" has everything ranging from "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimagined, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja, 57). Thus, the „third space" comprises of both the social and the historical. It is a temporal space without any pre-defined canons and is marked by the dynamics of negotiation. It is a space of openness and there is no scope for contouring or absolutism. Homi Bhabha denies the space any definite entity just as he denies definite history to nations or any definite negotiations. He writes:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation (Bhabha, 1994, 2).

Thus, being a space of constant mutual exchange, there is absence of any definite paradigms. It is a mid-way space signifying both the specific as well as the general. As Bhabha explains:

The pact of interpretation is never simple an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilised in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot „in itself" be conscious (Bhabha, 1994, 36).

The second-generation diaspora literature is predominantly replete with the experience of being caught in-between the „third space" which is the space of negotiating two disparate cultures to reach congeniality. This again is an arduous task as the „third space" is constantly nourished and nurtured by the bi-culturalism built in a diasporic situation, yet it has its own configuration.

DIASPORA AND IDENTITY

Identity crisis is one of the first things that an immigrant faces on landing in a new land. And Zygmunt Bauman opines that identity cannot be anything but problematic, especially because of its dis- embedded nature. Hence, it keeps the diasporic individual in action at all times. A diasporic"s conditionin a new land experiencing a sense of being lost and having gone astray may be compared to Bauman"sdefinition of pilgrims. He writes: "For pilgrims through time, the truth is elsewhere; the true place is always some distance, some time away. Wherever the pilgrim may be now, it is not where he ought to be, and not where he dreams of being" (Bauman, 20). Bauman takes the analogy of desert to represent the object of desire and its limitless area signifying loss of all identity. He describes the contended Protestants as "inner worldly pilgrims" who could make this desert come to them in contrast to the hermits who go to it. Pilgrimage, according to him, then is necessary to "avoid being lost in a desert; to invest the walking with a purpose while wandering the land with no destination" (Bauman, 21).

AIM OF THE STUDY

Thus, Indian diaspora writings are marked by conflicting interpretations of Gandhi. In fact Gandhi has made Indian diaspora more prominent in India. Responses to Gandhi range from stereotyping his Gandhian image as god, spiritual leader and revolutionary philosophy to render shallow the character of both Gandhi and Gandhism. The positive acknowledgment of Gandhi can be overwhelmingly high and Gandhi becomes a mahatma beyond the world of mortals. Gandhi is decolonised and symbolised in this diaspora and these are only methods to strengthen one"s spiritual ties with the homeland. On the contrary, there is a total rejection of Gandhi and Gandhism as well as de-mahatmaisation of Gandhi to reduce him to the stature of bad political leader, confused philosopher and a damaging consequence for India.

PROPOSED RESEARCH WORK

Staying in nations far move developed than India, these diasporics disdain the backwardness in India. Gandhism, with its in-built streak of conservatism, becomes synonymous with backwardness. Though even the Gandhi-basing diaspora accepts the fact that Gandhi did give something new and that his findings cannot be ignored but it is critical of the way he articulated his philosophy. Everything should not have been boiled down to morality and traditions as this only led to the misuse of Gandhism after Gandhi. Indian political and social life has been narrowed to "going back to the villages", holiness, piety, symbolism and moral uprightness. The rationale and progressive attitude is missing in Indians. There is dearth of intellectualism and overplay of spirituality. Everything from non-violence, to satyagraha to the spinning wheel have been disowned. Mahatmahood is a concept that this diaspora an only associate with saint not with political leaders. Gandhi"s mahatmahood has failed to succour support tin their writings. Gandhi summarises a disappointing India.

REVIEW OF STUDIES

Acknowledging Gandhi as the "symbol of India" Nehru has upheld Gandhi for his revolutionary moral fight and his determination (Nehru, 1949, 549). In tune with the ongoing nationalistic fervour of those times, Nehru describes Gandhi as "more a man of the people" and as warrior of the Indian peasant (Nehru 1949, 341). But at the same time Nehru has also recognised the duality problem of Gandhi the leader and Gandhi the preacher. Without being harsh to Gandhi, Nehru mentions that be was not as successful on account of his economic theories as policy of non-violence.

B.R. Ambedkar perhaps stands out in this section as one of the most vehement opponent of Gandhi. Especially due to their differences on the untouchable issue. Ambedkar has not only lashed at Gandhi"s handling or rather manhandling of the dalits but also blamed him for aggravating their miserable plight. In his essay "Gashism: The Doom of the Untouchables" from his book What Gandhi and Congress have done to the Untouchables, Gandhism is discussed as an insignificant matter of primitive regionalism unsuitable for a democratic set up. It has been shorn of all simplicity or innocence of any sort. Ambedkar blames Gandhi for upholding the "verna" system instead of trying to eliminate it and also shuns Gandhi"s anti-machinery call, considering it an outcome of his retrogressive thought system as he mentions that "Ghandhism with its call of back to nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of people" (qtd. In Dallmayr,"Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables", 1948). Thus Ambedkar blames Gandhi for prompting to return to animal life.

P.K. Narayan (Narayan, 1981) stands for the exploration of Gandhi as subject in a new dimension especially subtle caricaturing. Known for his direct approach in handling his subjects, in Gandhi"s case too Narayan has used his wit at its best to demahatmise Gandhism, For instance, Gandhi is seen as an oblivious yet dominating character in P.K. Narayan"s Waiting for Mahatma with eyes closed to what is around and busy playing the dynamics of the "self". His asceticism and emphasis on non-violence are seen as pretentious inflexible stationary axis and other are expected to accoummodate themselves according to him. Despite his arduous hard work, Gandhi fails to awaken the languorous masses, both intellectually as well as emotionally. Gandhi is relegated to the stature of being just another distraction for men eager to be a part of Gandhism for namesake but oblivious to the vision and principles that Gandhism advocated.

After deriding Gandhi for non-violence and the blind faith that people bestowed in Gandhism in 19678, Malgaonkar wrote The Men who killed Gnadhi, which is a detailed description of the plotting of Gandhi"s murder and the final execution of the plan. Malgaonkar graphs the development of the ideas responsible for his execution and it is hinted that as Gandhi"s actions were perceived as threat to national interest, it was decided to get rid of him. But then Gandhi undergoes major transformation in Bandicoot Run (Malgoankar, 1982, 103-105). He comes across as an interesting personality, wise and calm yet always on the move.

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