

The Literary Contribution of Indian Diaspora

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Abstract

Literature is essentially a way of life and that is what defines literature. It is well said that literature mirrors the society and the Indian diasporic writers also mirror the society of the country in which they are living and where they or their forefathers have lived earlier. After all, the literature is the expression of the experiences or the fancy a writer may have in the course of his life. It is but very natural for the overseas writers of Indian diaspora to base their literary creativity on such experiences and themes. Indian diasporic writers are rooted to their indigenous country to a great extent. The literature shows the world what kind of people Indians are and the world should look forward to interacting with them and that can happen only if our fellow Indians, who are settled abroad, help India in spreading Indian culture and traditions to all the corners in the world. They contribute their literary talent for their motherland wherever they may be. The truth is that the Indian diasporic writers are the ones who keep the spirit of India alive outside India too.

Keywords: Indian, Diaspora, Literature, Contribution

The Indian Diaspora is used as a generic term to identify the people who migrated from territories that are well within the borders of the Republic of India. It is used for their descendants, as well. The Indian Diaspora is found practically almost in every part of the world. There are more than a million Indians each in eleven countries. Twenty-two countries have got at least a hundred thousand ethnic Indians. There are, broadly speaking, three categories of overseas Indians.

- Indian citizens to this category stay abroad for indefinite period for whatever purpose and a sizable number live in the Gulf countries. They are known as **NRIs**.
- Such overseas Indians who have become the citizen of the countries of their settlement are known as **PIOs**.
- Stateless Persons of Indian Origin (**SPIO**) are those who do not have documents to substantiate their Indian Origin and a sizeable number of them live in Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

The mighty Indian Diaspora plays an important role in safeguarding and promoting India's interest abroad. It

acts as its unlicensed ambassadors. This is more so in the fields of literature, culture, education, arts, economic development, ICT, medical science etc.

The role of literature in the Indian Diaspora needs to be further underlined. The Diaspora's literary achievements have not just enhanced India's image in the world but have also boosted their personal image, internationally. The literary contribution has also led to a direct and mutually-reinforcing synergy between India and the international community.

There is still a need for better interaction among the overseas Indians and India. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations should play a bigger role to strengthen ties.

The overseas literary works of the Indian diaspora such as V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kovid Gupta, Agha Shahid Ali, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent are important to refer to here. Their literary pursuit comes in the broader category of postcolonial literature. The literature from previously colonized countries here refers to India.

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The overseas literature is a relatively recent development, being only one and a half centuries old or so. Travels of Dean Mahomet, a travel narrative by Sake Dean Mahomet was the first book by an Indian in English that was brought out in England in 1793. At its infancy, the overseas literature was greatly influenced by the Western literature. Initially Indian diasporic writers would use such English that was pure for an Englishman to convey an experience which was essentially an Indian. It is worth mentioning that Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890–1936) has the honour of being the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897–1999), a non-fiction writer, is popularly known for his *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951). He has described his life experiences and influences in the autobiography. Lakshmi Holmström has remarked about the trend thus, “The writers of the 1930s were fortunate because after many years of use, English had become an Indian language used widely and at different levels of society, and therefore they could experiment more boldly and from a more secure position.”

Among the post colonial writers, the one of the most remarkable figures is Salman Rushdie who was born in India. Presently he is living in America. Rushdie shot to fame with his work *Midnight's Children*. *Midnight's Children* has portrayed the journey of India from British rule to independence and then partition. The book elicited a great response, winning the Booker Prize in 1981 and the “Booker of Bookers” Prize (commemorating the best among all the Booker winners) twice – in 1993 and 2008! The book has travelled to various parts of the country including Kashmir, Agra and Mumbai, incorporating many real historic events. The book has claimed the place in the List of 100 Best Novels of all time.

This book paved the way for a new trend of writing. He made use of a hybrid language. His English was abundantly peppered with Indian terms so as to convey a theme that could be viewed as representing the vast canvas of India. Salman Rushdie is normally classified under the magic realism mode of writing most famously associated with Gabriel García Márquez.

Vikram Seth has written *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *A Suitable Boy* (1994). As a writer he has used a purer English and more realistic themes. As a fan of Jane Austen, his focus is on the story, its details and its twists and turns. Vikram Seth is widely known both as a novelist and poet. His remarkable achievement as a versatile and prolific poet remains mostly unrecognized.

Amitav Ghosh has contributed immensely to the overseas literature who is the author of *The Circle of Reason*. It was his debut novel in 1986. *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the first

volume of *The Ibis* trilogy, set in the 1830s, just before the Opium War, which encapsulates the colonial history of the East are his major works. His latest work of Fiction *River of Smoke* (2011), the second volume of *The Ibis* trilogy are also very popular.

Rohinton Mistry who an India is born Canadian author has earned a Neustadt International Prize for Literature laureate in 2012. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) was his maiden book. It is a collection of 11 short stories. His novels *Such a Long Journey* (1991) and *A Fine Balance* (1995) brought him a laurel.

Vikram Chandra is also a prominent author. He moves a lot between India and the United States. He has got critical acclaim for his debut novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) and collection of short stories *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997). Suketu Mehta is another writer currently based in the United States who has written *Maximum City* (2004) that is an autobiographical account of his experiences in the city of Mumbai. Arvind Adiga got the Man Booker Prize for his debut novel *The White Tiger* in 2008.

Davidar has set his *The House of Blue Mangoes* in Southern Tamil Nadu. In both the books, he has integrated geography and politics with the narrative. Shreekumar Varma has described the unique matriarchal system and the sammandham system of marriage in his novel *Lament of Mohini* (2000), while writing about the Namboodiris and the aristocrats of Kerala.

The overseas literature has its own controversy as well. When Rushdie stated in his book – “the ironic proposition that India’s best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists” is simply too much for some folks to bear. This gave rise to a lot of resentment among many writers. In his book, Amit Chaudhuri has put up counter questions, “Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?”

The overseas literature also depicts the microcosms of India reflecting Indian conditions. A critic contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as Narayan where although the use of English is pure yet the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also maintains “the post-colonial novel becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself”.

Amitav Ghosh expressed his protest by refusing to accept the Eurasian Commonwealth Writers Prize for his book *The Glass Palace* in 2001 and withdrawing it from the

subsequent stage.

The famous writer V. S. Naipaul is a third generation Indian from Trinidad and Tobago and a Nobel Prize laureate. In his works Naipaul highlights the ideas of homeland, rootlessness and his own personal feelings towards India.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a prominent writer who has won a Pulitzer Prize from the U.S.

Agha Shahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt, Richard Crasta, Yuyutsu Sharma, Tabish Khair, Vikram Seth etc. are some prominent modern expatriate Indian poets who write in English.

Some bilingual writers have also made significant contributions, such as Paigham Afaqui with his novel *Makaan* in 1989.

Conclusion

To sum up, the contribution of the Indian diaspora is immense in the field of literature. Some of the writers are globally popular. Their literary contribution has brought laurel to India as well. Slowly and gradually the standard of the Indian diasporic literature has reached the global standard and the treatment of Indian content draws the attention of the global community towards India. The content and the style of the literature by the Indian Diaspora have changed according to the needs of the time. Because of extraordinary diversity and geographical spread the genre, the language, the treatment, literary devices and the writing style have to change depending upon each segment of Diaspora. The approach towards the Indian diaspora in the Gulf is primarily welfare oriented and remittance centric. Here there are mainly workers and as such the literary outcome is not too much. But the overseas literature by the Diaspora in the developed world is multifaceted, aiming at making India a knowledge power. The communication and transportation revolution and the global reach of media are creating a major change in the nature of literature between the Diasporas and their country of origin.

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