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Diaspora Literature – A Hybridized Product?

Diaspora Literature - A Hybrid or a Hybridized Product?

C. GangaLakshmi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

This paper deals with how diaspora and hybridity in cultures of the diaspora community paved the way for the formation of Diaspora Literature. It presents how the 'Post Colonial Literature', 'Post Colonial Diaspora Literature' and finally 'Diaspora Literature' can be called hybrid products. It also deals with the literature that is considered to be hybrid in their origin.

Heartrending Emotions

Literature is a useful resource which provides an understanding as to how settlements were established, illustrates the daily conduct of trade, explores the relationship between diverse people and also depicts the conflicting and heartrending emotions felt by a particular migrant community.

Hybridity in its most basic sense refers to mixture. The term *hybridity* originated from the Latin *hybrida*, a term used to classify offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed and hybridity is simply mixture. An explicative term, hybridity becomes a useful tool in forming a fearful discourse of racial mixing that rose towards the end of the 18th century. It is the term which originated from biology, was subsequently employed in linguistics and racial theory in the nineteenth century.

A Paradigm of Colonial Anxiety

A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) which treats it as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. His key argument is that colonial hybridity, as a cultural form, produces ambivalence in the colonial masters and as such altered the authority of power.

While he originally developed his thesis with respect to narratives of cultural imperialism, his work also develops the concept with respect to the cultural politics of migration in the contemporary metropolis. Identity, multiculturalism and racism become crucial elements in this analysis. The social transformations that followed the ending of colonial mandates, rising immigration, and economic liberalization altered the use and understanding of the term 'hybridity'.

Many Forms of Hybridization

Hybridization takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic. Bhabha stresses the interdependence of the colonizer and the colonized in his works. Bhabha argues that all cultural

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systems and statements are constructed in what he calls 'Third space Enunciation'. In accepting the argument the reader begins to understand how the inherent purity and originality of cultures are 'untenable'. He focuses on cultural hybridity as an inevitable outcome.

Not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures,
but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity.

Tradition and Culture

Neither 'culture' nor 'tradition' constitutes the essence of an unchanging national identity. Tradition is a way of conceptualizing the fragile communicative relationships across time and space that are the basis, not of diaspora identities but of diaspora identifications. Reformulated thus, tradition points not to common content for Diaspora cultures, but to evasive qualities that make inter-cultural, trans-national diaspora conversations between them possible.

What Is Diaspora?

The prevailing definition of Diaspora seems to be a group that recognizes its separateness based on common ethnicity or nationality, lives in a host country, and maintains some kind of attachment to home country. This attachment may be primarily to culture.

According to Toloyan, 'hybrid identity' which diaspora creates:

is at its best the diaspora is an example for both the homeland and the host land nation-states, of the possibility of living, even thriving in the regimes of multiplicity which are increasing the global condition, and a proper vision of which diaspora may help to construct, given half a chance.(1996)

Mental Migration

Mental migration is a conceptualization of experiences of misunderstood frustrations which are all the outcome of issues of migration and diaspora communities. The role of these diaspora communities is to initiate a feeling of 'home' and to provide a centre for mental convergence - that is, a sense of 'we' through mental collaboration and support.

This mental migration is a challenge for any diasporic community. The question of settling remains unanswerable to any diaporian unless they associate themselves with any of the two lands.

Literature and Mental Migration

This oscillated mind, their suffering and agony out of cultural change are expressed by the Diaspora in different genres of Literature. In all those genres, there exist a challenge in integrating and progressing within the cultural logic and mentality of the host society.

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Commonwealth Literature

Commonwealth Literature is one such form in which the nations like Canada, Australia, India, South Africa, Jamaica and others are combined together with themes which mirror the convergence of two cultures in which the traditional value is painted and moulded. But Commonwealth Literature also has 'New Literature in English', 'Minority Literature', 'Marginalized Literature' and 'Post Colonial Literature'. The Post Colonial Literature is hybrid literature.

Some Characteristics of Post Colonial Literature

The term Commonwealth Literature includes the literature of the countries which had been colonized by Britain. But Post Colonial Literature encompasses a wider field of geography by embracing USA and all the countries which were not colonized or else colonized by other countries.

The Post colonialist theory deals with the problems of the outcomes of diaspora like migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, caste, class, culture, gender and place. Post Colonialism has its close association with cross-culturalism in which 'cross' represents the crossing of discrete barriers from one construction to another which envisages a consequent expansion of boundaries.

Cross-Culturalism

Culture represents the principles and constructs put in a place which is followed by members within a society to acquire a position making them to function and to communicate according to those constructs. The suffix *ism* denotes the progress and development of the individual self in that culture. This notion of culturalism is embodied in the trajectories of indigenous heritage, migrant population and a post colonial state.

The product of post colonial cross-culturalism is 'cultural hybridity'. Bhabha in his work analyses this shifting of margins in the authenticity of cultures. But in reality all cultures turn to be a 'hybrid'. The product of post-colonialism, culturalism and cross-culturalism are essentially hybrid in character by their inherent adjuncts of the post in post colonialism, the 'ism' in culturalism and 'cross' in cross-culturalism. Within the construct of post colonial theory, hybridity is based on a seamless boundary.

Post Colonial Diaspora Literature

The diversity of cultures present in such nations and the experiences of its members and the varied social groups which are all the products of diaspora, become a major concern in framing the term 'Post colonial Diaspora Literature', which turns out to be a hybrid of Post colonial Literature. Later it has been further hybridized to be called as 'Diaspora Literature'. Baker suggests:

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Physical, social and cultural changes of resettlement create on the one hand, a host of threatening situations associated with novelty and on the other hand multiple losses to bear. The migrant must be able to find his or her way around an unfamiliar social and cultural order. By making friends, learning a new language, getting a job and establishing a network and home, the immigrant engages a palliative cultural mechanism to come to terms with the losses and gains common to waves of migration.

The Sense of Isolation

These feelings lead to the outcome of 'Diaspora Literature'. The sense of isolation, alienation and aloofness amidst thousands of people in an adoptive land are depicted in the Diaspora Literature.

The writers who belong to this particular category of literature may even be a diasporian and mostly their novels would be the outcome of the sufferings and agony they experience out of the colonial encounter and also of the cultural alienation. The most prominent diaspora writers of the contemporary Diaspora Literature are Salman Rushdie, V.S.Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry and others.

Loss of Culture

India-born, America-settled Bharati Mukherjee, presents in her novels *Wife* and *Jasmine* the female protagonists Dimple and Jasmine, who face the problem of the loss of culture and they both endeavor to assert a new identity in the United States. Out of the cultural alienation Dimple's identity ended not as a creator but as a butcher of her own husband. Jasmine in an exile in transfer from the old world of India and old cultural values endures much suffering to achieve her destination.

The novel *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith has North London as its background thereby presenting a multiracial society with immigrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The novel *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali presents the life of immigrants from Bangladesh living in East London. These novels deal with the issues of identity crisis, displacement and cultural integration and give out the positive aspect of how a diasporian can overcome cultural differences and racial prejudices.

Another prominent writer V.S.Naipaul is of Indian ancestry, Caribbean-born and England-settled diaspora writer. He sketches out in his novels the cultural spaces in his speculative journey around the globe. He occupies a prominent role in the Diaspora Literature. In his novel *A Bend in the River*, Salim the protagonist suffers from cultural alienation and cultural shock. *In a Free State* represents the indigenous cultural history of a post colonized country.

To conclude, so long as human life exists in this universe the diaspora literature will also exist and be exist and be relevant. It will definitely have hybridization of culture as its basic root.

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