

## ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS - RIGHT TO LAND AND DISPLACEMENT ISSUES

Dr. D. Kalavathy

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, K.M.G. College of Arts & Science, Gudiyattam, Vellore*

### **Abstract**

*Struggle for existence and survival of the fittest are laws of Nature. People move on to different destinations for the sake of survival. They happen to encounter many problems in the alien nations for which they are not accustomed in their native lands. They are forced to manage social, political, economic, religious and spiritual issues. At a point of time, they feel frustrated and are subjected to mental depression.*

*This article explores the origin of displacement, Indian writing in English, Issues of Displacement, the problems of displaced human beings - the diasporic characters whom we may come across in some works of Indian writers, and how far they are successful in handling the problems. Even now, the territory of the diasporans is restricted by the natives and the threat to the lives of the diasporans has become a constant issue. Foreign countries are ready to use the intelligence of the diasporans, for it is cheaper but at the same time they are not ready to recognize that intelligence as they feel the displaced persons take the opportunities of the natives.*

### **Introduction**

The post-colonial history of Indian English Writing has emerged focusing attention on a multitude of social, economic, political, religious and spiritual issues. Such issues with India as a subject matter of literary writing is uniquely placed because within a period of half a century it witnessed diversified upheavals and tremors caused by the coexistence of post-colonial nostalgia, the new colonial awareness as well as the post-modernist revivalism.

### **The Origin of Displacement**

The Jewish community was forced to exile whereas during the colonial period, people were uprooted to serve the British Empire in various parts of the globe and their settlement there was half-forced-half willingly because option was given to them after the war but the last dimension of expatriation is the willed choice of migrants from the third world countries for greener pastures in the developed countries. But irrespective of the reasons, the reality is that the immigrants experience a sense of 'up rootedness' and 'unbelonging' in foreign countries. They do remain at the periphery and are treated as 'others' in spite of the attempts of the immigrants of acculturation.

### **Indian Writing in English**

Indian Writing in English (IWE) or Indian Literature in English (ILE), as is called now, has gained immense popularity and recognition in the last two decades of the 20th century.

From Tagore through Raja Rao to Salman Rushdie, from Sarojini Naidu through Kamala Markandaya to Arundhati Roy and many other writers have concentrated on changing societal patterns, transformation of values, and on the individual's predicament in a society in transition. Rapid industrialization, scientific revolutions and upsurge of information technologies, have all led to a devaluation of ethics and crumbling of culture. Indian writers have constantly tried to adapt themselves to the changing scenario.

### **The Origin of Indian Writing in English**

The seed of Indian Writing in English was sown during the period of the British rule in India, after Macaulay's introduction of English education in India. Gradually, there emerged a few talented writers, who may be called 'Macaulay's Children', of this living and evolving literary genre, who could lift this form to international status and universal recognition. Many legendary figures like Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and others dominated and directed the emergence of IWE. In IWE fiction three names are usually mentioned: Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. They are known as 'The Big Three', an epithet coined by the noted English critic William Walsh. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, in their own inimitable style, adopted the English language to serve their purpose. The credit of bringing a name and reputation to IWE fiction goes to them. These three innovative writers have brought world recognition to the new genre namely Indian-English fiction. When Bharati Mukherjee experienced herself as an expatriate, Mukherjee saw V.S. Naipaul as her model. It is only when she outgrew and discarded the posture of an expatriate that she rejected Naipaul as a model and chose Bernard Malamud instead.

Even the educated and the Westernized Indians are afflicted with an identity crisis since emigration causes a traumatic effect on them. They are forced to assimilate their country into their psyches without becoming Imitation Westerns. There arises a conflict between their intuitive grasp of their native culture and their rational understanding of a foreign culture. Their norms have to be scrutinized and re-evaluated in the light of their bewilderingly alien environment. They face a new world which is neither beautiful nor brave, but chaotic and disorderly. They suffer the horrors of acculturation and become victims of rootlessness.

The rootlessness is often the result of weakening of the order they had known in the Old World in India. Their new environment undermines the unquestioning allegiance to ancient traditions and the sense of unconditional belonging which had been taken for granted by them in their homeland. More and more Indian immigrants to the New World come to experience a growing insecurity in their hearts, a lack of assurance that they belong to anyone or anything or anywhere.

The feeling of uncertainty coupled with the loss of cultural identity leads to the shattering realization that aloneness is their real condition in their New World. Aloneness and loneliness are not the same. Aloneness means separation while loneliness implies

separation from someone close, a lover, a friend, a family. Indians find that they are on their own once their umbilical cord connecting them to their native culture is cut by immigration. Friendship, love, communication, ecstasy, all has to be sought after, worked for, and earned.

The immigrants' problems can be studied in terms of changes in socio-cultural patterns, ways of life, value systems, and differences arising from places of destination, in adjustment patterns, lifestyles and attitudes. The immigrant is entangled between the two cultures and suffers from double consciousness, from own culture, language, and roots. Every ethnic group in the receiving country becomes a part, partially or completely, of the host culture through various mechanisms like assimilation, adaptation, and absorption. The process depends on how both the cultures mutually respond towards each other and at micro and macro level situations.

Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh have become celebrities for their distinctive approach to expatriate hood as a metaphysical experience of exile and as agents of attitudinal change, both in the majority and minority cultures. Their concern transcends the issues of cultural shock and adjustment.

Mukherjee wrote about her personal experiences after returning to the United States. *Isolated Incident*', one of her short stories, explores the biased Canadian view towards immigrants that she encountered, and how government agencies handled women and their mistreatment are reflected in her another short story entitled *The Tenant*. It is the story of a divorced Indian woman studying in the States and her experiences with the interracial relationships. It is movement, both destabilizing and reconciling, both disabling and enabling. Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh have displayed their creative and linguistic skills in their novels, and have established themselves as diasporic writers after the model of Salman Rushdie and others.

In Bharati Mukherjee's selected novels, *Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*, we find characters suffering dually from cultural and social shock, as a result of geographical shifts.

In the same way, the most erudite and ethnographic, Amitav Ghosh imagines protagonists in his novels *The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide* and *In An Antique Land* who face the same problems, within similar contexts.

Mukherjee writes in *Wife* about a woman named Dimple who has been suppressed by such men and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife with the demands of her new American life. As a young woman who was raised to be passive, Dimple lacks the inner strength and resources it takes to cope in New York City as the young wife in an arranged marriage. Again in this novel, Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and, ultimately, live. Out of personal instability and fear, she commits suicide after murdering her husband. The stories in *Darkness* also narrate similar stories of women and immigrants.

Mukherjee's second heroine Jasmine is born and brought up in the small village of Hasnapur, with minimum education. But the death of her husband totally transforms her that she ventures all alone to America to fulfill her husband's ambition. Her ambition transforms the village girl and effects the different phases in her life. Adapting to the American way of life and dressing, she successfully encounters the problems of an immigrant. Lillian, her mentor, teaches the American way of dressing and walking.

*Jasmine* eventually returns to the position of a care-giver through a series of jobs. The unity between the first and the third world is shown to be in the treatment of women as subordinate in both the countries.

Jasmine feels insecure in America with no one to help her permanently and this sense of insecurity makes her fall in love with Taylor. When she transforms to Jane, her attitude gradually changes and she wears high heels and silk chartreuse pants. The fighting spirit in her enables her to manage all problems with courage and she loses something and gains something. Her American life is different from the Indian beginning.

The protagonist Hannah Easton of *The Holder Of The World* comes to India as an immigrant with her husband Gabriel and earns Indian way of life. When she comes to understand the disloyalty of Gabriel as he has a *bibi*, she deserts him. Immigrants, in this situation, would wish to return to their native country. On the contrary, she remains in the host country and earns her daily bread by her talent in embroidering. With self-respect, she refuses the financial help of Gabriel. She accidentally meets Rajah with whom she falls in love. Situations force her to act as the Rajah's representative and she meets Emperor Aurazeb to put an end to the genocide due to further war. Though she fails in her mission, the simple immigrant lady without any experience in politics, Hannah encounters the Emperor bravely and transforms herself into a peace-maker.

Tara of *Desirable Daughters*, in many ways breaches traditions but still remains tied to her native country and fail to make her diasporal dream a success. Mukherjee's other heroine Jasmine successfully assimilates herself into the adopted land. Even Hannah, experiences the same adoptive experience, assimilating herself into Moghul India.

Tara Chatterjee of *Desirable Daughters* is disappointed at her husband Bish's mechanical life, leaves him without any hesitation. If she is in India, she might have been checked by the society. But in America, there is no one to control her. So she conveniently quits her husband and lives with the Hungarian carpenter, Andy. Being the daughter of a prestigious Bengali Brahmin family and a mother of a boy, it is unexpected of her.

*The Tree Bride*, is the story about Tara Gangooly, who is from a docile Bengali Brahmin family and her transformation into an impassioned organizer of resistance against the British Raj. The contemporary narrator, Tara Chatterjee discovers and lays claim to unacknowledged elements in her "American" identity."

Amitav ghosh's writing deals in the epic themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love and loss, while all the time

crossing the generic boundaries between anthropology and art work. Both his fictional and non-fictional narratives tend to be transnational in sweep, moving restlessly across countries, continents and oceans.

All these characters leave their mother land and enter into a different world. This migration leads to “cultural and social transplantation” and in turn to a crisis of identity and finally reconciliation to the choice. The immigrant writers’ temptation is to fall in the trap of glorifying their native country and belittle and degrade the adopted country. But these authors deliberately present a fascinating study of the problem of displaced persons in their native country and host country, in a triadic pattern of geographical, cultural and social transmigration.

From Calcutta to California, from America to India, and in the reverse flow too, the characters of Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh exhibit transnational mobility across geographical trajectories. These diasporic transnational movements narrate, in all their varied and individual details, the concerns and contrasts of the defining concept of ‘home.’ From Dimple’s Calcutta home to Kanai’s and Piya’s Sunderbans, the trajectory is fascinating. These places, these essential fictional settings, become main characters themselves. Moving from rural India through Arabian and African and Asian locations to rural and urban America, these men and women undergo a transition that begins at the geographical level and moves on to the cultural and social contexts.

The phenomenon of diaspora is to transport people from one nation to another and the immigrants suffer dislocation as they grab the chance to reinvent themselves in the New World. Bharati Mukherjee has suffered a literal geographical displacement and has confronted social and cultural alienation. Her metaphorical reference to “Uprooting” and “Unhousement” of the immigrants in their attempts to construct an identity is suggestive of the notion of place and displacement prevalent in her writing. In her own words, migration from the Third World to the US is a metaphor for the process of uprooting and re-rooting or “unhousement and “rehousement”.

*The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh’s first novel is tour de force that takes its intrepid hero, the misshapen Alu across East Pakistan, to Malabar, to the African port of al-Ghazira and finally to El Oued on the north-eastern edge of African Sahara. Based on *Moby Dick*, according to Ghosh, it is a great adventure narrative that has layers of stories and levels of ‘exuberant’ expatriate experiences.

*The Shadow lines* is about the journey of a family to an old ‘address’ that has been left behind but also a new ‘address’ created in the present. Through the shadowy lines that separate and connect, the novelist beautifully portrays the life of an individual, a family, a society and a nation. The shadow blurs the lines between memory and reality, personal and general, emotion and practicality, communal and religious, violence and normalcy, India and Bangladesh, India and England, partition and migration, past and present. (Sharma B.S. 1- 2)

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ila is the daughter of Maya and the Saheb who is a diplomat. She has many servants at home to attend her. She goes abroad for further studies and there she lives on the meager amount she gets out of her part-timework. She is transformed totally in her dress and gets her hair cut. In spite of being the only daughter of a rich and prideful family, she leads a simple life in an alien country.

Immigrant culture is that, most of the immigrants adapt themselves and adopt and assimilate the culture of their host country. After earning wealth in an alien land for some years, they get back to their native land, marry the girls selected by their parents, return to their host nation, settle for a considerable number of years there itself, they yearn to spend their last days in their own nation.

Partition after Independence renders many homeless and deprives people of their ancestral and hard-earned wealth. Jasmine's father and the Grandmother of *The Shadow Lines* are affected by Partition as they lose their wealth and seek refuge in the neighbouring country.

Dolly of *The Glass Palace*, when young, was an errand-girl at the Royal palace of Mandalay. But as the story develops, she becomes the responsible person among the attendants of the royal family, marries Rajkumar, begets two sons, brings them up, settles life for them and finally joins a monastery and dies there. The uneducated, simple girl is transformed, performs her duty and seeks solace in seclusion from her family members. Dolly successfully adapts and adopts herself to the different situations that arise out of displacement.

Amitab, the narrator of *In An Antique Land* spends a few years as an immigrant in a small town of Lataifa in Africa for his research. As an immigrant in Africa, he too transforms in many ways—learning their customs and traditions and follows them during his stay there.

Overall, we see great transformations in the cultures and sociability of the displaced populations. Though their physical and geographical positions are de-localized, their social and cultural positions are still attached to the old memories of the social and cultural positions from which they have emerged.

This change in their outlook is basically due to the expatriate experience, exposing, in the process, how the lure of the global on the local produces subjects who are caught between the need to participate in a homogenized material culture and the desire to protect, retain and value their established beliefs, traditions and knowledge.

The fiction of Bharati Mukherjee and Amitav Ghosh relate the expatriate experience through their imaginative trajectories amalgamating the two different worlds before and after the hyphen. These two writers have

“captured and portrayed an immigrant's image and shown us what it is to  
“become an American.” (Sivaraman 218)

Or, become a global human being, re-colonizing the world, erasing physical territories and subsuming cultures and social conventions. “Goods move. People move.

Ideas move. And cultures change;” so do the immigrants, transforming themselves into a universal citizen, sans borders.

**References**

1. Alam, Fakrul. *Bharati Muherjee*. New York: Twayne Pub., 1996.
2. Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. Scribner: NY. 2003.
3. Arun Joshi, *The Foreigner* ( Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1968) p 65
4. Aschcroft, B., G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin: *The Empire writes Back*, New York: n.p, 1989-90.
5. Hastings, Adrian. “Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce.” *European Imperialism: 1830 - 1930*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1999.
6. Hornby, A.S: *Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary of Current English*, New York: Oxford Univ Press, 2005. Print.
7. Mukherjee, Bharati: “Immigrant Writing: Give us your Maximalists”, *The Times Book Review* (August 28, 1988).
8. Nash, June. “Defying Deterritorialization: Autonomy Movements against Globalization.” in *Social Movements: An Anthropology Reader*. Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2005.