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“Re-Imagining India: Representation of India in Indian Diasporic Writings”

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Introduction:

The entire process of historiography and linearization of history of the people of Indian origin is more than a hundred years old; right from Sikh emigrants to the immigration of the recent generation to United States and Canada. This entire group of individualized consciousness in the form of a community has faced and overcome racial discrimination, harassment, double-alienation (both from their homeland and in their host lands) having now achieved positions of power and distinctions like governors of state, premiers of provinces, ministers of the various branches of federal government, members of houses of parliament and senate, mayor, civil servants and other officers of public offices. Thus there is a sea change in the perspectives of present generation immigrants from lamentation and loss to acceptance and assertion. Hence the people of this diasporic community have advanced to their utmost capacity in terms of the domains of power, status, position and prestige in the areas of socio-economic, cultural and political identities in their adopted host lands.

A direct result of this process of migration and settlement has been seen in the domain of literature in terms of a vast amount of literary output being written by these diasporic writers who have garnered recognitions all over the world in terms of culturally iconic literary prizes like Pulitzer in USA, Commonwealth Writers Prize, Giller Prize and many Governor General awards in Canada. Even though this genus of writers has either lived the major part of their lives in United States, England and Canada and so on, the presence of India, its voices, its ethnic identities etc. have been felt in the background of their works and have been like a haunting specter in the minds of these writers. It is evident from instances like Rohinton Mistry who has not written a single novel with Canadian characters, nor has M.G. Vassanji indicated or created any significant North American character in his works. Rajarao has lived all his life in America yet majority of his works are about India. The most recent evidence of this movement can be seen in the works of writers of post nineties like Jhumpa Lahiri, Hari Kunzru, Kiran Desai and Shauna Singh Baldwin who even though have been brought up abroad have written about India, Indians and Indian culture.

This vast span of over one hundred years has been understood and categorized by a variety of movements and responses during the colonial and post-colonial times. The two broad movements in terms of this historical demarcation are as follows: First are the majority of colonial writers who have been observed to have a western ideological output; they have been looking at India and all the narratives on Indian diasporic consciousness with imperial

prejudices. On the other hand, there are writers belonging to the so-called, (so-called-because it's a question of epistemological anomaly)-post-colonial era like Jeanette Turner and Elyce Alden. The works of these writers tend to romanticize India, its narratives and its voices of ideological, socio-cultural image all over the world. Another such instance is when Frank Davey attempts to understand this anomical reality by evolving certain post-colonial strategies by rewriting a tourist guide-book.

The major issue here is to express a concern over a fragmented representation of the image of India in terms of fleeting glimpses of India projected to both India and to the world through cursory readings taken by some of these diasporic Canadian, English and American writers. It ponders over the issues relating to perceiving India as a fixed and stable image-identity both in colonial and post-colonial times, the idea of "India as it is". Thus this project has tried to work on creating an alternative methodology of understanding India both in readerships of India and in that of the rest of the world itself.

These two images of India of colonial and post-colonial times however seem no longer stationary and we experience a sense of fluidity and changes in this arbitrary image of India in the writings of the Indian diasporic writers. Thus, this research project has tried to focus on the inclusion of such writers in a close examination of the re-created image of India in the writings of the Indian diasporic writers.

Statement/Scope:

The review of the following theses involved the qualitative review of research papers, articles, research journals, critical essays and doctoral theses of the relevant authors pertaining to the project from digital repositories like shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in, shodhgangotri.inflibnet.ac.in, researchgate.net, library.iitgn.ac.in, scopus.com, jstor.org etc. The detailed review of the doctoral theses on these digital repositories yielded some very interesting observations. Research in the case of the author Jhumpa Lahiri showed that she has become a prominent and significant voice in the research area of Indian diasporic writers. While those of Kiran Desai and Hari Kunzru point out to the fact that these two voices are still in the flux that is these are the voices of the in-between Indian diasporic spaces. And finally, the review of Shauna Singh Baldwin broadly showed that she is one of those few voices still being represented in the liminalities of the diasporic consciousness of Indian diasporic writers. Therefore, the Re-imagination of India in these Indian diasporic writers has a very well defined movement in terms of its representation the study of which is the genesis of this research project.

The idea of Diaspora is multi-disciplinary which consists of critical and creative writings. It can also be classified sometimes as academic and nonacademic writings. The popular and critical literature of Diaspora however classifies into the following categories. Old Diaspora is usually said to consist of first- and second-generation diasporic writers followed by the subsequent generation. This is further than divided into New Diaspora comprising of authors who are born in homelands and migrate to host lands; this category also consists of the other that is the authors who are born in the diasporas of the host lands themselves. The doctoral theses, blogs and research articles so far in this area seems to seem to try and chart out each of these movements separately and individually creating a kind of hierarchy in its thematic strands in any particular work of the said authors. This project has tried to avoid this fallacy by looking at the idea of Migrancy-Identity- representation in the selected works by trying to study them in relation to each other and in relation to the relevant thematic concerns arising out of the question of representation of India in Indian diasporic writers.

Keeping this multi-disciplinary approach in mind the literature review seems to point to the fact that the research and critical study done so far in the authors mentioned above has been single dimensional and uni-directional. The major themes which they seem to be dealing with

are the feelings of nostalgia and lament in the first-generation writers and the idea of acceptance and recognition of the second generation.

Objectives:

The present research project keeping the above mentioned trends in purview has tried to take a step forward in trying to formulate and try to postulate an objective frame of analysis; This frame has thus tried to critically study the idea of how the above selected authors look at the image of India in India diasporic writers not with lamentation, loss or acceptance but trying to critically look at the idea of representation of India.

Hypotheses:

The traditional study of the idea of re-imagination of India in narratives of Indian diasporic writers has been through a study of historiographical and thematic concerns. A wide range of these authors include the diasporic writers of the post nineties era. This project does not question the credibility of such an approach; it is nevertheless a single dimensional comparative analysis of the authors and their works which limits the scope of study. Hence this project has attempted to present an alternative hypothesis of study which has been a two-pronged approach.

At the initial stage, the project has attempted to study the idea of the re-imagined India in the narratives of the Indian diasporic writers according to their socio-cultural, historical and geographical belongingness. This project has tried to do a comparative study of the authors under consideration on the basis of the image of India which is re-imagined by them in their narratives historically taking each author's works simultaneously. So, the question which was : Does such a re-imagination lead to the double alienation of India, both as a country and as a category of study? This double alienation, which seems to be present, seems to be in the representation of India in their narratives. The purpose of such a teleological mode of study has been two-fold. 1) The first is to understand the liminalities and boundaries of the project itself keeping in mind its huge scope of study with a wide range of works and authors which will be made clear below. 2) Another purpose of such an open-ended mode of examination of the project is to allow the creation of an alternative framework, a frame which is free of the imperialistic and romantic prejudices of the colonial and post-colonial times.

The second step of this two-pronged approach of study has been to raise and try to answer a variety of questions regarding the two major conceptual categories of this project namely that of "Identity" and "Representation" or as one may call it "Re-imagination". In order to achieve this objective, the theoretical frame which was used was examining the narratives which re-imagine India in the works and narratives of Indian diasporic writers. The project has thus tried to use frames, works or theories of authors which try to raise and answer the questions regarding the fundamental categories of identity and representation which are also

the two main pillars of this project. The list includes authors like Homi Bhabha, V.S Naipul, Raja Rao, Amartya Sen, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakraborty, Louis Althusser, Benedict Anderson to mention a few of the many

As the final and concluding theses has selected, studied, categorized and examine a few representative writers and their works out of the wide range of authors belonging to this consciousness of the trilemma of migrancy-identity-representation. The objective of trying to open up newer forms of examining this complex question of re-imagining India thus seems to have been taking shape. In order to achieve this purpose, the said authors and their works have been divided according to their historical time-periods and the thematic concerns keeping in mind its teleological inconclusiveness and its advantage of acting as a liminal and delimiting variable to an otherwise un-ending complex array of questions. For further significant analysis keeping in mind the research questions there was an attempt superimpose the trilemma of migrancy-identity-representation onto the emerging thematic strands of these narratives in order to try and find an alternative methodology for the representation of “Re-imagined” India.

Thus, the hypothesis that is that even though these writers of the Indian origin are permanently settled abroad, away socio-politically, culturally and geographically they are still present ideologically and aesthetically in the re-imagined India seems to be taking up a solid shape. Their presence is felt in the representation of India in their narratives which leads me to believe that they continue to draw their spiritual, cultural, ideological and aesthetic sustenance from their Indian roots. This accounts for the never-ending presence of the re-imagined India and Indian customs, values, ideas, identities, ideals, figures both real and imaginary-imagined. It can also account for the constant questions which these authors might have both physically and psychologically about identity and representations of characters, themes, plots and ultimately the very narratives which they write. This in turn has done value addition to the research findings as mentioned below and seems to offer a new entry point in the area of diaspora studies in general and Indian Diaspora in particular.

Research Questions:

The proposed research has attempted and to find answers to the research question in the form of following findings.

1. Examine the features which categorize the idea of India, image of India and Indian identity in the narratives of Indian diasporic writers: -

The Whole of question of image, identity and narratives of identity of the diasporic nation have seen intertwining in the form of overlaps and arrays of the authors under consideration. The notion of identity, nation and narratives of identity has thus been rendered as a site of continuous dynamism, and has become one which needs constant re-examination and re-consideration with the changing variables of the diasporic landscape. This landscape of diaspora when cross examined with the theoretical concepts and percepts mentioned below paint a very significant picture. The features which seems to categorize the idea of India, image of India and Indian Identity seems to be directly co-related and proportional to the changing landscape of the nation being represented in the form of various forces and factors under a variety of labels like culture, power, identity, socio-historical landscapes, anthropological landscapes, ideological landscapes etc. This intersecting forces and factors directly seem to point to the fact that the author/s under the umbrella of the term Diaspora seems to have been significantly impacted by the forces at play here. Moreover the changing scenario in variables like readership, publication policies, target audience and target language norms seems to have created an added layer of complexity to the question of reimagined nation.

2. Define, examine and attempt to map the impact that India has on the cultural imagination and literary existence of the authors in question, in their representative works pertaining to the current project:

The notions of cultural imagination and literary existence are two of the most pressing questions in the context of the question of representation of the Indian diasporic landscape. The representative works of the current project in question have brought a very significant picture. The cultural imaginations and literary existences of the authors under consideration and their very consciousness seem to undergo a major paradigm shift when it came to the question of representation. This shift seems to be occurring with the change in the socio-political and, cultural, linguistic and geo-political landscape of the nation and with its changing position the question of representation of cultural imagination seems to be taking on a definitive shape.

3. Explore, examine and analyze the similarities, differences and cultural-ideological overlaps and the various strands of inquiry arising out of the above-mentioned teleological demarcation of the representation of India especially in the context of identity-politics and politics of representation in the era of post-colonialism.

The question of identity politics and ideology was examined using multiple approach. Some of the most major ones were the ideological state apparatus approach of Althusser, The Marxian approach of ideology and power to mention a few. This analysis yielded a very significant paradigm. The teleological demarcation of the question of identity politics and politics of representation finds its overlaps in the areas of migratory landscape, cultural tropes and representational arena of migration studies. The various strands of inquiry arising out of the subject position of the texts under question clearly showcase the position which the authors under consideration seems to have taken. These positions of identity politics clearly showcase the needs of studying the question of diasporic and migratory identities as a dynamic concept with a much bigger scope of text and contexts. This seems to bring to the forefront the idea of overlaps very clearly to the forefront and highlight the similarities and differences in the narratives under consideration as per the changes in the external parameters affecting the narrative like socio-historical forces, migration patterns, cultural ideologues etc.

4. Examine how India is re-imagined and represented by the diasporic writers in the context of the main conceptual categories of identity, ideology, representation, power and migrating consciousness.

The major question which the following research has tried to answer is the question of how India is Re-presented and Re-imagined in the selected narratives mentioned below. The findings paint a very clear picture. The question of imagining the concept of a nation seems to very clearly depend upon the various factors which have been studied in detail above like identity, ideology, representation, power, migrating consciousness, cultural capital, etc. What seems apparent is the rapid change in this re-imagined notion of a nation like India and its direct reliance upon the above-mentioned factors. Put very simply the dynamism of the said factors due to the socio-cultural, historical and geo-political changes seems to have directly impacted the notion of the idea of a re-imagined nation. Thus, the point under consideration here is not of a re-imagined nation but rather of a re-imagined consciousness so much so that it seems to have pervaded the very psyche of the authors under study here. This has led to a creation of such a corpus of narrative as being studied here. This corpus of texts in turn has further inspired generations of diasporic communities and authors alike leading to creation of diasporic narrative loci both in Homelands as well as host lands.

Methodology:

The method of examination of this research project has been qualitative and exploratory. This research methodology has mainly focused on the representations of images of India in the below mentioned authors and their works. It has been according to their historiographical and authorial thematic concerns as the major archetypes of the ways of representations of India in the narratives of these Indian diasporic writers.

Thus, the project has tried to and seems to at least postulate an objective analysis of the different forms of representations of India and its ideological and cultural narratives in the proposed authors and their pertaining works. The methodology recognizing the delimitations of the project has tried to study the majority of overlaps and strands amongst all these representations.

Outline of the Chapters of Thesis:

The dissertation has begun with the introductory chapter with a brief history of the idea of India as a diasporic consciousness. The chapter has attempted to analyze the questions of identity and representation of the concept of re-imagining India via the theories and narratives of theorists like Homi Bhabha, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Raja Rao, Amartya Sen, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakravorty, Louis Althusser, Karl Marx, Totossy de Zepetnek etc. The question of the categories of identity and representation is indeed a slippery one hence an attempt has been made to try to represent the essentials of Indian identity.

The next chapter has tried to examine and understand the idea of representation of Re-imagined India through the works of Jhumpa Lahiri. An has been made to compare and contrast the representations of the homeland and the host land in the thematic concerns and images invoked in her works. The chapter has also tried to examine how Lahiri has tried to unite her authorial sensibility with her historical past. The primary texts of Jhuma Lahiri studied for this objective were *The Namesake* and *Interpreter off Maladies*

The third chapter has tried to study the idea of representation of Re-imagined India in the works of Kiran Desai. This chapter has attempted to compare and contrast the representations of homeland and the host land in the thematic concerns and images invoked in her works. It has also tried to examine the impact of India as an identity marker on her literary aesthetics and imagination. The primary texts of Kiran Desai studied for this objective were *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*

The fourth chapter has tried to study the idea of representation of Re-imagined India in the works of Shauna Singh Baldwin through the comparative and contrastive analysis of representations of homeland and host land in the thematic concerns and images invoked in her works, and the impact India had on her consciousness, ideologies, psyche and sensibilities. The primary texts of Shauna Singh Baldwin studies for this objective were *The Selector of Souls* and *The Tiger Claw*.

The fifth chapter has tried to compare and contrast the various images of Reimagined India and to put them into perspective using the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks. The chapter has compared and contrasted the representations of homeland and host land in the thematic concerns and images invoked in above mentioned authors and their respective works to understand how India looms largely in their sensibilities.

Limitations of the Study:

The scope of this project as proposed has been about a concentrated focus on a specific number of authors and narratives only. Thus, it might have left out some of the popular voices in Diaspora literature, since this particular area of research has multitudes of voices and narratives with respect to its various historical time periods. However, this theses has tried to examine and re examine the thematic concerns of the selected authors and narratives who have been important voices and have their own versions of India in their imagination, thereby throwing concrete light on the variety of images regarding what India as their possible homeland seems to be as seen and shaping up in their narratives.

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