



Book Review

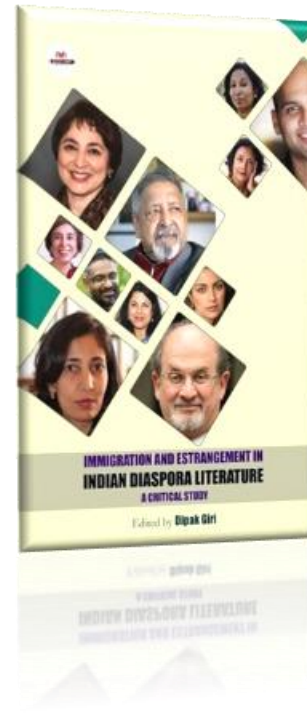
Immigration and Estrangement in Indian Diaspora Literature: A Critical Study

ISBN: 978-93-88963-43-5 Ed. Dipak Giri
AABS Publishing House. 2019

Reviewer

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The book *Immigration and Estrangement in Indian Diaspora Literature: A Critical Study* is one of the most interesting books edited by Dr. Dipak Giri, a prolific Indian writer and an editor from Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. To his credit, he has edited many books on various topics like Dalit literature, Women writings, Indian drama, Indian English novel, Indian English poetry, Subaltern perspectives etc. The present book is another volume of a compilation of fourteen insightful essays dealing with the situation of immigration and its representation through Indian Diasporic writings. For centuries together, migration, throughout the world, has become a common phenomenon. In the earlier times, for better survival conditions, migrations happened out of force, out of necessity; and in the later ages, with the advancement of civilization, it has become out of choice. In fact, many countries have accomplished their sustainable development with the positive contribution of migrants/immigrants from the other nations. Thus, some countries support immigrants in all aspects and some may not. As the process of migration throughout the world always result in suffering and humiliations, most of the migrants took writing as their medium to express their agony for the loss of identity. In literary terms these migrant people are being identified with the term 'Diaspora' to address several issues relating with social, political, economic, and even psychological elements. Mostly, Diasporic literature deals with the identity crisis of immigrants who struggle in the alien country to create their own space. Hence this literature has its roots

in the migration and displacement of people since the beginning of history. These forced migrations, sometimes voluntary migrations have shaped the narratives and themes of the Diasporic literature, in a large extent which reflect the torn lives of the people hanging between the alien territory and their home lands, often obliged to have a sense of loyalty towards the foreign nation. Thus, the Diasporic narratives always play a significant role in understanding the global dynamics in multiple aspects.

The painstaking efforts of Giri are evident in the meticulous compilation of the selective essays to make the readers to have a comprehensive understanding of Indian Diaspora. The 'Introduction' of the book written by Giri begins with detailing the origin of the word 'Diaspora', thus giving the glimpses of Jewish and Babylonian histories and also explaining of how the word 'Diaspora' broadened its scope by including the writings of other races who were unable to cling either to native or host cultures. He alludes to various works of this genre, written by the prominent writers like Dean Mahomet etc., as the early proponents of Indian Diaspora and also delineates some of the critical aspects as proposed by Indian postcolonial writers like Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, referring to their works *The Location of Culture*, *Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World*, respectively. While introducing each and every essay of the book, Giri ensures the reader that all the essays are the quintessence of immigration and diaspora which explains the problem of displacement and dislocation in detail. Entire book is said to be a repository of the analyses of various texts, presented by the professors and scholars from the institutions throughout India, thus depicting their scrupulous efforts in dealing with the works chosen.

In particular, the essay with the title, "Assertive Nature of Indian Women Immigrants as an Indispensable Outcome of Gender and Culture Oriented Restraints: A Study of Manju Kapur's *Immigrant* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Vine of Desire*" by D. Amalraj, examines the characters of women protagonists from both the texts. Nina from the *Immigrant* depicts a strong woman personality after being betrayed by her husband. Amalraj the essayist, analyses the inner pain of Nina when she realises the truth that she is an immigrant in Canada and when she was forced by her husband Anand to adapt with the lifestyle of this host culture by coming out of her native traditions. The essayist clearly depicts how Nina being a woman and an immigrant in an alien culture exhibits her bold traits to retain her own personality despite of her differences with Anand. Similarly, Amalraj's perusal of two friends Anju and Sudha from *The Vine of Desire* delves deep into woman's psyche which exemplifies their robust nature to overturn all the patriarchal dictates when they are identified with any gender biases, in order to establish their identity and independence. In this essay, Amalraj deeply evaluates the portrayal of the said women characters by referring to various insights by the writers and examines how these characters struggle with their status of immigrants by becoming the wives of immigrant men and also their scuffling to withdraw from their native customs in order to embrace the alien cultures.

The other essay ““Gulf Migration: “A Literary Representation of “Goat Days” by Benyamin”” presented by Malyashree Mandal begins with the line, “Creative writing or literature cannot exist in isolation from life’s intricacies” (35) which clearly depicts the role of literature in a society. The texts like *Goat Days* makes the readers to have an understanding of the pain of fellow human being who loses everything in one’s life without his fault, thereby becoming the victim of systemic flaws. The essay projects writer’s portrayal of the various phases in the life of the protagonist Najeeb which questions the existence of humanity and benevolence in this world. Though Najeeb becomes an immigrant by law when he entered Gulf, the circumstances made him to be a labourer and slave with mere animal like treatment. Whole essay examines the suffering and humiliation of Najeeb, finally becoming a refugee on the foreign land and how he succeeded in uniting with his family at the end. The essayist presents this essay by highlighting the problems of the immigrant workers especially who are flying to other countries for labour work, but unfortunately getting stuck by doing very menial jobs and depriving of basic human rights. Most of them are even ending their lives before they return to their homelands, thus failing to fulfil their dreams. Mandal with her deep analysis of immigrant problems in the essay ends it by suggesting some changes in the existing restrictions and policies of the Immigrant laws in India, thus expressing hope for the subsequent betterment in the lives of immigrants. The seriousness and victimization of the immigration and its authenticity were given an arduous examination in another essay, “Migrant Writers and the Question of Authenticity: A Study on Booker Prize-Winning Novels from India” by Dr. M. S. Veena. She probes into those Diasporic writings which have won the Man Booker Prize “one of the popular literary prizes in the English-speaking world” (58). She has selected four Booker prize winners of Indian Diaspora, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga and Kiran Desai for their novels, *Mid Night’s Children*, *The God of Small Things*, *The White Tiger* and *The Inheritance of Loss* respectively and tries to put forward the criticisms on these texts for their inauthenticity in presenting the soul of India. The essayist neither justifies nor negates the works of these writers but attempts to make the readers to understand the texts from the aspect of writers’ relationship with India as their immigrant status makes them to look into issues of the country as outsiders. Also, the language used by them is highly criticised as some expressions fail to represent the authentic regional connotations. Though these writers have won the prestigious Booker Prize for their writings, they cannot escape the severe criticism that they had presented India in their novels only to appease the western readers, thus highlighting the Orientalist notions eventually, resulting in the oversight of actual image of India. By highlighting the observations and bold criticisms of certain thinkers like Amitava Kumar, Namrata Chaturvedi, Kanchan Gupta, Sanjay Subrahmanyam etc., Dr. Veena provides broader insights to realize the actualities of the literary works, sometimes which are far away from the reality but had written only for the sake of popular awards.

Across the ages, colonization has become the common reason and background for most of the migrations. It is something which takes away one's identity, history, culture and sense of place; in turn forces the immigrants to acknowledge the dual, fragile and hyphenated identity. This sense of longing, belonging and detachment always haunts the memories of the expatriates. Editor of this volume Dr. Dipak Giri, deeply examines and interprets these predicaments of homelessness, exiled life, aimless journeys of the Indian Diaspora in his essay "Home and Away: Migrancy, Diasporicity and Identity in Select Novels of V.S. Naipaul". He has chosen Naipaul's most provocative works like *The Mimic Men*, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, *Half a Life* and *A Bend in the River* to examine how the constant sense of loss chases the protagonists of all these works. Most of them reflect the autobiographical elements of Naipaul who, being an immigrant gets caught between the cultures of India, Trinidad, and England and makes his works as a pathetic depiction of nostalgia, clumsiness and apprehensions of the uncertainty. This estrangement is the result of the colonial situation which made the colonised to perceive their culture, language and identity as inferior when compared to that of the colonisers'. The essayist makes it clear in his statement, "What all Third World people learn about themselves comes only through the European vision". It is again emphasized when he refers to Salim from *A Bend in the River* saying "Without Europeans, I feel, all our past would have been washed away". Also, loss of language is another reason for their estrangement as one's own native language is one's own identity. But the lack of proper knowledge of mother tongue results in the lack of expression which remains as a huge barrier to have an identity in the alien territories. Be it Salim, or Biswas, or Singh, or Willie, all of them suffer displacement from their native countries who get caught between their cultures and the Western culture, but unable to embrace either of them and thus struggling to create a third space of their own, as defined by Homi K. Bhabha. This essay projects this desperate struggle of the protagonists, in real Naipaul's, to have self-recognition and self-identity but fails to construct their own self. Thus, Giri explicates the seriousness in the crises of immigrations and immigrants by delving deep into the texts and lives of the protagonists and attempts to make the readers to understand what it means to be in foreign land without having proper identity and recognition.

In brief, this book justifies its title with the commendable efforts of the editor in compiling such intuitive essays wholly discussing and explaining about the problem of immigration and the estrangement of Diaspora within the context of India. What do people identify with? can be the most pertinent question in understanding the identity crisis of the people caught between the two cultures. Readers of this book can have a profound understanding of certain literary texts, who wants to know the realistic situations of the Indian Diaspora and hence it is worth reading with great insights.