



# DIASPORA AND LITERATURE

## AN INTRODUCTION

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# What is Diaspora?

- Literally means scattering
- Originally used when the jews were forced into exile in Babylon
- Now it stands for all kinds of migration – forced or voluntary

# Age of Migration

- Age of the Refugee – Albert Steiner
- New Nomad – Alvin Toffler
- Exile vs Migration – one is forced while the other is voluntary
- Reasons can be many – basically the need for betterment – monetary, intellectual or simply a more modern place to live

# The consequences of migration

- Not just a geographical journey
- It is a severing of the symbiotic bond with the homeland
- Loss of first hand knowledge of economic, political and social changes
- Current dialect , landscape and even climate
- Calls for re-orientation of the entire social being

# Themes in Diasporic writing

- Nostalgia for the homeland that exists only in memory
- Expatriate writers tend to sentimentalize the native landscape in a retrospective view

# Failed quests and thwarted dreams

- Journey motif predominates
- Search for home, identity, space and location usually ending in loss and failure
- House for Mr Biswas

# Intergenerational conflict

- As children grow up assimilated into the new culture and reject parental efforts to preserve connection with their past.
- the children integrate on their own terms and this leads to familial tension

# Marital conflict

- spouses differently adapt to the new or imagined standards of the new culture.
- Dimple in Bharathi Mukerjee's **Wife** is an example of this. Though married to an educated and liberated man, she is not able to strike a balance between the two juxtaposed worlds: the one she left behind and the other she has come to live in. She is so much frustrated with life that the use of words like loyalty, suffering and pain, on her husband's part have lost all meaning and instead, she starts fantasizing the act of murdering her husband.



# Experience of racism

- Diasporic writing catalogues the experience of racism with its accompanying sense of rejection and humiliation
- Bharathi Mukerjee's experience

# Misreading the new cultural environment

- The effect of Culture shock
- No New Land – M G Vassanji
- The Rink – Cyril Dabydeen

# “Fitting In”

- Attempts, sometimes tragic, sometimes humorous to fit in or assimilate into the adopted culture
- Sarosh in Rohinton Mistry’s *Squatter*

# Use of Nationalistic Metaphors

- Attempts to invoke the myths and symbols of the past
- Vasantha in Markandeya's The Nowhere Man has a bottle of water from the Ganges and a handful of Indian soil.

# The Third Space

- Some writers move beyond the protest/nostalgia syndrome and create narratives that are set in a neutral or third space.
- Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is set in the backdrop of the II world war

# Important writers--- British

- Salman Rushdie
- Midnight's Children – Saleem and Chutney
- Shame – rewriting Pakistani History
- Satanic Verses – Gibreel Farishta's jump
- Shalimar the Clown – Kashmir

# Others..

- Hanif Kureshi
- Monica Ali
- Gurindher Chadha

# American

- Jhumpa Lahiri
- The Interpreter of Maladies deals with marital conflicts, generational gaps and problems of assimilation
- The Namesake
- Unaccustomed Earth



# Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

- The Mistress of Spices
- Sister of My Heart
- Exoticising Indian culture and creating stereotypes

# Bharathi Mukerjee

- Wife
- Jasmine
- The Tiger's Daughter
- All are typical of the diasporic genre

# The Desai's

- Anitha Desai
- Kiran Desai
- Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard
- The Inheritance of Loss

# Amitav Ghosh

- Probably one of the most powerful immigrant writers
- The Shadow Lines – indian history
- The Glass Palace – Burmese history
- The Calcutta Chromosome – historical sci fi novel
- The Hungry Tide – life in the sunderbans

# Vikram Seth

- The Golden Gate – novel in verse form written in Onegin Stanzas
- A Suitable Boy – one of the longest contemporary novels, dealing with post independence India

# Canadian

- So many to list
- Uma Parameswaran – poet and dramatist
- M G Vassanji – novelist
- Shyam Selvadurai – sri lankan gay novelist
- Joy kogawa – japanese canadian
- Michael Ondaatje – Sri Lankan novelist and poet
- Mordecai Richler – jewish writer



**THANKS**

**BEST OF LUCK**

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