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Diasporic revelations in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*

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Abstract

Is Diaspora a Bane or Boon? Diaspora as we all know is a physical displacement of a person from one place to another. The displacement which occur is psychological also which lead to alienation, otherness, identity crisis, nostalgia, language barriers and on the other hand it also lead to reveal some unrevealed truths. Thus, the present paper will discuss the experiences of

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## Diasporic revelations in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*

Matteo and Sophie as immigrants in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* as it on the other hand symbolizes the search for fundamental truth of life.

**Key words:** Diaspora , Identity crisis, Alienation, Immigration, Spiritual transformation.

To know other countries is not to belittle but enlarge our own country and help it to a greater power of its being.

Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Poetry*

Is Diaspora a Bane or Boon? In the wake of globalization, diaspora has grown by leaps and bounds and it is dispersal from original homeland. The term has been used for people like expatriates, immigrants, exiles, refugees and other ethnic minorities. We can also say that diaspora is not only a physical displacement but also a psychological displacement which lead to alienation, identity crisis, nostalgia, language barriers and on the other hand lead to reveal some unrevealed truths. It is a continuous form of formation and reformation. Satendra Nandan writes

“Diasporic identities are those which  
are constantly producing and reproducing  
themselves a new through transformation  
and differences.”

Immigration in a present era, as a need or a right has lead to creation of Diasporas. In fact, one can make a fairly distinction between the forced and unforced diaspora. In this era, we decide to leave the land of our own birth due to different opportunities or we can due to economic, academic or personal reasons, in the case of forced or unwilling we can see in the history as in case of Jews and hundreds of thousands of Africans were forced to move to another country, eg U.S without having any say or choice of their own.

In the galaxy of writers, there exists a group of women writers who also have emerged as significant voices of the global Indian diaspora. Indian women writes such as Meena Alaxender, Bharti Mukherjee, Sujata Bhatta, Suniti Namjoshi, Uma Parmeswaran, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri are the ones who articulate their voices as consciousness of diasporic wives, daughters and minority.

The present paper focuses on experiences of immigrants as projected in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*. In *Journey to Ithaca*, Anita Desai makes use of spiritual anguish or quest of westerns to show the uncertainty of the diasporic experience.

The connection between religion and diaspora was there virtually from the beginning. Man in the pursuit of his/her spiritual fulfillment move from one place to another. With the increased pace of connectivity, the one community can maintain its contact with other principal communities like Jews with Jerusalem, Sikhs with Amritsar, Muslims with Mecca and soon as a west with the east.

As Zoroastrians continue to migrate

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around the world not only in a greater  
number but also and perhaps more  
significantly, in a greater proportion  
...extinction of the world's oldest  
prophetic religion.

As Hinnells explains, some Zoroastrians are more positive about the future; for, just as they accept that the move from Persia to India in response to Muslim persecution was a necessary survival strategy. The novel *Journey to Ithaca* was published in 1995 when Anita Desai herself experiences the third space which manifest an unsettled hybrid location, a displacement. In this novel, the main three characters experience the diasporic conditions; they are Matteo, Sophie and Laila. Matteo and Sophie is a couple who after marriage come to India, They are travelers and remain travelers all through, physically as well as mentally. Matteo, an Italian by birth and Sophie a German are placed in India, Desai seems to have inverted her own diaspora and by drawing from her own homeland India, she has tried to see life as a continuous quest, an unending journey.

Matteo longs for India, in order to fulfill his desire, spiritual pursuit. He become a seeker and for him place doesn't matter .East is believed from the past that it is a place of spiritual well being. India, a land full of divine energy and all over the India there are large number of

manifestations that are significant for spiritual pursuit, he become a seeker, after what the mother terms “honey”,

“the honey made from the spiritual

nectar , nectar to nourish your soul”(p-118).

The lines above mean the nectar of the spirit which enlightened us, on the other hand Sophie a practical women, she remains a skeptic till the end when she decides to join her husband in his spiritual journey.

Matteo is one who is satisfied with the conditions and the turmoil’s of the life, he never retaliated or say any word about India. Matteo is physically, mentally as well as emotionally satisfied with the conditions that are around him, he never retaliates, place never matters for him, he never even thinks where he is or where he was.

“Sophie refused to eat in the veranda

and went to sit on the steps behind

the kitchen where a pack of stray

dogs lived by licking the...and

spitting them out to the steps. (77)

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Sophie is one of who experience all the turmoil's and tortures, she finds. According to her, India a place full of dirt and dust. The dilemma of diasporic experiences is experienced by Sophie. She is alienated and confused personality. The physically journey from Italy to India becomes a torture for her, she is one who props into the mother past (laila) in order to find out the truth. She wonders from one place to another in order to get information about her past and finally, she decides to follow Matteo in his spiritual journey. She yearned for Matteo's physical presence and Matteo started rejecting it by saying

“If you and I know ecstasy for a second,  
the ecstasy of the Mother's love  
lasts and lasts, it has no end'... you are  
a destroyer. You will destroy me.”(142).

Sophie rejected all his philosophy mockingly, covering up her ears and shouting,

“The Absolute, the soul, the Supreme Supra  
this and Supra that. Don't use those words,  
I am sick of them. They are non-words.”

(143).

At last, they both are in a consciousness in search of the spiritual homeland. Thus, we can say an important component of diasporic literature is the search of own identity, selfhood in the twilight world between two culture, that of the homeland and of the adopted land the space between the two worlds, the third world, as term by Homi Bhabha gives the writer an objectivity of an outsider as well as the immediacy of the experience of the insider. There may be fear in the mind of Sophie that she can never be accepted by the host society and she will remain partly separate.

Cultural displacement and identity crisis are two main factors which surround Sophie. Identity crisis leads to all sufferings as she is not able to integrate herself with in the surroundings of India, everywhere she goes , she think herself of being beyond everything. She inhibits an intervening space, which always disintegrate her. Things are more confused for her. But, it is conceivably time for Sophie to think about the seeming soundness, completeness and unity of cultures, and also to inspect the populations which are apparently disparate, removed or separated from mainstream society.

It is a boon as displacement of a person from one place to another lead to the maturation of a person. Coming from one culture and getting lost in another culture lead to the growth and transformation. Everyday interactions widen our outlook as an identity. All these cultural, linguistic, environmental changes, new relationships should be taken in a positive way and should be enjoyed by the person instead of thinking of the past. One should live in the present to enjoy the essence of life. The “past-present” becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*).

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In the novel Matteo as boy was different or rather a failure from the worldly angle , clumsy at games, uninterested in academics, closed in social gathering, he becomes a problematic child for his dotting parents. Herman Hesse's journey to east sparks of his pench men for east, a spiritual India. After his marriage he comes to India with Sophie. Matteo is mute but according to Sophie they follow a period of disappointment depression, illness and uncertainty as the two span the length and the breath of the country from dirty hotel to the dubious ashrams.

“This whole country was  
populated with devotees,  
the gods could not have  
enough now they recruited  
them from abroad as well.”

In this Desai, has presented stereotypical, negative pictures of India for the western readers. Jasbir Jain categories such as “ethnic trap” as “exotic” and states that such a plot” enchases on mark ability of the homeland.

Anita Desai is one who is more successful in revealing of the diasporic trauma through the character of Sophie than through Matteo, she goes through intense diasporic experiences. She is having myth about the homeland for the Matteo, everything is normal but for Sophie everything is abnormal. However, the journey is complicated out Sophie make it more complicated by creating tensions.

As an outsider, she sees the death of a child at the end of the pilgrimage which according to her is because of faith in God, instead of that there should be treatment, the futility of the hippy life, the Mother's hold on the psyche of her devotees. Even her husband is one of them and the dubious past of the Mother, all these are causing sufferings in her life. Sophie remains a traveler with Matteo but she is not with his spiritual quest. When Matteo does not fulfill her desire she nags him, quarrels with him and make things unbearable for his existence. Sophie nurses Matteo when he is ill, takes care of him. They are having two children; she sends them to their grandparents in order to have a better life. She does not want them to grasp the footsteps of their father. Sophie has maintained the concept of idealized homeland; she continues to relate to that homeland and their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity. Sophie is doubly suppressed, first she is a women and other that she herself feel that she is 'other'. We can also call her subaltern as she in the early chapters of the novel is unable to connect herself.

Again Sophie became cynical; she wanders from one country to another in order to dig the Mother's past. She travelled to Paris, Venice, New York and Bombay collecting the detail and facts about The Mother Lila. Sophie hated her air to her because she was keeping Matteo away from her. Sophie's quest or desire is dominated by her own passions. Sophie is a journalist by profession. She tries hard to prove her western superiority over India, but fails to prove it.

Matteo is obsessed with spiritual knowledge while Sophie's rationalistic, materialistic position denies her. Spiritually, a pious journey cannot be administered in any one, nor salvation be attained superficially but the spirit and the body has to work hard to achieve it. Sophie in the middle of the novel turns to her homeland for stability and belongingness as a return movement or intermitted visit to home. In India, she experiences Diaspora's typical problem of identity. The question of belongingness verses her so acutely that she often branches the subject of leaving

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India. Ego is one of the destructive elements which infers us, good is something which satisfies our ego and bad is what that does not satisfy our ego, the western superiority has occupied her thoughts and which always create a hindrance.

“When you are well, Matteo we will  
leave. Later in exasperation, she snaps  
at him, “Couldnot we stay in our country?  
To die there”.(P-5)

Everything in India traumatizes her. She is unable to belong her but when she goes back nothing belong there to her, there is something missing out for her. She is unable to relate herself to Italy, this happens because she discovers that place does not matter. Thus, Desai in this novel lead to rediscover self-identity, to live through their inner voice, to manifest themselves and have their self discovery. We can say that Desai has brought out self – fulfillment through journey. Journey sometimes leads people to a new path and ultimately helps them to frame a new life for themselves. Roman philosopher Seneca has rightly said that “Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind”. (qtd. In Das, 56)

*Journey to Ithaca* symbolizes the search for fundamental truth of life as Matteo is one who strive to find higher meaning in a strange world. On the other hand Sophie is the victim of alienation and is tightly trapped in the hands of identity and loneliness. She feels India as a horrible cage to live in but somehow in the end through her inner awareness she decided to

follow her husband's footsteps. The essence of joy that they both uphold in the last , leads to – Know Oneself. Thus, *Journey to Ithaca* is a spiritual journey to one's inner self. The journey gives wisdom and knowledge, which is two great things which we have to inculcate our self .The journey, is important and it is far beyond any material pursuit. This is beyond everything. Thus, we can conclude by saying that this diasporic experience lead to self identity, discovery of a self, which lead to salvation for the inner self. So, this journey bring into limelight inner spiritual truths which are very joy giving and blissful and this transformation is self – manifesting and peace giving for Matteo as well as Sophie and they brought out the proposal that journey gives a new sense to one's life.

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