

Imitaz Dharkar, Minority: An Experience of Forging an Identity through Creative Expression

N. Albansin Viviliya

Assistant Professor of English, St. John's College (SF), Palayamkottai, India

Abstract

Literature is a written material such as poetry, novels, essays especially works of imagination characterized by excellence of style and expression and by themes of general or enduring interest. When it comes to Poetry, the poet acts as an observer, describing what he has seen or heard. He brings his own reflections upon what he has seen or heard. Diaspora (from the Greek word for scattering) refers to the dispersion of a people from their homeland. The authors of diaspora literature express their own life outside their native land. The term identifies a distinctive work of geographic origins. There is a distinct between exile and diaspora. The difference between exile and diaspora depends on the representation of book toward the homeland and toward the migration. Exile is a process of forced migration and the freshness of the experience of leaving the homeland. Exiled people have a mindset and a desire to return to their homeland. In contrast, diaspora is a process of living away from the homeland and a sense that it is possible to live and even thrive in the adopted country. Diasporic literature is a reflective of the ancestral native land, may be the longing for their homeland is lessened but it is not disappeared in the minds of the writers. In diasporic literature, there may be the possibilities of new location. Therefore, it may be written after the Babylonian exile by Jews who chose not to return. Diasporic people maintain themselves as a community of distinct identity and consider themselves as a Minority.

KEYWORDS: Minority, Experience, Forging, Identity, Creative Expression

Migration occurs for various reasons and particularly in India, it is governed by historical, political, economic situations and also the better prospects like marriage and higher studies. The chief characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt. The diasporic writings also known as the 'theory of migrancy' helps generate aesthetic evaluation, multicultural identity and help the rise of a new hybridity. Indian Diasporic writings help in many ways and it helps in connecting the entire globe. Diasporic literature aids in the circulation of information and in answering many issues too. Diasporic opinion helps to break through the past alienation and isolation which caused much injustice and abuse of human rights.

Imtiaz Dharkar describes herself as a Scottish, Calvinist Muslim. She was born in Pakistan, raised in Glasgow, and now lives between London and Mumbai. Her poetry is a product of the convergence of the cultures of three countries which are called by her as a home. As a post modern South Asian poet, Dharkar writes about her diasporic experience in her poems. Being a writer with multicultural identity, Dharkar writes to explore and find out her identity through her subjectivity. The poetry of Dharkar include the anthologies like *Purdah* (1989), *Postcards from God* (1997), *I speak for The Devil* (2001), *The Terrorist at My Table* (2006) and *Leaving Fingerprints* (2009). The poem *Minority* is from the anthology *Postcards from God*

and it shows the various layers of the experience of migration. The poem articulates what it is to be a foreigner, to not belong anywhere. The poet expresses her sense of frustration being an outcast because of her multicultural identity.

This paper explores the themes of diasporic writing like alienation, identity crisis and multicultural identity through the poem, *Minority*. The act of writing is a means of self-definition. The speaker selects writing as an act of creating an identity. This poem explicates the two kinds of experiences. They are the feeling of alienation due to migration and the experience of creating an identity through creative expression that is through the writing. A psychosocial state or condition of disorientation and role confusion occurring especially in adolescents as a result of conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures, and expectations and often producing acute anxiety. Here in this poem, one can view the quest for identity even in the first two lines, "I was born a Foreigner. I carried on from there to become a foreigner everywhere". These lines challenge the idea of the readers about the term native. If someone is born in a country, one is considered as the native of that country. But these lines say that 'born a Foreigner'. This creates some sort of confusion in the minds of the readers that how can one be born a foreigner. However, the speaker claims to be born a foreigner and therefore becomes a foreigner in every place she goes. The poet expresses her frustration of being an outcast in her own family. In the second stanza, Dharkar show her disappointments of not having a particular identity and also not knowing the history of her identity.

All kinds of places and groups
of people who have an admirable
history would, almost certainly,
distance them, selves from me.

In these lines, one can understand that the poet has no knowledge about her identity and also her concern on knowing the history of her identity. Alienation is a withdrawing or separation of a person or an affection of person from an object or position of former attachment. Alienation has demonstrated its recurrent power in literature. Whether alienation results from estrangement of characters from their true selves, or from their cultural heritage, or from society, the thematic concern has been used successfully by many contemporary American writers to study the relationship between an individual of true and false identities, between assimilation and cultural heritage, and between the individual and society. Dharkar is alienated by her relatives as the tubers among the maize and sugarcane. She is a stranger among her own family members. She remains isolated even in the presence of her family. In the first stanza,

I went, even in the place
planted with my relatives,
six-foot tubers sprouting roots,
their fingers and faces pushing up
new shoots of maize and sugar cane.

Here, one can realise the pathetic situation of the poet as an alien for not being the native of her own family, It is only known that a person who is migrated to

somewhere will be treated as an alien by the society. But here in this poem, the speaker is alienated even by her own family members. Cultural alienation is the process of abandoning one's own culture or cultural background. The cultural differences of the speaker are presented in two ways. One is, Dharkar identifies herself as a badly translated poem which has lost its originality and the other is, she compares herself as a food with pungent taste of neem or cardamom in a food cooked with milk. One can analyse the third stanza in the perspective of Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism means the society with various cultures. People of different ethical, religious, and colour backgrounds living in one society. The multicultural identities of Dharkar are picturized as the multiple flavours in cooking. Some tastes would not blend with other tastes easily, there will be atleast an unexpected taste. Like the unexpected taste, the poet is also culturally alienated. In the third stanza,

I don't fit,
like a clumsily-translated poem;
like food cooked in milk of coconut
where you expected ghee or cream.
the unexpected aftertaste
of cardamom or neem.

The poet connects the unfamiliarity of taste to the language she speaks. As a foreigner, she has difficulties with the language of her native land. The accents and words of her own mother tongue are alien to her. The image of 'tongue' is used as a weapon that describes the linguistic deficiency of the poet and also as the organ of speech. Dharkar compares her identity with the native language proficiency and thus she vies herself as an outsider.

As Tom Morris said, an art of writing is the art of finding out what we believe. It is so applicable for the writing of Imitaz Dharkar. It is here in the last two stanzas, the poet challenges the notions of her alienation, identity crisis, multicultural identity by creating an identity through writing. She believes that only writing can define who she is. So she transformed her wound of migration into the paper on which she writes the experience of alienation. However, she chooses the creative act of writing to define herself. In the fifth stanza,

And so I scratch, sratch
through the night, at this
growing scab on black on white.
Everyone has the right
to infiltrate piece of paper.

The speaker says that the paper is not prejudiced because she is different, it offers her a space to examine her alienation. The act of writing is imagined as a probing scars of isolation, hostility and differences she has experienced all her life. The lines in the poem which was written by her representing the painful memory of estrangement, lead her to the minds of the reader and there she creates the relationship with her readers. In the fifth stanza,

A page doesn't fight back.
And, who knows, these lines
may scratch their way
into your head -

Dharkar uses the image of immigrants to explicate how her writings travel into the minds and lives of the readers. Those writings reside in the heart of the readers as

a refugee, but one day the reader recognises the poet as their own native. Thus the poet shows that the reading is the process of analysing the point of view of the readers over a period of time. Every reader, according to the poet is an outsider until they understand the poet. In the final stanza,

until, one day, you meet
the stranger sidling down your street,
realise you know the face
simplified to bone,
look into its outcast eyes
and recognise it as your own.

Thus the poet, Imitaz Dharker asks the reader to be the part of her art of writing to define herself to the society. As Virginia Woolf said, Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works. The poem explores the own experience of the poet as a migrant with multicultural identity. Through her writing, the poet discovers the identity in the minds of her readers. Though she was alienated for not knowing the history of her identity, now she has written her own history in the heart of the readers through the lines of her poem. She emphasis her identity as a writer. She proved that the writing can create a great impact in the society. Atlast her act of writing has brought her a definition of herself.

Work Cited

"Alienation as a Literary Theme - Thematic Significance" Society and Self, Critical Representations in Literature Ed. David Peck. eNotes.com, Inc. 1997eNotes.com 7 Mar, 2019, www.enotes.com/topics/alienation-literary-theme#in-depth-thematic-significance

"Alienation|Definition of Alienation", Merriam-Webster, 1828, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alienation

"Cultural alienation: a glance", Kaav Publications, 2016, www.kaavpublications.org/journals/journal-5/article/article-443.pdf

"Diaspora Literature - Bible Odyssey", Society of Biblical Literature, 2018, www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/diaspora-literature

"Diaspora Literature with Special Reference to the Indian English Literature", onlinerose, 30 Mar. 2013, www.bengalstudents.com/blogs/onlinerose/diaspora-literature-special

"Imtiaz Dharker - Literature", British council, 2019, literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/imtiaz-dharker

"Identity crisis dictionary definition | identity crisis defined", Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2011, www.yourdictionary.com/identity-crisis

"Multiculturalism - Wikipedia", en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism

South Asian Literature in English, an anthology. Edited by S.Annapoorni. Chennai: mainSpring publishers, 2018.