

DIASPORA: THE KALEIDOSCOPIC TRANSPOSE OF IDENTITY IN M.G. VASSANJI'S *AMRIKA*

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Diaspora has become a very common term dealing with people and their issues of migration. Migration means moving from one country or locality to another in order to achieve better job opportunities or to fulfill other aims. Every migration leaves some memory that stores and remembers information and moments. Memory plays a vital role when someone recollects it in their mind as it reflects the past, present and future. The present research paper attempts to discuss diaspora and examines the role of social, economic and political factors in creating one's identity. As diaspora is just a concept, but it is the individual person who migrates and hence develops himself as diasporic identity.

Keywords: Diaspora, Cultural identity, Connections, Hybridity, Ambivalent.

Everyone is represented in this world by their cultural identity which is one's shared culture. It may have some connections or some differences; and it can also be transformed with the change of time. It is a very important aspect in Diaspora as it changes from person to person and it is not fixed. Cultural identity has its essence with memory, migration, connections, myth as it can be made and remade with it. It constructs but also loses its originality thus becomes hybrid and in the end person is torn between the two and wants to make a return either physically or literally

A person's identity is a complex product of experiences, beliefs, personal interactions, behaviours, engagements with space and place, and attachment to things. All these are shaped by emotional states, memory and imagination. One of the central points for the construction of self identity is the home. Identity is not transparent, it is always in process and never complete. According to Stuart Hall there are two ways of thinking about cultural identity. First defines cultural identity in terms of one's, shared culture, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. As first deals with similarity the second point deals with differences: it states that there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or 'what we have become'.

Identity is always a temporary and unstable effect of relations which define identities by marking differences. Identity is a structured way of showing who you are, and you can only see the good in it through the "eye of the negative." Before it can assemble itself, it must first pass through the "eye of the needle" of the other. So it clears the notion that one cannot talk about anything in detail about one side for a long without characterising it with the other side. 'Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It comes from somewhere, have histories. Brent Hayes Edwards in his essay "The Uses of Diaspora" – draws an image of a joint of the body. It is a place of connection, where different parts of the body are joined together, but also a place of separation. Ultimately, 'it is only difference- the separation between bones or members- that allows movement'.

Ramji, an East African student from Dar-es-Salaam, came to the United States in 1968 to study with his friend Sona but became immersed in anti-war protests and spiritual pursuits.

In odd circumstances, Ramji's ancestors relocated from India to East Africa. The older generation moved involuntarily, but the younger generation was compelled to move because of better opportunities. Ramji had ventured out of his hometown for the first time. He got in touch with his roommate Shawn, his friend Sona, his mentor Darcy, and the riot activist Lucy. When Ramji arrived in America, everyone was concerned about the possibility of a third global war. America was considerably different from Dar in terms of culture, politics, social structure, and economics, according to Ramji. Students at universities support the war. Ramji was eager to begin a new life and filled with excitement.

He got close to Ginnie and regretted his actions as a result of their relationship. Ramji met his roommate Shawn Hennessy there, and the two got into a discussion about war and its consequences. Shawn was a supporter of the war and a member of the SDS group. Ramji was persuaded by Shawn, who also joined in on the demonstration and participated in anti-revolutionary activities. Ramji received a warning from the dean and head of the university about engaging in similar cases. Ramji moved to America with his wife Zuli, and the couple had two children while all of Ramji's revolutionary friends disappeared into a busy and comfortable life. After four years, Ramji met Rumina at Jamila's party and became close with her, divorcing Zuli in the process. He often feels responsible for the destruction of his loving family.

The editor of the political magazine *Inqualab*, Darcy, offered an invitation for him to join his company. There he met Michel, a stranger who had arrived in *Inqualab* and sought refuge at Ramji's residence. At first, it was assumed that he was innocent, but subsequently, it became clear that he was responsible for the uprisings in Zanzibar; after Darcy looked into that matter, he was found to be responsible for the bombing. After confessing his guilt and being persuaded to give himself up, Michel later took Rumina captive to escape. Then, though, in front of Rumina, he shot himself. Rumina went to the hospital as a result of this horrific suicide. After being released, Rumina leaves Ramji alone. Ramji looks for Rumina, but when he discovers no sign of her, he too decides to leave the area and live alone with his memories of the past in the hope that Rumina will come back.

Vassanji has preserved history using his memory. Ramji, the primary character, is constantly looking for his identity. He is the victim who took a huge risk and lost everything, including his friends, girlfriends, wife, and children, and who ultimately feels isolated. He is a man of shifting circumstances, constantly seeking tranquillity. His memories attempt to connect him to both the old and new worlds, luring him into political and sexual pleasure. He becomes alienated, ambivalent, and hybrid.

The novel is set in three sections named: Schrodinger's Cat with eleven chapters; A Grand Reunion with eight chapters and Phantom Obsessions with fourteen chapters. In each section, the narrator narrates his story from childhood till now. Vassanji has given such names to the sections because there is a link between the sections' titles and the protagonist's life.

The first section, Schrodinger's Cat, is a thought experiment in quantum mechanics. It illustrates a paradox of quantum position. In quantum mechanics, Schrodinger's cat is a psychological test representing a mystery of quantum superposition. In the psychological test, a hypothetical cat might be viewed as, at the same time, both alive and dead because of its destiny being connected to an odd subatomic occasion that could or could not possibly happen. Ramji's situation somehow links with this theory as he thinks about himself and his grandmother. "He realized that to his grandmother back home, who could have no idea as to what exactly was happening to him, he would be very much like a Schrodinger's cat" (Amriika 39).

At the start of the first section, Vassanji mentioned a few lines of the famous short story of Joseph Conrad. "Youth" is a short story that depicts a young man's first journey to the East. It deals with romance and disillusionment; also, there is trials, tribulation, and survival throughout life. It negotiates between the powered issues that are idealism v/s realism. Ramji had also made his first step outside his hometown. This section covers the starting phase of Ramji's life in America from 1968 to 1970. During these years, he made contact with several people who were important to him. His friend Sona with whom he reached America, and his mentor Mr. Darcy, said, "There's nothing more important than your education. Go and get it wherever you find it. See the world and learn from it" (Amriika 274). He made his visions clear to study when he was afraid to leave his country because of the murder of Mr. Kennedy and also because his Grand grandmother would be alone here in Africa.

Then the riot activist Lucy Anne Miller and his roommate Shawn were in the Youth hostel at Harvard Square. In this part, only Ramji makes several love affairs with Ginnie Morris, Lyris Unger, Jamila, and Zuli. This section is based on Ramji's youth, feelings, and the moments that will never come back. Ramji arrives in America with his friend Sona when the threat of the third world war revolving everywhere. Both reached America away from the politically unsafe atmosphere of Tanzania, quite hopeful and enthusiastic for their futures. However, once they arrived, they faced an unknown world far from what they had dreamt of back home in Tanzania. America was culturally, politically, socially, and economically very different from where they have come from.

The second section is named A Grand Reunion, in which Ramji meets with all his old friends at a party, which will be a grand reunion for all of them. This section starts with the quote "what revels are in hand?" (Amriika 171) from A Midsummer Night's Dream, a comedy written by William Shakespeare in 1595/96.

It portrays the events surrounding the marriage of Theseus, the Duke of Athens, to Hippolyta (the former queen of the Amazons). This comedy deals with love scenes, and there is a play within the play, and in the end, there is the reunion of all the love couples. Here in this novel section, the grand reunion also deals with love scenes; there is a reunion of friends, and some traces of play within the play are formed with the help of Rumina's edited poem story.

The third section, Phantom Obsessions, deals with all kinds of phantom thoughts in which Ramji overthinks about those moments of his life which exist only in his thoughts. He is found obsessed with his memories of the past. At the starting of this section, Vassanji mentioned a quote from Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Possessed*- "the fire is in the minds of men and not in the roofs of houses" (Amriika 267), which means that it's the mind behind every action which instigates or triggers the body to perform. The given quote is true in the sense of Bhabha who visualizes in *The Location of Culture* that the influence of multiple cultures brings in the mind of immigrants as "a kind of tension between their identity stasis and the demand for its change and mimicry makes a compromise to the tension" (88). *The Possessed* is a confused and violent novel that deals with the consequences of the political and moral nihilism prevalent in Russia in the 1860s. There is a conflict between good and evil. This section reveals how Ramji is confused and listens to his mind in all his actions, bringing a nihilistic approach to his life and desolating him.

Diaspora is used to define as the movement of people away from their own country. Old Diaspora was the forced resettlement due to expulsion, coercion, slavery, racism, or war especially nationalist conflicts. Like the dispersion and the scattering of the Jews in the world. But now there is a change in the view of diaspora and its meaning and nowadays it applies to all the displaced people who are willingly or unwillingly moving from one place to other. "Diaspora links identity to spatial location and identifications, to histories of alternative cosmopolitanisms and diasporic networks" (Gay & Hall 1995). It is the history and memory which relates to past events as well as the home, discovery, collection, organization, presentation and interpretation of information about these events. Diaspora identities are those that continually produce and reproduce themselves via transformation and distinction.

According to Gay & Hall the migrations of modern times... have transplanted themselves according to some social, religious, economic or political determination, or some peculiar mixture of these.... The people only brought a portion of the entire culture with them, so the culture that emerges on the new soil must be perplexing both alike and different from the parent culture. It will occasionally be complicated by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration. In this way, peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash appear (56).

This 'part' culture, this partial culture, it is indeed something like culture's in-between', baffling both alike and different. Partial culture is formed when one tries to adopt others culture but is unable to leave his previous culture of his ancestors. This creates a situation of hybridity and multiculturalism which is a new transcultural form that arises from cross-cultural exchange. Multiculturalism states for the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism... it celebrates and seeks to promote cultural variety.

The... hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented... but is also double-linguaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousness, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, consciousness, two epochs... that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance... it is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms...such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words. (Qtd in Gay & Hall 58)

American literary critic, George Steiner believes that the century that is coming to close is not only the century of exile but it is the century of multiple identities. Everyone here is physically separated from something. In this age of globalization a type of communication with each and everyone uses has led to a situation where there comes a problem of cultural interpollination. Everyone is interrupted by this. That's why Rushdie says we need to celebrate "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs"; we need to rejoice "in mongrelization and the absolutism of the pure. Melange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world" (1991). It is the great possibility which mass migration gives the world. It creates a situation where person become

ambivalent and his mind flickers between different views and is seen conflicted between varieties. He tries to adopt ‘this’ and wish to gain ‘that’.

Diasporic persons usually have the afflictions, isolation and insecurity of living in a foreign place. They are commonly seen as victims of displacement rather than as active agents shaping their own lives. According to Avtar Brah the “diaspora experience is not only about memories of the past or a sense of displacement and dislocation; it is closely linked to the idea of location and identity” (2002). Stuart Hall talks about a connection that can be made, unmade and remade. He deals with the notions of continuity, similarity and authenticity which are in opposition as well interrelated.

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