

# Diaspora Literature: A Comprehensive Analysis of Key Elements and Theoretical Frameworks<sup>1</sup>

\*Mr. Kiran Sampat Patil, \*\*Dr. P.N. Gore

\*(Ph.D) Research Scholar, Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur

\*\*Research Guide, Dr. P.N. Gore, HOD, Department of English, Smt. K.W.College, Sangli.

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## ABSTRACT:

Migrations have been a consistent aspect of human history since ancient times, and these movements have given rise to what is now known as Diaspora literature. This genre revolves around the experiences of groups of people who have migrated from their homeland to another country, maintaining political, social, and economic ties with their place of origin. Such journeys often bring forth a range of challenges, including feelings of alienation, nostalgia, encounters with different cultures, and a profound longing for the homeland. In the contemporary era, Diaspora literature continues to fascinate both readers and writers. It now encompasses a broader spectrum of topics, including the impact of recent events like the Corona Pandemic and instances of warfare that have forcibly displaced populations. These modern events have become significant catalysts for migrations and subsequently form the foundation for new waves of Diaspora literature. This paper aims to delve into several key elements and theories that underpin the concept of Diaspora. It will explore the intricate dynamics of migration, shedding light on the various ways in which individuals and communities navigate their identities, connections, and emotions as they adapt to new environments. By examining these fundamental aspects, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving nature of Diaspora literature in our contemporary world.

**Keywords:** *Migration; diaspora; nostalgia; catalysts; alienation; pandemic; dynamics; longing for motherland; cross culturalism.*

## INTRODUCTION:

The term "Diaspora" finds its origins in Greek history and civilization. Its etymology can be traced back to the Greek verb 'diasperein', signifying the act of scattering or sowing, coupled with the Greek preposition 'dia', meaning through or over. Early studies predominantly associate the Jewish experience with the archetype of both exile and Diaspora. This connection was primarily established to document the exile of the Jews subsequent to the Babylonian dispersal in 586 BC. In contemporary times, the concept of Diaspora has expanded to encompass any substantial community from a specific nation residing outside its borders, while also sharing a common bond that contributes to their ethnic identity. These communities strive to establish themselves in new territories, making concerted efforts to integrate with foreign cultures. This phenomenon is witnessing continuous growth, evolving into an overarching term that encompasses various disciplines within literature and philosophy.

## Objectives:

1. To study the significant elements of Diaspora literature.
2. To study the classical and contemporary theories of Diaspora literature.

## METHODOLOGY:

The present paper studies interpretative, descriptive, as well as analytical point of view of the significant elements of Diaspora. The researcher has meticulously gathered data from both primary and secondary sources, employing a

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multifaceted approach to understanding the pivotal elements within the realm of Diaspora. The researcher has also studied and read selected papers and searched information on internet related to the topic.

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

Diaspora is a process in which group of people migrate from one nation to another. There are many thinkers and philosophers who have defined characteristic features of Diaspora. According to Cohen, a Diaspora group must have the following characteristics:

- (i) The dispersal of the group must be the result of a traumatic experience, a pursuit of work or trade, and colonial ambitions.
- (ii) A commitment to the homeland's maintenance, restoration, safety, prosperity, and even in some cases its creation.
- (iii) A group consciousness sustained over a long period of time including a sense of empathy and solidarity with other members of the group in the host land.
- (iv) A potential for contribution to the host land when a tolerance for pluralism is present.

These are the basic traits used to examine whether the group is actually diasporas in nature or not. Let us discuss some of the important elements of Diaspora literature.

### ELEMENTS OF DIASPORA:

- **Migration:**

Migration serves as the foundational trigger for the emergence of Diaspora. According to the Oxford Dictionary, migration is characterized as the relocation of substantial groups of individuals, as well as birds or animals, from one geographical location to another (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 7th Ed.). Individuals embark on journeys from their original residences to new cities, states, or even countries, propelled by diverse motivations, such as employment prospects or various other compelling factors. Among the multitude of reasons that prompt migration, the pursuit of employment opportunities stands out as the most prevalent catalyst. However, migration also arises due to circumstances like the scarcity of prospects in one's home region, the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects like dam construction, the sweeping impacts of globalization, the aftermath of natural calamities, and other factors of similar significance.

- **Cultural displacement:**

This element deals with geographic dislocation of the person. Longman dictionary of contemporary English opines that "Cultural means a group of people belonging or relating to a particular society as well as its way of life and displacement means when a group of people or animals are forced to leave their place where they usually live". (Longman) In this process two or more cultures come into contact. Culture may include specific beliefs, attitudes and customs as well as values and behaviors. Diaspora literature presents many features of cultural displacement.

- **Alienation:**

It is the psychological situation and result of the dispersion. Karl Marx developed theory of alienation in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, and *The German Ideology*. He defines, "Alienation as an inherent condition of capitalism, the economic system of capitalism isolates and dehumanizes human beings and is the source and cause of alienation". (Karl Marx, 1844). It means alienated means not simply having tension, doubt and anguish but being unable to function systematically and satisfactorily.

- **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is the process of making consistent or compatible at the place where a person is migrated. According to the Cambridge dictionary, "Reconciliation is a situation in which

two people or groups of people become friendly again after they have argued". It is a process which takes hours of negotiations to bring about settlement between the two sides. When a person is migrated he is confused with diverse situation and then the process of reconciliation starts in which migrants have to adjust with two opposite beliefs, ideas, or situations at the host place.

- **Hybridity:**

Diaspora is the fusion of two distinct races, wherein the cultures of both the homeland and the host society intertwine following the dispersal. The concept of hybridity encapsulates the amalgamation of Eastern and Western cultures in its most elementary sense. However, the term "hybridity," drawn from a biological metaphor, assumes a broader connotation in contemporary discourse. It extends beyond mere East-West cultural blending and encompasses a wide spectrum of cultural intermingling or fusion between the Eastern and Western influences.

- **Loss of Identity:**

Loss of identity or identity crisis has become common theme of human existence. It is continuous process and constituted within, not outside representation. The change in experiences leads to change in identity. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, "Loss of identity or identity crisis is personal psychosocial conflict especially in adolescence that involves confusion about one's social role and often a sense of loss of continuity to one's personality".

- **Homelessness:**

Homelessness is defined as the condition of not having a house and usually being unable to afford the same. Homeless people usually live in a hostile or unsafe environment. As far as today's situation is concerned, there is a huge variance in why people become homeless. When Salman Rushdi reached in England he describes his mental condition, he quotes, "When I first went to England to study, I became the other. I think I am able to understand what it means to be on the other side of the wall." In this way, it is clear that, the host society that makes the immigrants feel that they do not belong that particular place where they are living at present is homelessness.

- **Nostalgia:**

Nostalgia and Diaspora share an intimate connection, with the former often intertwined with the latter. Nostalgia can be characterized as a form of sentimental idealization of the past, often focusing on periods marked by joyful personal relationships, akin to the sentiment of love. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines nostalgia as "a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for a return to a past period or an irrecoverable state." This sentiment frequently finds resonance within the context of Diaspora, where individuals separated from their homelands tend to fondly reminisce about aspects of their past that are associated with happiness and personal connections.

There are many other elements which are equally important such as rootlessness, quest for identity, cultural conflict, acculturation, marginality, cultural identity, hybridity, multiculturalism etc.

## **THEORIES OF DIASPORA:**

- **Classical or Traditional Theories of Diaspora:**

Within the framework of Diaspora theory, the utilization of the Jewish experience as a benchmark for evaluating other groups' classification as Diaspora is a significant criterion and perspective. However, it's important to acknowledge that the Jewish criteria may not be universally applicable to all transnational communities. The Jewish Diaspora analysis delves into a range of critical themes, including migration, cultural dislocation, feelings of alienation, identity struggles, exile, trauma, collective identity, despair, and hybridity. It's worth noting that these attributes cannot be indiscriminately employed to assess whether other groups qualify as Diaspora. An illustrative instance of an ancient or classical Diaspora is the Greek community, which dispersed primarily due to commercial pursuits. As highlighted by Chaliand and Rageau (1995: XVIII), "During the Hellenistic period and under Rome, the Greeks encountered a dispersion characterized by both intellectual and trade-related dimensions." Nevertheless, it's crucial to recognize that the majority of classical Diaspora theories have been formulated based on the experiences of

Jewish communities. While the Jewish paradigm offers valuable insights, it's imperative to interpret and adapt these theories thoughtfully to accommodate the unique circumstances and dynamics of various other transnational groups.

During the middle Ages, spanning from the tenth to the early fifteenth century, a consistent presence of Armenian communities engaged in trade and craftsmanship is well-documented. Notably, in Western Europe, cities such as Venice, Marseilles, Paris, and Bruges stood as prominent hubs for Diaspora communities during the 13th to 15th centuries. The Moors also constituted a significant Diaspora community in Spain throughout this pre-modern epoch. Within this historical context, Cohen introduces the notion that "Other ancient civilizations uninfluenced by the Judaeo-Hellenist world – notably the Mesopotamian, Inca, Indus, and Zhou empires generated their own migratory myths and their own population flow." Comparatively, the contemporary period encapsulates an even broader array of Diaspora communities, and the factors prompting their dispersion are notably more diverse than those observed in the classical era. This is particularly accentuated in light of the influence of globalization. The scope of Diasporas during this modern age encompasses an intricate tapestry of motivations and circumstances that extend beyond what was experienced in the classical period.

- **Contemporary or Modern Theories of Diasporas**

As far as contemporary situations are concerned there are many incidents such as civil wars, Covid-19 pandemic etc. which have been resulted in verities of Diaspora. The contemporary or modern period covers from the end of World War II to the present age. The principal diaspora theorists fall into two main categories. The work of Safran (1991), Clifford (1994), Chaliand and Rageau (1995), Said and Simmons (1996), Cohen (1995, 1997), Green (1998), King and Melvin (1999), Gillespie (1999) etc. which rely heavily on the Jewish experience as a starting point for examining the phenomenon. The second category essentially comprises a small corpus that explores diaspora issues in a novel manner. This body of literature explores the contemporary diaspora with issues of transnationalism and globalization. We have philosophers like Castles and Miller (1998), Laguerre (1998), Papastergiadis (1998), Van Hear (1998), Mahler (2000), Mandelbaum (2000), Mittelman (2000), Cornwell, Stoddard (2001), and others who come in this category.

After the world wars in Europe, great chaos reigned both in terms of political disorganization and economic collapse. In fact, the major transfers of population or migrations in Europe as well as across the world at the end of World War II were of three kinds. People who had been forced into Nazi Germany to work during the war and afterwards resettled in their own country from states is first kind of Diaspora. Russians and Poles who settled in territories annexed or occupied at the end of the war, from which the original inhabitants either fled or were expelled is another kind of Diaspora. The third category can be attributed to a diverse range of factors in the twenty-first century, encompassing both human-made and natural crises. These factors include warfare, the resurgence of nationalism, ethnic tensions, acts of terrorism, the sweeping effects of globalization, historical colonialism, rapid industrialization, and the complexities of international trade. Collectively, these elements have contributed to a state of instability that has resulted in migrations and ultimately giving rise to a widespread Diaspora phenomenon across the global landscape.

## CONCLUSION:

This paper has systematically explored a range of elements that have contributed to the diversification and proliferation of various Diaspora scenarios in the contemporary era. The primary objective of this study has been to dissect the foundational components that have given rise to the concept of Diaspora, while concurrently analyzing a spectrum of Diaspora theories. Classical or traditional Diasporas are inherently linked to antiquity, encompassing ancient Greece and the Jewish exilic narrative. In contrast, Contemporary or modern Diasporas unfold in a more fluid and unpredictable manner, characterized by dislocation and rejuvenation processes that are intrinsically intertwined with the globalizing context. The significance of Diasporas and their consequential role within the evolving global political economy is of enduring import. Notably, the Latin American Diaspora has evolved into a valuable cultural resource, particularly within the United States. This underscores the enduring impact and significance of Diasporas, transcending geographic boundaries and enhancing the richness of cultural exchange.

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