

## **‘Away From Home’ : Alienation as a double-edged weapon in Indian Writing**

**Rajani B**

Associate Professor, Department of English, Zamorin’s Guruvayurappan College,  
Calicut, Kerala, India

---

Loneliness is a feeling often misunderstood with detachment. Like loneliness, alienation is a state of mind much romanticized in literature. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines alienation as “the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, products of work or self”. Alienation is the basic form of rootlessness, which forms the subject of many psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies.

The term ‘diaspora’ refers to dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland. When people make such a movement, there is a likelihood of more and more people from the same ethnic as well as cultural background to collectively form a homeland, though imaginary in their new abode. Among Indian writers, the longing for Indianness and everything Indian never ceases. The changing designation of home, the state of homelessness and the fear of losing everything and forced return to homeland are some of the recurrent motives in diasporic writing.

In diasporic literature, there is always often a discussion of cultural displacement. As in the case of Parthasarathy, a bilingual poet whose ‘Rough Passage’ vividly speaks about the clash of the two cultures, English and Tamil. The first part ‘Exile’ speaks about the need for roots and also the impact of the West on India. In his essay, “Whoring after English Gods”, he states that the “affair with the English language has been prolonged and tempestuous. It’s over now, and I have ...settle down with Tamil” (1970: 32).

In his poem ‘Loneliness’, he writes,

Loneliness is not that bad.

You can count your breaths.

You can count on your violin existence.

You can be your thoughtful companion

And again,

Loneliness is a great chance. (2014)

Melancholy and a sense of darkness is everywhere visible in the second part of the poem, ‘Trial’.

School was a pretty kettle of fish:

The spoonfuls of English

Brew never quite slacked your thirst (44-46)

But the irony in the case of Parthasarathy is that after his return to his own country, he still feels like an exile. His loyalty is divided between the two great countries and the return to his native city fills him with gloom and accentuated feelings of exile. The feelings of the poet towards the two cultures borders on both fascination as well as anguish and could be best termed ambivalent.

Uma Parameswaran is another poet who writes about the immigrants who suffer a lot because of their separation from homeland. In her opinion, displaced communities live in the margins of two countries and hence their life is all about adapting and negotiating with an alien culture. In her collection of poems, "Trishanku and Other Writings" (1988), the poet uses the metaphor of 'trishanku' to address immigrant as the term means 'neither here nor there'. The immigrants as they straddle two cultures, often face alienation and rejection in one or both cultures. She writes,

White and brown  
And what shall I do now,  
...  
Shall I hang myself in the sky  
As Trishanku did of old? (15)

Yet, what can be seen is that in both these Indian writers, alienation gives them the reason to write. In Parthasarathy's case, the alienation is self imposed too. However, there are other writers who revel in alienation that cultural displacement brings with it.

In the works of modern Indian writers, alienation does play a major role, but the twist is everywhere visible. In the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai, alienation has a totally new meaning. In Lahiri's 'The Namesake', the second generation Gogol and Sonia, unlike their parents, feel the need to belong. The novel, of course, deals with the conflicts and turmoils of the expatriates, yet, tells the story of courage and growing determination, especially in the character Ashima.

Her 'Unaccustomed Earth', deals with the Indian Expatriate experience, where the younger generation feels burdened by the Indian cultural past.

In Chitra Divakaruni's 'Arranged Marriage', a collection of eleven short stories, women are depicted in private and public spheres. In her interview with Metka Zupancic, she says what can be summed up as the essential difference between generations of women,

"My characters are mostly Indian women growing up in India in a very traditional family. In "Arranged Marriage" many come from a background similar to my own. I grew up with very definite notions of womanhood, of who is considered a good woman, and how she is to behave, especially within the family context. Much of that was based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices. As a result of immigration, when we find ourselves in the west, there is quite a different notion of

what a good woman is and what she is expected to be....It begins to change their relationships with the people in their family- their husbands, who are with them in the new country, and their parents , who are usually back in India. There are children who are now born in the new environment, caught between two cultures, yet with a completely different worldview”.

The difference in tone and theme is striking. The new generation has definitely come to terms with alienation and they have learnt how to use their alienated experience in a positive way.

#### Works Cited

Parameswaran, Uma. Trishanku and Other writings. Toronto South Asian Review, 1988

Parthasarathy, R. Rough Passage. New Delhi: OUP, 1977