

Preface

I have been working on the subject of diaspora for many years. One could go back to the 1990s, the decade which witnessed a subtle change from expatriate to diaspora, and accordingly move from the politics of exile to hyphenated identities and ‘translated’ men. During this long period, my relationship with the diaspora has gone through several phases, inevitable when one realises that the initial response is to a work of literature; it is only later that one looks at the numerous locations, politics and theories that surround it.

Over the years, one has had to consider the poetics and the aesthetics of the diaspora, to debate its postcoloniality and to place its work alongside with those writing in India, not only in English but in India’s many languages. The question of what goes to make a classic has also arisen. Further, how do we read it, evaluate it and judge it? Where does it belong—to ‘us’, whose countries it writes about whether with love, disapproval or derision, or to ‘them’ who read it as representative of the home culture and literature? And what about language when the dominant language subdues the dialogicity of the native tongue leading to a dilution of cultural references?

The double location—one physical, the other of the mind—and the transcendence of that distance raise many questions which cannot be answered by any generalisation on account of the multiple differences that crowd diasporic writing. The present work attempts to answer some of these, the essays herein focus on questions related to representation and memory. The word ‘write’ has many connotations and the Chap. 2, ‘Writing Home’, dwells on some of them. The act of ‘representation’, capturing the ‘reality’ of the moment and reflecting it in a literary artefact, brings in languages. I have no desire to credit either ‘representation’ or ‘reality’ with any fixed meaning. They are constantly evolving into new meanings and have a tendency to be provocative through their rapid shifts. ‘Writing Home’ consists of memories from a distance and perspectives from the outside. Yet, no cast-iron division can exist; the boundaries will collapse and merge. Literature opens out and creates new contexts.

Some of these essays were presented earlier at conferences or published as book chapters/journal articles: A version of ‘The New Parochialism’ was presented in a

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