A SYNOPSIS

OF

THE THESIS

STRATEGIES OF ACCULTURATION

IN SELECTED NOVELS ON

SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA IN BRITAIN

TO BE SUBMITTED

BY

TAMASHA ACHARYA

TO

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI

FOR THE DEGREE OF

Ph.D. IN ENGLISH (ARTS)
NAME OF THE CANDIDATE : TAMASHA ACHARYA

NAME OF THESIS : STRATEGIES OF ACCULTURATION IN SELECTED NOVELS ON SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA IN BRITAIN

DEGREE FOR WHICH THE SYNOPSIS IS PRESENTED : Ph.D. (ARTS)

NAME AND DESIGNATION OF THE GUIDE : DR. RAMBHAU M. BADODE, PROFESSOR AND HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI

DEPARTMENT WHERE THE RESEARCH WAS CARRIED OUT : DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI, KALINA CAMPUS, SANTACRUZ (EAST), MUMBAI – 400 098

DATE OF REGISTRATION AND REGISTRATION NUMBER : 30TH MARCH 2008 / 13

SIGNATURE OF THE CANDIDATE :

SIGNATURE OF THE GUIDE :

DATE : 07TH JULY 2010

PLACE : MUMBAI
SYNOPSIS

The spurt in migration in the twentieth century has made the world borderless, encouraging transnational immigration, border crossing, heterogeneous nationalities, dual citizenship, multiple identities and assimilation in more than one nation space. The literature of this genre leads itself to categories called diasporic literature, immigrant writing, literature of exile, transcultural writing and so on. Various theories connected to and discussed in the thesis are Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, Hybridity, Third space and Multiculturalism. The themes taken up deal with alienation, nostalgia and longing, collective memory, home and homeland, women and the family in the diaspora. Language issues too form an important aspect of this study. The present thesis is an attempt to trace the strategies which writers have devised to make their characters acculturate in the new, adopted land.

Chapter One : Understanding Diaspora

The first chapter seeks to clarify the meaning of the term diaspora and define it according to certain established theorists. The definitions by Arjun Appadurai, Khachig Toloyan, Sudesh Mishra, Jana Evans Braziel, Judith T Shuval and Anita Mannur have added to different aspects of the term diaspora. The etymological origin, denotative and connotative aspects of the word diaspora have also been
taken into consideration. Theorists like Avadesh Kumar Singh and Arjun Appadurai have classified diaspora in terms of categories as the diaspora of hope, despair and terror which have been explained. William Safran’s outlines for members of the expatriate minority community are drawn out along with a definition of expressions like expatriation and exile. He has chosen and used terms like classical, pre-modern and modern diaspora. The importance of diaspora studies along with the scope has been propounded in this chapter. The precise meaning of the term South Asian, fundamental concerns of diaspora and the concept of acculturation has also been proposed. The movement of the diaspora has been traced in the form of three waves – the first, the second and the third. The Bangladesh, Pakistani and Sri Lankan diasporas in UK, their origin and strengths have also been documented. Out of the twelve texts chosen, seven are by writers of Indian origin, two novels are by a Sri Lankan writer, one is from Bangladesh and the remaining two are from writers of Pakistani origin. The corpus of writers taken for analysis belongs to the first and second generation of immigrants with more women writers addressing the migrant narratives. The writers from India, other South Asian countries or Britain are twice or thrice removed from their homeland just as it is for their characters that already have diverse counter-histories. Writers like Hanif Kureishi, Meera Syal possess a hyphenated identity as British Asians while Atima Srivastava and Monica Ali have been living in UK since their childhood. Immigrant writing as can be seen forms an important part of area studies, cultural studies and ethnic studies. It further showcases the psychological, sociological, anthropological, political, economic
and religious changes in a borderless society. The emergence of a second and third generation has given rise to a fused and hybrid type of identification known as “British Asian”. This merged diasporic identity is found in perceived cultural commonalities: food, movies, music, film songs, dances, clothes, festivals and rituals which draws upon the old as well as the new.

Acculturation is used to describe the results of contact between two or more different cultures where a new, composite culture emerges, the Third space, in which some existing cultural features are combined, some are lost, and new characteristics are generated. Acculturation refers to a cultural change or modification in behavior that results from continuous first hand contact or socialization between two distinct cultural groups. These groups have developed competencies and strategies for adapting to life in the new land. In Britain the migrants find their traditional values increasingly challenged by Western cultural values leading to some degree of personal changes in them by a process called acculturation. This is not a static, stagnant process because a change in the cultural values depends on the host surroundings where immigrants live. Each culture is porous and subject to external influences where it assimilates in its own unique ways. These different ways or methods have been termed in this thesis as strategies.
The Bangladesh, Pakistani and Sri Lankan diasporas in UK their origin, strengths and certain historical facts have also been outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Exploring the Past

This chapter contains an overview of the writing produced by diasporic immigrant writers in Britain of the earlier generation. A major point of difference between the sugar and the masala diaspora or the old and the new is that, in the first instance the immigrants came to lands which already ‘belonged’ to someone else. Claims to the homeland were as necessary as their commitment to it. South Asians were perceived to be inferior by the natives and racism was the main detractor. Representative cross sections of writers have been taken up. A large number of them are from India. Only their diasporic work has been considered. The major themes discussed are angst, nostalgia, loneliness and existential rootlessness at the cultural, emotional, physical displacement. It can be seen that the themes are a reflection of the dilemmas faced by the experiences of the authors. Issues of family, homeland, women, the NRSA and language in the major novels have been explored.

Writers who are included are Kamala Markandaya, Raja Rao, R.K Narayan, G.V Desani, Mulk Raj Anand, Attia Hossain, Aubrey Menen, V.S Naipaul, Anita Desai, Ravinder Randhwa to name a few. Recalling homelands from a diasporic
space and experiencing dislocation as the migrant remembers the past from which he has been moved is the main contention here. Writers of this diaspora have brought up the theme of colonization and its impact time and again. Homelessness has been added to the deep personal anguish of the immigrants because of the lack of total or partial acceptance in the host country. The novels of the older generation of diasporic Indian writers predominantly look back at India with emotional overtones and rarely record their experiences away from India as expatriates. It is as if these writers have discovered their Indian-ness after leaving India. Obviously they have the advantage of looking at their own land clearly once they are abroad.

Writers from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh feel strongly ostracized and removed from the alien surroundings, the weather, language, unfamiliar faces and alien smells away from home making survival a difficult issue. However their literary output is not much, unlike writers of Indian origin.

The chapter also seeks to explain certain ideas and concerns of the following theorists – Homi Bhabha and his theory of Third Space, Hybridity, Cultural identity of Stuart Hall, Jan Mohammed and his notion of the syncretic border individual, Bhikhu Parekh and Stuart Hall with their proposal on multiculturalism, Rushdie and his Imaginary homelands. This makes a framework to create the views that theorize certain aspects of immigrant writing.
Chapter Three: Identifying and Contextualising Acculturation Strategies in writers of Indian Origin

This chapter provides an in depth analysis of the strategies used by the immigrant writers to acculturate in Britain. The novels discussed here require and apply the strategies which can be broadly clubbed under – Physical, Cultural, Social, Psychological and Spiritual. The texts analysed are Meera Syal’s ‘Anita and Me’, ‘Life isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee’, Ardashir Vakil’s ‘One Day’, Atima Srivastava’s ‘Transmission’ and ‘Looking for Maya’, Preethi Nair’s ‘One Hundred Shades of White’ and Gautam Malkani’s ‘Londonstani’. All the writers are of Indian origin and have moved out from India to UK except for Meera Syal who was located in UK and came to India only when she was twenty two. The novels are based within the city of London and relate the experiences of first and second generation immigrants as they attempt to straddle two worlds—one their own homeland and the other the adopted homeland.

The novels have been analysed taking four major parameters – Homeland, NRSA, Women and Family into account. Home, the first concept – currently ‘in London’ is depicted as a place providing security, support and identity. The novels analysed bring out typical, traditional signifiers which can be found in every Indian home, an attempt to recreate a visual replica, bringing in the imaginary homeland in spite of the Western influences and spatial and temporal distances. The distance from the homeland necessitates strategies to acculturate
both for the first and the second generation. The homeland, here ‘India’ is revoked with longing as strategies to acculturate in the present, ‘home’ requires a reinforcement of memory to consolidate the spatial and temporal distance. The analysis reveals how postmodern concepts approximating fragmentation occur as the migrant, distanced from what was his own, attempt to create a fractured vision with fragments of memory which is generally glossed over and hyped. The second aspect taken into consideration is the NRSA – a term abbreviated to represent the non-resident South Asian. As women have been dealt in a separate section, this part handles men and children. The novels also explore acculturation strategies while defining the identity of the individual in a multicultural setup. An attempt has been made to formulate the Identity of the NRSA. This has been taken up at three levels in the chapter - Personal, Social and Cultural. Finally the hybrid tag Br Asian has been attached to these migrants especially belonging to the second generation as he has accultured, and can neither be labeled as an Indian nor becomes a native Britisher. An important aspect discussed is the marginalization of the migrant as racism is a common factor faced by both the first and the second generation. Strategies to overcome this hurdle are interesting as each generation handles it differently but the last novel analysed, Londonstani (2006) show cases scenes where the tables have turned as the migrant takes the upper hand over the native. It signifies that the South Asian migrant has arrived and can finally dictate his own terms.
The chapter also considers the images and invisible baggage carried by the NRSA, the props he clings to and the differing perspectives between generations. Finally the chapter strives to depict the women immigrants, their dual responsibility and the strategies adopted to address the issue of acculturation.

Women immigrants of the first generation have to handle the loss of *desh* or home despite its well-established hold on their memory. Their identities are seen in a multiple light of hybridity, nationhood, globalization, transnationalism and multiculturalism. An examination of the texts show women often revealing a stronger resilience in the diaspora, acculturating sometimes even faster than men. Acculturation in the democratic, multicultural setup has been taken to be an advantage for women. As an independent breadwinner she is successful professionally, intellectually on par with her white counterpart, the difference no longer sacrosanct as before. Women have been analysed essaying different roles as child, daughter, wife, mother etc. The women included in the texts are, ‘new women’ because they handle life in the adopted home strategising by using their internal strength, belief in the old age wisdom and values she has inherited from her family, the bonding she has with her sorority with whom she learns to tide over issues, to overcome hurdles, and yet conform to their image. If the second generation progresses it is sometimes because of the strategies adopted by their mothers who have taught them to question and yet abide by traditional assumptions. Religion and God, discussions on karma, rebirth have also have
been used to help the children handle their life better as they cannot be
dissociated totally from systems in the homeland. Closely associated with
women is the trope of food which has been explored in detail in all the texts at
length, an important strategy used extensively for binding and bonding.

‘Family’ is a link that supports the individual and acts as a buffer against any
crisis whether in the first or second generation. The importance of family as a
centre of values, the homing zone where the errant individual in search of an
identity returns again and again is conveyed through ties that unite – relations,
music, value systems, clothes and festivals all of which are taken as strategies to
bind the family. These tropes can be found repeatedly in the texts of the novels
selected and the need of a family-for physical, emotional sustenance cannot be
denied.

Chapter Four: Foregrounding Acculturation Strategies in writers
from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The present chapter is closely related to the earlier chapter as the same
framework has been adopted. The novels taken up are from other South Asian
countries – Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. These countries have similar
customs, traditions, food habits, clothing, weather conditions and so have been
grouped together. The novels selected are Romesh Gunesekera’s ‘The
Sandglass’ and ‘The Match’, Sara Suleri’s ‘Meatless Days’, Hanif Kureishi’s ‘The Buddha of Suburbia’ and Monica Ali’s ‘Brick Lane’. Both Hanif Kureishi and Romesh Gunesekera are in a limbo zone where despite their background they consider themselves to be British writers. The same parameters continue to be explored- Homeland, NRSA, Women and Family.

Despite staying voluntarily in Britain which is considered ‘home’ the protagonists of both Gunesekera’s novels dream of returning to Sri Lanka in search of ‘roots’. This is even if the adopted homeland has metamorphosed into their actual homeland. Brick Lane depicts the protagonist who had arrived in Britain with starry dreams of making it big and yet is unable to find what he actually wants. The pull of the homeland in his subconscious is too strong and ultimately he returns unlike his wife who aware that she can gain economic independence stays back to make a life for herself and her family. Distanced from their own land and people, strategies from home include strategies of memory-which takes on a tinge of nostalgia as the innate realisation of what their homeland means is clarified. The’ home’ in Britain serves as a primary site of grounding children in the ways of the parents – a strategy used for maintaining links between generations and the homeland.

The NRSA, in ‘The Match’ floats along from Sri Lanka to Manila to Britain in a state of flux initially, unable to complete courses flitting from engineering to
accountancy, from a departmental store to a photographer’s job helpless to
shake off the past or completely to adjust in the present. Hanif Kureishi’s Karim
Amir, the protagonist and narrator of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, is of a mixed-race.
His personal memories in UK include small-town racism, and though a slave of
the system and the country he realises the invisible tugs from his homeland were
for real. Acculturation strategies in all British Asian families dealt here include a
focus on education which was a means to develop, go ahead. There is also a
focus on keeping the homeland alive by making children aware of customs,
relations and differing ways of life.

Women from the other South Asian nations discussed here are more open and
modern in their outlook and are not limited by the family constraints. Sara Suleri
says “There are no women in the third world” and explains further, “The concept
of woman was not really part of an available vocabulary: we were too busy for
that, just living, and conducting precise negotiations with what it meant to be a
sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant.” Women gain succor from their
own lifelines – sisters, friends, relations, children. The trope of food continues to
be a focal point, binding families together, keeping memories of the homeland
alive along with their mother’s recipes.
Language is an integral and key component of assimilation and acculturation in the adopted homeland. Language is embedded in cultural norms and is an inherent part of one’s culture as it expresses certain emotions which the adopted language did not. The second generations believed in and are living in an era where there are multiples of everything like knowledge of multiple languages, customs, traditions etc. Hybridity allows an opening in the multiplicity of traditions and cultures within the diaspora without succumbing to the temptation of homogenization and domination. This has been identified in the novels where the third generation also expresses a desire to know, grasp and speak in the mother tongue as they feel left out. The ‘Third space’ immigrants create the ‘Third Language’ a hybrid version of English and the mother tongue leading to another language which is not new but which has certain new formations a creation with English and certain typical words from the mother tongue used when at home, with parents or siblings and relations. It synergises them and helps in creating a bond of togetherness. Most families in these texts are bi-lingual and their children multi lingual. The first generation resorts to the mother tongue more frequently especially when articulating loneliness, emotions, using proverbs or quotes or even while discussing personal problems which they don’t want the children to know. Sometimes the second generation have a distinct advantage over their parents in not considering the third language as a foreign language and are quite at home in using both, some of them even making it monolingual—the superior education, skills give them an edge over their parents or the earlier
immigrants. The global economy encourages one to be multilingual and multicultural. The expatriate writer also brings in cultural nuances through the use of typical words and expressions connected with the register of cooking using it as a strategy to plot generic boundaries. Within the tradition of immigrant literature, culinary discourse can be found abundantly in all the novels revealing layers of nostalgia, and national as well as personal identity.

Language, a means of identity as much as a tool of empowerment, is at the heart of a culture and its people. All the twelve books selected have shown strategies used by the characters to acculturate faster in the adopted homeland through implementation of the local British accent, and usage of slang. *Londonstani* as a text surpasses all others in the use of a hybrid concoction of its own – a mix of slang, texting, Panjabi and bastardised gangsta rap. The London slang that the characters speak also draws on Jamaican patois, American hip-hop speak, and other Americanisms such as “feds” and “bucks,” and therefore illustrates how “proper” English is a symbol for the mainstream society young Br Asians are trying to reject – alongside the education system, public transport network, public institutions, and the taxation system that funds them.

In *The Buddha of Surburbia* conventional manner of narration is updated with postmodern taste and the registers are grafted onto a variety of cultural forms that include 1970s music, the glitter of fashion and bohemian arts. Suleri uses
analogies from Islamic and British Imperial architectural style habits of self-presentation, as well as recipes and myths concerning various food items to question different attempts to look within and differentiate the national myths of present-day India from those of Pakistan.

Chapter Six : Conclusion

Identity as Stuart Hall points out, is ‘always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.’ Diaspora identities are in a state of flux and whatever form they take they are interwoven into the social and cultural fabric of the adopted homeland. The syncretic border individual has moved away from nostalgia to focus on changing identities and establishing new relationships. Conflict and friction is natural as there is variance between the two worlds but so is the realisation that a hybrid identity has become the norm rather than the exception. The multi-cultural scenario leads to conflicts and the struggle for a new life, but, nevertheless, a complete break with the past is implausible. Even if they have not visited their actual homeland they are influenced directly and indirectly by it but often they are neither here nor there is the consequence of which a fractured identity. The acculturation process has resulted in acquiring a changed identity, a seamless, assimilated one. The hybridity is evident everywhere in the mixed dressing styles, food habits, language. The image of the global citizen includes an accepted form of bi-culturalism, a richer and a more complex way of being that is equally at home and abroad.
The continuation of customs from the homeland in the new home ensures intragenerational links and continuity with one's own country. Knowledge and acknowledgement of the parental past and a larger ethnic, cultural past provided the necessary bond for continuity and community building stability and an ability to continue life in the hostland. The homeland is a definite lure for the second gen individual and they see it as a land they want to visit at least once. The second generation immigrants have adopted the values and beliefs of the receiving society as well as their own and use many strategies to acculturate.

This chapter draws conclusions on the basis of the analysis and the discussion carried out in the first five chapters. It also enlists the findings of the research and tries to project further studies which can be done in this field. The strategies analysed so far have been depicted. It is assumed that further readings of the texts will enable the researcher to point out many more which will be submitted in the final thesis.

Out of the twelve novels only four – Londonstani, The Buddha of Suburbia, The Sandglass and The Match centers on male characters. The other eight are women centric. To develop their own identity they project different facets of their personality. The NRSA experiments socially, culturally, tries to disinherit and detach himself from the values inherited but ultimately returns back homewards
as realization sets in. Whether it is the already acculturated individual or the new immigrant – the invisible tugs of the homeland cannot be denied.

There are a variety of views on the future of diaspora. Diaspora literature has opened itself up for intra-disciplinary studies. While political boundaries cannot be erased, cultural and social borders continue to intermingle and change the dynamics of life. Empirical studies can be conducted to discover links between the literature being written and life as it is actually being led by the immigrants.

Though immigrant writing always includes a nostalgic sense of a lost home, dislocation, displaced values and a search for another homeland, the second generation have successfully managed to create global identities for themselves.
Bibliography

Primary Resources


Secondary Sources


