



Diasporic memory displacement and survival: Exploring some recent cinematic texts

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Abstract

The research paper will focus on the diasporic experiences and memories of people which are often excluded by the mainstream. It will define how people have to survive while facing the crisis of their identities and their complicated journey which show them their final destination.

The paper will focus on the homelessness of refugees and their nostalgic experiences, migrated young girls and boys in search of belongingness. This paper will reflect on individualistic and collective experiences of people in exile.

My study will be based on three Hindi and Punjabi movies. These movies are Punjab 1984, Jatt and Juliet and Khamosh Pani.

Keywords: Punjab 1984, Jatt and Juliet and Khamosh Pani

Introduction

The term diaspora particularly refers to Greeks and Jews who were involuntary dispersed from their motherlands. As Martin Baumann says that:

“Undeniably, the ancient notion "diaspora" has become a fashionable term. Once exclusively used in a context-bound way, that of Jewish history and the plight of Jewish people being dispersed 'among the nations'; in late 20th century the folk term became generalized on a grand scale. Since the 1970s, "diaspora" was increasingly used to denote al- most every people living far away from their ancestral or former homeland.”(Baumann 313)

Groups belonging to African diaspora, Irish Diaspora, Palestinian Diaspora and Indian Diaspora etc. shared similar experiences but at the same time each group had different reasons behind their migration. For instance, African diaspora occurred because of slavery, Irish diaspora occurred due to starvation, Palestinian people migrated due to war while talking about Indian Diaspora, mass migration took place involuntarily because of partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 but now time has changed as people migrate voluntarily for economic betterment.

From last few years Punjabi Diasporic Cinema has been highlighting the experiences of Indian migrants in different countries. It has very successfully touched upon the issues like nostalgia, identity crisis, NRI marriages, alienation, relationship failures, cultural-gaps etc. that basically talks about the lives and trails of Indian migrants. As Rita Joshi states:

Difficulties in adjustments, nostalgia for home, inability to 'connect' on return visits to India, schizophrenic sense of double Indian and Western identities or a sense of belonging nowhere, neither here nor there, remain the

dominant feelings of the Indian Immigrants. (Joshi 85)

This paper focuses on some recent Punjabi movies that are – *Khamosh Pani*, *Punjab 1984* and *Jatt and Juliet*. These movies are concerned with the lives of Punjabis who are far away from their homes. It will define how people have to survive while facing the crisis of their identities and their complicated journeys which show them their final destination. Punjabi movie *Khamosh Pani* known in English as *Silent Waters* produced in 2003 is based on the true events of 1947 in India. It is set in 1970s and is about Ayesha who is separated from her family in 1947, now a muslim widow in Pakistan and her teenage son Saleem who is influenced by Jihad. Saleem gets angry at the arrival of Sikh pilgrims from India that leads to the disclosure of long-buried secrets of his mother. As a result she commits suicide.

Ayesha remembers the summer of 1947 when she used to play around the well with her friends. She remembers the time of partition when muslim abducted Sikh women and same as muslim women were abducted by Sikhs. Women of both religions were forced to commit suicides in order to save their chastity. There is a scene in this movie that shows how Sikh women were forced to jump into a well. It can be seen that throughout the movie this well of silent water haunts her.

This movie throws light on the view that when people migrates from their homeland to another place, some of them are able to adjust themselves in the new place whereas, some people remain nostalgic and feels like a fish out of water. Their roots are too strong to transplant at new places. Ayesha belonged to Sikh community till 1947 so her roots are in Sikh religion that is why after so many years of separation she still has love for people of her earlier community and she sends sweets for Sikh pilgrims to Gurudwara Panja Shahib. Men in Punjab remember their villages and houses in Pakistan.

To survive at new place everyone needs some means of survival. First of all, in her attempt to find identity she has to change her name from 'Veero' to 'Ayesha'. In order to

support herself and her son she gives lessons of Quran to small village girls and gets the pension of her late husband.

Although after her marriage she has adopted the muslim religion and muslim community. For instance she has married a muslim guy and has a son, she has learnt Quran and did her best to adjust there but she is called 'Kafir's daughter, Kafir's sister' that haunts her. When she warns her son not to involve with political people and expresses her fears that they are dangerous people who do injustice in the name of God but her son gets a point to doubt and asks "How can a true muslim be afraid of Islam? (self-translated)

After the disclosure that she is a Sikh converted into muslim and her brother is searching for her in the village. Muslim community announces boycott of Ayesha with village people. Firstly, girls whom she gives the lessons of Quran ceased to come, secondly a woman and daughter who fetch water from the well for her, denies doing so. The thing that hurts her the most is that when her best friend tells her indirectly not to come at the marriage of her daughter. This movie shows the dilemma of Ayesha or Veero who represent women like her who are not accepted after partition either by muslims or Sikhs.

Scene depicts the helplessness of Ayesha who is rejected by muslims because she is a Sikh's daughter and also not identified by Sikhs because she is now wife of a muslim. Ayesha asks his brother "What kind of heaven is left for me??? Is it of Sikhs or of muslims??? Basically movie shows the pitiable and horrible condition of women who had only two options, first was to commit suicide for the sake of chastity, second was to live, get raped then murdered or sometimes to marry their abductors.

The movie 'Punjab 1984' tells the story of a mother Satawant Kaur's journey across many towns and villages in search of her son Shivjit Singh who is innocent but has declared a terrorist due to bad conditions in Punjab.

People who have left the places of their birth, where they used to play in childhood, where they have spent their youths, are actually connected to those places by their hearts. They always have a strong desire to return to their homes, their villages because they feel they belong to it. In One scene we can see Shiva and Tari discussing their desire to go back home. Shiva wants to go home at any cost.

The movie songs as a cinematic device play a very significant role in the construction of a movie's narrative. This movie has some beautiful tracks like Rangrut and Swaah Bann Ke that describe diasporic feelings of people like Shivjit Singh. The lyrics of 'Swaah Bann Ke' state that hero wishes to return to his home even after his death in the form of ashes. He gives message to the soil, water and wind of his village that he wants to merge into them. In the end of the movie, Shivjit's desire to go back home at any cost overpowers him and he returns, although his life is on stake. As a result he is shot at the door of his home.

Away from homes they were displaced, tortured brutally in police interrogations. Many innocent boys were captured and then murdered in the name of terrorism. Many of them were imprisoned for no reasons and had to face unbearable and unspeakable tortures at the orders of corrupt and unjust political people in power. Everybody wants to live, enjoy and to achieve some goals but they were tortured so much they

just waited for death to come because only death could free them from that horrible life that they were forced to lead. Internal Indian displacement has been emphasized through the dialogue of Shivjit when he says, "That is my house, my field, my village, and this whole country is mine, so why I have to hide myself?"

In the time of 1984, condition of wrongly accused young boys were so bad that only their will power and enthusiasm can help them to survive. In the movie when Shivjit is captured and tortured by Inspector Rana, he could die the very moment while facing that torture but this is his dignity and will power that helps him to tolerate that torture. Secondly they had to do protest and for this they took the help of weapons. As W.H Auden has written in "September 1, 1939":

Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return (21-22).

People do evil in return when they feel they are mistreated and evil has been done to them. Most of the movies which are based on 1984 shows the condition of young boys how they are victimized, tortured and killed and how boys like Shivjit Singh turn into murderers for the need of the hour. But sisters and wives of these type of men who are connected to Khalistani Movement, they also faced horrible police interrogations, got raped in police stations and were impregnated and after their release from jails, these women had to lead a life full of guilt and embarrassment, nobody wanted to marry such girls. These are the very serious issues which has not been touched upon in Punjabi cinema.

The movie Jatt and Juliet has released in June 2012. It is the story of a mischievous and innocent Punjabi guy Fateh and a modern Punjabi girl Pooja who go abroad for different reasons, Face problems and help each other to survive and return home in the end. This movie mainly highlights the problems and experiences of Punjabis in Canada.

Nowadays Indian people go abroad to get more comforts, facilities and employment that they feel India lacks. They feel that they can fulfil their dreams only in other countries. They are very hopeful that they will lead a much better life there but the scene is very different when they actually face it. Then they feel diasporic and remember their homeland and miss the love, affection and friendship of their dear ones. In host countries they come close to people from their country very easily because they can share their feelings with them. When Pooja comes back to India, Fateh misses her. Although, Fateh's motive to go abroad was to marry a Canadian girl to get Canadian citizenship. But Towards the end of the movie, when Joginder tells him that Sodi Marriage Bureau has found a Canadian girl for him he is not happy with the news but pretends. In the movie Joginder Singh and Chhano have their restaurant named 'Apna Chulla' that shows they are still connected to Punjab and Punjabi culture.

A common language is the highest form of communication between the members of any community. So a lack of this commonality leads people to difficulties in adapting host countries. Most of the Punjabi migrants find it difficult to have an easy conversation with people of host countries hence misinterpret the things that create new problems. In the movie when Jenny asks him for a job, Fateh misinterprets it as

Punjabi word “Jaag” which is added to milk in order to make curd.

This lack of interaction with people of host countries makes Fateh to talk with photographs which connect him with his land, as it is shown in his act of talking with the photograph of Malika, an Indian Bollywood actress.

Apart from language problem, migrated people have to face problems regarding accommodation. People have to share their apartments with unknown people. Boys can manage but girls need a safe place. Many times girls have to compromise in sharing apartments with boys. As it is shown through the common apartment shared by Pooja and Fateh togetherly and face various problems as once Fateh comes after having drink and disturbs her while she was studying.

To survive in foreign countries people like Fateh and Lakh winder find it a safe means to settle permanently in a foreign country by getting married with foreigner girls. As I have already mentioned that accommodation is the major problem of migrated people. But they are helped by already settled Punjabis of India. As Neeru’s friend Jazzy who is basically an Indian arranges accommodation for her. There is a very famous dialogue of the movie: “After all a Punjabi helps another Punjabi in a foreign country.” Religion also helps them to survive. If people are unable to get a place to stay they can stay in Gurudwras. People have to do different jobs to earn their livings that they have never experienced earlier in their native lands like Fateh works as a cook.

It is very common that immigrants in attempt to find identity change their names. As Rihana changes her name to Kathy and Pooja’s friend Jaswinder changes her name to jazzy.

To conclude, today Punjabi Diasporic Cinema presents a good picture of displacement of people outside India as well as inside India. It shows homelessness, nostalgic experiences and search of belongingness of migrated people witnessing their times of struggles, joys and departures over the passing years of their life. But there is much more than this about diaspora that has not been depicted through movies. As we know, today’s young generation go abroad on study basis, marriage basis, work permit etc. Most of the migrants failed to get accommodation and employment, girls are exploited sexually, boys become the victims of racism etc. So, these issues also need the attention of Punjabi Cinema.

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