

“Diasporic Identity: A Transnational Consciousness”- in Rai’s *There is a Carnival Today*

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Abstract

The novel, *Aja Ramita Chha* by Indra Bahadur Rai translated as *There is a Carnival Today* in English by Manjushree Thapa has been viewed applying concept of hybridity and diaspora of postcolonial theory as methodological tools propounded by Homi K Bhabha to analyze cultural identity of diaspora. Cultural identity of diaspora is hybridized because of affiliation and connectedness to both home land and host land. Identity of old diaspora connected to nation is replaced by new diaspora associated with trans -nation and globalization. The researcher has focused to answer the questions such as, how is the cultural identity of diaspora hybridized? What are the experiences that diasporas feel while living in in-between position? The researcher has used theory of diaspora to show the cultural affiliation with home land, and theory of transnationalism to explain mobility of the characters crossing the border. The concept of hybridity under diaspora has been applied to analyze the cultural aspect of the characters living in-between positions in the host land. The finding of the research is that diasporas living in the host land live through dual identity, double consciousness, conflicted mentality, divided self and hybrid identity because of their connectedness and affiliation to both land of origin and land of destination.

Keywords: Diaspora, home land, host land, hybridity, identity, nation, transnation.

Introduction

Cultural identity of the diaspora in recent days is multiple, hybridized and fluid because of their belongingness in both home land and host land. “From the late 1980s and in to the twenty first century, many writers of cultural and geographic affiliation become more divided, displaced and uncertain” (Boehmer 225). Cultural identity at present is not fixed and stable; it is more divided and displaced. Identity is associated with the matter of change and fluidity in new diaspora. It has replaced unified and single identity connected with particular race, ethnicity, community and nation with multiplicity and plurality in the transnational space. Regarding the changing nature of identity, Sanjeev Upreti opines, “the base of people’s identity is changing because diverse external factors determining the identity are also changing” (276). As such cultural identity which is a matter of social construction as viewed by post- structuralist concept, is not innate and essential thus changing and fluid.

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Identity of the diasporic people in the past was connected entirely with homeland in term of cultural affiliation. As the diaspora in host land has the feeling of nostalgia, seclusion, loneliness and exclusion from the mainstream culture, they connect themselves culturally with homeland. However, in new diaspora people connect themselves with both homeland and host land. In the later part of the 20th century, people living in the host land have changed their views regarding their cultural identity because of the openness of the boarder- crossing, and have access to other nations easily. Regarding the open boarder of the nation, Pramod K Nayar writes, "with increasing flow of people and money, culture and lifestyles, the very nature of the boarder is suspect" (190). Similarly, with regards to the changing context of the nation, Ramji Timalisina writes, "real and symbolic boundary of the nation have gone loosening and weakening" (311). Under such situation, people connect their cultural identity with both home land and host land on equal basis. As a result, people living as diaspora have to live dual identity.

People living as diaspora in the host land build their home away from home land, however it is not stable. Timalisina writes, "The recent theory of diaspora questions the traditional notion of home and homeland. Their place has been taken by the discourage of home-coming desire that is the desire to make a home in the host land" (143). As the people have their settlement in the host land, they are culturally connected with the land of origin and the land of destination as well. As a result, cultural identity of the diaspora naturally turns out to be 'hybridized', 'divided', 'fragmented' and 'dual' according to Homi k Bhabha. The changing situation of the diaspora in the formation of cultural identity seems to be resulted from the notion of searching "routes" instead of "roots" (Nayar199). Focusing on the transnational space and globalization to be more specific, Upreti takes the ideas from Arjun Appadurai that root is replaced by the free flow of the movement of people, goods, image, ideas, money and technology crossing the border throughout the world (219). Thus, people living in the host land do not have their fixity and stability in terms of home and identity.

The researcher has focused on the cultural aspect of diaspora. The major problem has been raised in the following questions:

1. How is the cultural identity of diaspora hybridized?
2. What are the experiences that diaspora feels while living in in-between position?

These are the basic problem around which this article focuses on to supply answer. The objectives of this research are to analyze how the cultural identity of diaspora is hybridized, and to analyze the experience diaspora feel while living in in-between position. The researcher has applied conceptual notion of hybridity propounded by Homi k Bhabha to analyze the identity of the divided mentality, double consciousness and dual identity of the diaspora living in host land. Similarly concept of imaginary home land discussed by Salmam Rusdie has been applied to analyze imagination of the diaspora longing for the roots.

Literature Review

Kusum Gautam, the researcher, has analyzed the text from the perspective of absurdism. Gautam writes that novelist, Indra Bahadur Rai has established new trend in writing novel revolting against the traditional way of writing. Though this novel stands on realism, it is entirely based on absurdity. She further remarks that this novel incorporating the context of people living in Darjeeling has presented aspect of absurd life realistically. Rai has reflected the experience of wholeness of life living in Darjeeling vividly. Furthermore, she relates absurd situation with the consequence of second world war. As a revolt against traditional literature, the new movement, absurdism centers on the concept that life is meaningless and valueless. Gautam further writes that absurdity in social, economic and cultural

aspect of the people of Darjeeling is vividly reflected in the novel. The novel has the story not of a specific people, but of a common people of all walks of life. She writes that this novel has initiated the trend of writing absurd novel in Nepali literature.

Similarly, Badri Prasad Koirala, another researcher has analyzed the novel from linguistic perspective. He defines linguistic experimentation as, "the differences in the use of language among certain communities because of the factors of geographical and social varieties" (19). Koirala further writes that novelist has brought diversity in the use of language through different characters. Moreover, diversity is vivid because of gender, age, race and profession of the language users. Koirala further writes that the novelist seems to have good knowledge about language spoken by various people, and accordingly he puts language to the mouth of different characters. He demonstrates his expertise of language use in literature, law, science, commerce and education. Similarly, the language the novelist has used has represented the people of Darjeeling from different classes, races and genders.

Another writer, Durga Bahadur Gharti has viewed the novel in his article, there is a *Carnival Today* from the perspective of existentialism. Individual being is the central subject matter of existentialism. He opines that what the person or thing looks like, the exact feeling one has about it is existence or being. That sort of feeling is possible only through wholeness. As the feeling is manifested before consciousness, it is knowable. Gharti further writes that individual existence is embedded in wholeness. Among various aspects related to individual being, absurdity is considered the most important. By understanding absurdity, existence is searched. Gharti views life and the universe from wholeness based on existential perspective, and the existence of individual is searched from the midst of absurdity. Thus, establishment of individual being through free decision and the identity of individual being through the wholeness of life and universe is the major concern of the novel.

The researchers and critics have analyzed the novel from the perspective of linguistic and existentialism. The absurdity and meaninglessness of life is beautifully portrayed realistically through various characters in the context of second world war. Similarly, the text has been viewed from linguistic perspective that how the language is used by different speakers in multicultural society. As no one has researched this novel on the cultural aspect of diaspora, the researcher has found the research gap that the researcher is going to problematize issue on cultural aspect of diaspora, and will focus on research findings.

Cultural Identity and Diaspora

Post-colonial theory related to the cultural aspect of diaspora has been applied to the study and analysis of the text, *There is a Carnival Today* by Indra Bahadur Rai. In this regard, concept of hybridity as a theory propounded by Homi K Bhabha has been especially selected to study the cultural identity of diaspora. The researcher has also applied the concept of imaginary home land discussed by Salman Rhusdie to study the longing and desire of the home land for the diaspora which is possible only at imaginative level, but in reality, longing for homeland is painful and almost out of question. Because of the openness and blurring of the boundary in the later part of the 20th century, the notion of nation and nationality has lost its relevance and significance at present. People have developed new cultural identity in the host land because of their affiliation to the land of origin and the land of destination at the same time. According to Keshab Raj Chalise, the position of diaspora in term of cultural identity has turned to be 'displaced', 'conflicted', 'hybridized', 'dual' and 'ambivalent'. As the diaspora has to adopt the culture of new territory and sustain the culture of their roots, new cultural identity such as 'in-betweenness' emerged which has created ambivalent feeling of love and hate, 'mimicry', 'third space' and 'uncanny' which has been discussed in the text, *The Location of Culture* by Bhabha according to

Chalise. The researcher has briefly discussed the basic concept developed by Bhabha to support textual analysis.

Cultural identity of the diaspora turns to be hybridized as the diaspora internalizes both cultures from ancestral land and host land. "A hybrid is thus a palimpsest that reveals both alien and home alternately in such a way that there is no distinction between the 'original' and the 'new'" (Nayar208). Diaspora as such loses the purity and originality of identity associated with nation of the origin. Regarding hybridity, Chalise writes, "hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (81). As the culture from both land mixes, the diaspora adopts and internalizes hybrid culture terminating the purity and authenticity of their ancestral culture. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin quote the idea from Bhabha that "inherent originality or purity of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity" (61). Thus, it is the cross-cultural exchange.

Bhabha develops his theoretical concept drawing upon the idea of some post-structuralists such as Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Mikhail Bakhtin to analyze cultural relation between colonizers and colonized. Regarding this, Habib writes,

Bhabha takes some of the foregoing ideas from Derrida; from Mikhail Bakhtin, he draws the notion of the "dialogic" (indicating the mutuality of a relationship in order to characterize the connection between colonizer and colonized; he draws also ...on the concept of "nation" as defined in Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983) (750).

Bhabha draws upon these theoretical concepts of post-structuralists, and develops new theory of hybridity as a challenge to deconstruct the superiority of colonizers.

The concept of uncanny is a new idea developed by Bhabha to analyze the mysterious nature of the colonized. Chalise writes that uncanny reflects double character within post-colonial identity. He further opines that man is always in search of stable culture, but culture in itself is unstable. Thus, searching stable identity in unstable culture is also uncanny (86). Thus, it is helpful to study the divided psychology of the diaspora through uncanny. Beside uncanny, Bhabha develops concept on nation. Because of globalization and transnationalism, people move from one territory to the next crossing the border easily and comfortably. Diasporas have changed their views on nation because of the open access and opportunities available to them in the host country. They adopt the cultural identity from both nations of home land and host land. Anyway, traditional notion of nation is deconstructed by diaspora (Timalsina310). Thus, unitary and single cultural identity is replaced by hybridized identity.

Textual Analysis

The major protagonist, Janak goes through the experience of hybridity in the novel, *There is a Carnival Today*. Moreover, Hybridity in terms of cultural identity can be seen in characters that imitate language, manner, dress up, food and ways of speaking of the colonizers and sustain the cultural heritage of their roots. Janak's father who runs tea shop in the locality is influenced by English education and sends his son to Calcutta for further study after matriculation. The old man who is proud of sending his son to Calcutta for further study because of the assurance of finding job from British bank manager imitates wearing English dress as, "dressed in a red felt cap and white shirt done all the way up with hooked

buttons...." (3). Similarly, British bank manager speaks in English with broken Hindi, "we see, Achha!" (3). These quotations show that not only colonized but also colonizer mimicry to each other's language.

The protagonist, Janak maintains cultural identity from both home land and host land. Janak, thrilled and interested to visit Nepal for the first time with his family, is "curious to meet blood relation and see the ancestral homeland of the Yonzons" (10). Furthermore, Janak has the strong desire of finding his ancestral home place down in Sailung, Dhankutta of "singing a Sello song and of flirting with the Himalaya's pure Tamang women" (11). It is just Janak's fantasy and imagination that he wants to create connection with his land of origin; in reality he does not dare to visit this particular place Janak has mentioned because he cannot claim that this place belongs to him. As Janak is permanent resident of India he has adopted the culture of host land. Moreover, Janak has adopted the philosophy of non-violence, and adopts India as his home, "our country is our home" (4). Culturally he is divided between Nepali and Indian. As such, Janak does not "have grave responsibility towards his nation" (7). Thus, Janak belongs to both homeland and host land in terms of cultural identity as a result of which he does not carry grave responsibility to any nation.

Cultural affiliation to the territory of both sides brings the experience of frustration, fragmentation and division of the self on Janak. He does not seem to have fixed and stable nature of job in the host land. Janak keeps changing his job, but does not succeed in anyone of them. He seems engaged working in bank, running government ration shop, opening cloth store in partnership, but he is a failure. As a result, Janak goes through financial crisis and feels frustration. As Janak becomes failure in host land he creates ties with Nepali community and intends to work for the interest of them. Janak responds to the question asked by Bhudev, politician about Janak's changing position as, "we must change our colors again and again, a hundred times to save and develop our peoples and our kinsman. I'm not in favor of going extinct. We change color not of self-interest, but for the betterment of our peoples, that's all" (137). These lines are obvious that Janak is interested for the betterment of Nepali community when he is in trouble. Thus, Janak goes through frustration because of the instability of his life.

Diaspora in the multicultural society develops the sense of enmity and racial superiority among other communities. There are people from various castes, communities and religions living together in Darjeeling town demonstrating their cultural and racial superiority over other. People like Marwari, Bihari, Bengali, Muslim and Christian are the inhabitants along with Nepali who live together in Darjeeling town demonstrating their cultural and racial superiority to each other. M.k. and Ajoy address each other in informal ways as, "you go and eat fish bone sauce. What do you know, you Bengali who sleeps in a skirt? You go and eat stale rice. What do you know; you hill man who sleeps in a sack?" (27). These lines show the feelings of superiority of one community over other. At the same time, people from one community follow the language and culture of another's community, thus living in harmony. Ajoy who is Bengali shopkeeper speaks in "Bengali inflected Nepali" (27). Thus, showing cultural superiority as well as maintaining harmony is basically found in the text. Concept of cross-cultural exchange is aptly applied in the novel.

Diasporas have changed their notion regarding the concept of nation because of globalization and transnationalism as a result of which people move from one territory to the next crossing the border easily thus establishing unstable identity. People in the old diaspora have their connection and affiliation entirely with home land, thus have single and fixed identity belonging to particular community, culture, caste, ethnicity and nation. However, in new diaspora, people living in host land do not connect with any particular community, culture, caste, ethnicity and nation. Because of open border and globalization, people move freely establishing new identity losing purity and originality of the roots thus resulting in hybridity. Janak says, "we the Nepali of Darjeeling are trusted by both India and Nepal,

and so both India and Nepal try to win our love and affection; but Darjeeling is ours and we are Darjeeling's" (170). What these quotations actually indicate is that the protagonist is psychologically divided between India and Nepal regarding his belonging. Though Janak is the inhabitant of Darjeeling because his ancestors shifted from Dhankutta to Darjeeling long ago, his attachment to Nepal and Nepali culture he cannot forget easily. Psychologically, he is attached to Nepali language and culture. However, he prefers to live in Darjeeling physically. This is the state of divided self which Bhabha calls uncanny which study the mysterious nature of the character.

Identity of the people in the transnational space is marked by the state of homelessness and uncertainty. Homelessness and uncertainty are created by the location which is not fixed and permanent for settlement. These situations are caused by the mobility from one territory to the next crossing the border comfortably, and not selecting specific location for permanent settlement. As a result, people suffer from the crisis of identity being homeless. Birman who does not settle in one particular place keeps on moving crossing the border between Nepal and India, "Birman crossed the border at the Mechi River into freedom" (18). Birman being a single intends to visit Mulpani, Illam where his father lives. Discouraging Birman not to visit his father, Janak remarks, "you have neither sons nor daughters nor a mother. Why kill yourself travelling all the way to visit a so-called father who has brought three wives?" (22). He seems wandering various parts of India and Nepal. Being uncertain for his settlement, Birman decides finally to move to Assam being homeless. Finally, Birman replies to the question asked by Janak when he returns, as, "how can a bird flying away with a broken heart ever know when it will return?" (166). Thus, it's unknown and uncertain about Birman's whereabouts.

Diasporic people living in the host land are influenced by the culture of the westerners. Many characters such as Birman, Bhudev, Yamuna, Ravi, M.K. etc in the novel seem to mimicry English culture. By imitating language, dress up, manner, religious practice, judicious practice, characters try to be adjusted and internalize the norms and values of western culture. For example, Birman mimics sentence such as "thank you" (18) without proper use, thus making it ridiculous. Similarly, Bhudev, MK, Yamuna, Ravi speak Nepali mixed with English words and phrases. Putting on goggles and high heel sandals, wearing sleeveless blouse, spraying perfumes on cloth, viewing cinema, visiting bar and restaurant frequently rather than taking care of her ill husband, Yamuna is the true portrayal of postmodern woman who is much influenced by western culture making her character hybridized. Similarly, the characters like Daniel and Isabell whose name has been kept after English name adopt Christianity thus living with divided mentality. Romantic love between Isabel and Ravi does not turn into marriage because religious difference might be the cause of it. As such most of the characters depicted in the novel in one way or another are impressed and influenced by English culture.

Conclusion

Cultural identity of the diaspora is the major concern that I have focused on the novel, *There is a Carnival Today* by Indra Bahadur Rai. Cultural identity of diaspora in the host land is in-between position because of the adaptation of the culture of both host land and home land. As the people adopt both cultures, they are culturally and psychologically divided resulting in double consciousness and dual identity. Moreover, in the multicultural society, identity of the diaspora is multiple and fluid. The diaspora in the host land has the strong desire of looking back to the ancestral home but they do not dare to claim the home land in reality. So, longing is limited only at imaginative level. Most of the characters seem to be influenced by English culture; they mimicry western language, religion, dress up, judiciary etc. as a result of which they are hybridized culturally. Major character, Janak as well as other minor characters has to face hardship and difficulty in term of adjustment in the host land. Finding of

the research is that diaspora living in the host land has to go through conflicted mentality, hybrid identity and double consciousness in terms of culture because of their attachment to both roots and routes in the transnational space. Diasporic characters in the novel go through instability and uncertainty in their life living in the host land which is the finding of the research.

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