

DIASPORA AND 'HOME' THROUGH FILMS: REFERENCE TO THE HYDERABADI MUSLIMS AND THE KASHMIRI PANDITS

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The paper aims to study the exile and trauma of two different communities i.e. the Hyderabad Muslims and the Kashmiri *Pandits*. It takes two films as its primary text: *Deccani Souls* (2012) by Kaz Rahman and *Tell them, 'The Tree They Had Planted Has Now Grown'* (2002) by Ajay Raina. Both the films talk about the issues of migration and diaspora. The first film highlights the Police Action on Hyderabad in 1948 and the aftermath, and the other film is related to the displacements of Kashmiri *Pandits* during 1990s. The paper tries to study how these films try to create a dialogue with the majority community reflecting various attitudes of the people living out of their 'homelands' which resounds the 'dialogic' and even 'polyphonic' voices as described by Bakhtin.

The paper tries to bring out questions and experiences of these two communities through the selected films. It also studies the perspectives of the second generation diaspora who have settled down and try to bring these issues through various art forms. Their voices of resistance are manifested through these films. Resistance is the very note of any kind of art like films produced from the margin. Diasporic writings being written from margin contain the tone of resistance. This tone for contra-culture shows the spirit of individuality, identity (Said, xiii). However, identities are quite complex phenomenon, because it is in continuous flux, it is positioned. As Stuart Hall opines that there are two kinds of identities, one is where we share collective memories and the other wherein we are at the stage of becoming.

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they

undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found ... and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (4).

In these two chosen narratives one finds that people try to understand themselves from the position of their home's collective history and also position themselves into the present society where they look at themselves as 'become' or 'becoming' selves in new places. But they constantly attempt to reclaim their identity of past or at least create a 'space' for a negotiation where they can find a hope of returning their 'home.' The films take the situation and represent the plight of the two communities' reflecting on the previous incidents and at the same time giving insights into the present psychological status of these displaced people.

Both the films are rooted into history, more specifically its inception lies in the times of accession of states into India during the post-Independence period. The places like Kashmir and larger Hyderabad were princely states like many others. In both the places the majority population was not of the rulers' communities. Muslims were the majority and Hindus were minority communities in Kashmir whereas in Hyderabad, the picture was just reversed. Indian attack and effort of bringing both the places under the larger Indian Territory was not so smooth and consequences followed. Though it was not 'forced' migration, but the loss of power and status led Hyderabad Muslims to a position of 'dispersed from the centre.' The feelings of fear and

insecurity also added to the emigration of Muslims of Hyderabad. Further, the later communal violence and tensions in the country placed them in a flux of 'not accepted' (Leonard, 258).

The *Deccani Souls* is a 2012 film by KazRahman who is a visual artist, filmmaker and teaches at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Apparently, his father migrated to Canada during the Police Action. The film is an abstract one about the mystical journey of the protagonist to another time and place- Hyderabad. Rahman himself plays the role of the protagonist (Hamza) who visits Hyderabad and its history as if in dream. The other character Babu is a census collector, who goes to different houses, discusses with people about the Operation Polo and their association with the city and property ownership. The character Siddiq is a poet, who is going through a phase of crisis in his creativity. He finds difficulty with his creativity and searches for the history of Deccan. He is specifically looking for the lost writings of his grandfather, which narrates the tragic incident of the Operation Polo. The film also portrays fear and insecurity of a minority community during some tragic times leading to communal violence. According to Rahman, it was a different culture and lifestyle before 1948 and he used information from the Sunderlal Report about Operation Polo (*Indian Express*, 29 August, 2012).

The central character leaves in Canada. He feels disconnected to the cold atmosphere of the place. He feels dragged upon when someone is pulling something at the snowfall. It tries to indicate that the character belongs to somewhere else and his roots are different and the situation is not so comfortable. Hence, the question of understanding of one's roots and identity may be looked at. Babu, the symbolical character invites people to get rid of memories of the tragic incident by asking them to sign on the government papers and in return he gives them Rs. 250 as some sort of compensation. This might be considered as an invitation towards a new beginning, but at the same time people are sceptical in accepting this. So, the film highlights deep issues like identity crisis and the struggle for identity formation that displaced people always search for. The diasporic people's struggle for identity got explained by James Clifford in his essay "Mixed Feelings":

Identity is never only about location, about shoring up a safe "home", crucial as that task may be in certain circumstances. Identity is also, inescapably, about displacement and relocation, the experience of sustaining and meditating complex affiliations, multiple attachments (369).

In this context the *Deccani Souls* presents Hyderabad in relation to its historical backgrounds where characters are in search of identities and tries to understand the city. It seems all these characters want to know what Deccan is and where its 'soul' lies. What has happened in the past etc? But they never utter a word about the tragic incident; it comes in the background as a narrative and sometimes where Siddiq reads his grandfather's account of that history. However, through all this the film does not forget to capture the essence of today's Hyderabad. It tries to capture the old Hyderabad's image in contrast to the 'progressing Hyderabad' of present time.

There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our personality (*Mill on the Floss*: 233).

The above note of George Eliot in the *Mill on the Floss* intensifies what 'home' can be for someone and if one is thrown out of that got explained in the other chosen film here. *Tell them, 'The Tree They Had Planted Has Now Grown'* (2002) by Ajay Raina looks at the urge of the Kashmiri Pandits who desperately miss and want to go back to their 'homeland.' Very clearly it depicts the mass departure happened in Kashmir during 1990s due to militancy and instability further. The film does not have characters but the director interviews friends, writers, known people and so on to understand the situation better. It is an autobiographical documentary where the protagonist is going home after eleven years of turmoil. It's a cinematic journey to the lost 'homeland' and revisiting after a long exile. Thus, the film is like a memoir which narrates in nostalgia. Diaspora nostalgically and reminiscently remembers their 'home.' Thus, their native 'home' always comes into their minds as "a mythic place of desire" (Avatar, 192). Further the same ideas can be extended when the film highlights the pathetic conditions of the Kashmiri migrants and their social and economic conditions. According to the director, the Central Govt. should protect Kashmiri people and their problems and needs. Later Ajay Raina writes,

This account of my visit to my homeland is an attempt to express the pain, the bitterness and the anger I feel for being an Indian, a Kashmiri and a Kashmiri in exile... I still have a home there and I am looking forward to my permanent return as soon as I can... (*Going Home*).

Thus, particularly, both the films focus on the people who are not diaspora by choice like people going for profession and so on. These people have been displaced

to many reasons and thus migrated to many places including some places in country itself. Also interestingly, both the directors who are any how related to the places amalgamate the past and presents and try to create a space for dialogue concerning the situations of the displaced Kashmiri *Pandits* or the rootless Hyderabad Muslims. Similarly, both show the effort of reclaiming some space as diaspora writers always do which is perfectly described by Rushdie.

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back we must do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely that thing that was lost, that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (Rushdie, 10).

References:

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