



Delineation Of Diaspora In Zadie Smith's Novel White Teeth

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Abstract

Born to a Jamaican mother and an English father, Zadie Smith, a multiculturalist by birth, wrote her debut novel about an uncomplicated, uninvolved working-class Londoner who lived a good life throughout the twentieth century. Her novel *White Teeth*, which contains autobiographical elements, is universal appreciation. The book has the diasporic elements features sprinkled throughout the story, mingling in the characters without any trace. Second-generation immigrants encounter diasporic issues such as identity crisis, alienation, and in-between-ness in the host country when they migrate to some other urban centre seeking their initiative to get higher education or some productive jobs. Practically they are sandwiched with the psychological anxieties regarding the diaspora and cultural identity.

Keywords: Diaspora, alienation, identity crisis, multiculturalism

INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to highlight the diasporic overviews depicted in the novel *White Teeth* by its author Zadie Smith. Diaspora came from the Greek origin *diasperian*, which meant dispersal or scattering seeds. According to Tololyan, contemporary diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transitional moment (Tololyan, 4-5). The term has different terminologies: exodus, dispersion, migration, dissolution, dispersal, expatriation, scattering, displacement, and escape. Today the coinage has been broadened to attribute several transnational movements where human beings and commodities are taken over, beyond national boundaries and borders. Nowadays, the term diaspora has been used to indicate and enshroud different expatriate people worldwide, from Jews to Armenians, Turks, Indians, Pakistanis, Bengalis, and Chinese. As William Safran states,

‘the label [of diaspora] has been stretched to cover almost any ethnic or religious minority that is dispersed physically from its original homeland, regardless of the conditions leading to the dispersion,

and irrespective of whether, and to what extent, physical, cultural, or emotional links exist between the community and the home country '(Safran, 9).

Set in North London, Smith's *White Teeth* deals with migrants settled in London. The wide difference between their wishes and fulfillments, the conflict between their home and host cultures, the want of adaptation and the fear of disintegration, the patriots' counteraction, and the arrival of the religious conservatives are exhibited. The novel communicates to the readers about the issues, the immigrants face in the country, their need to compromise with the western culture, the identity crisis they have to tackle, the feeling of alienation their next generations have, and their desire to live in exotically equal dreamland. Smith portrays contemporary London with special binoculars that show her wide-ranging perspective, recording the conversations among people from different racial backgrounds.

White Teeth is a closely knitted saga of three families of three different races and religious backdrops living in London. Due to the author's multiracial background, she can portray North West London as a racial hodgepodge with colourful displays. Exhibiting a multi-ethnic society has been Smith's tea since she was born and brought up in such one. She clearly and powerfully recreates the daily lives of people living in London. She utilises the common vernacular English spoken in the northwest part of London and includes it here and there in the novel without much effort. The novel contains burning issues like identity crises, displacement, assimilation, cultural integration, racial hatred, and rootlessness. She effectively depicts the social life of those living in a multicultural background in her pedantic and stylistic way.

As a feature beyond ethnic status (Clifford, 255), religion also has a pivotal role in creating identity. While London has a multicultural kind of living, it is important to answer whether the indigenous minorities receive fair treatment and are treated in a deep-rooted racist environment. In the words of Yasmine Haque,

Affirming itself as belonging to the group of post-colonial Diaspora Literature, *White Teeth* arranges its subaltern figures in a non-hierarchical way keeping none in the center or creating everywhere micro centers. Juxtaposing all kinds of things from Irie's bucktooth and synthetic hair to Chalfen's experimental rat, from Samad's masturbation to the end of the world campaign in a strikingly non-confidential manner, the novel champions plurality and diversity in a world of the mass exodus (Haque, 149).

The inconsistency between the immigrants of the first-generation and second-generation immigrants in their overview of the identity problems and the subject of belonging gives an enthusiastic flavouring to the novel. The earlier immigrants try their best to fit into the multiculturalism but pathetically fail to acculturate and mix up into the British society. This failure and the knowledge of their children that their so-called homeland is reluctant to accept them as its subjects raise questions of identification and belonging. Where do these immigrants belong? Can they preserve the tradition and culture of their homeland? Can they claim that they still belong to their community of origin? Living already in western society, they notice that their children slowly change beyond recognition? All such predicaments are very well exhibited through the characters by Zadie Smith. She uses Samad Iqbal as her vicegerent to speak up about her identity crisis and alienation views. According to Samad,

London is a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated like you are an animal finally house-trained. Who would want to stay? But you have made a devil's pact... It

drags you in, and suddenly, and you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable. You are nowhere (WhiteTeeth, 407).

In his opinion, the younger generation is likely to have their identity problem. Is a middle-aged expatriate with frustrated aspirations; being a middle-aged expatriate with frustrated aspirations, Samad suffers from back to the home syndrome. Rather eccentric in rejuvenating his own racial and cultural identity, he overdoes his role as a parent, and as a result, he misunderstands his children. To set right his unethical relationship with his children's music teacher Poppy Burt Jones, Samad decides to send one of his twin sons to Bangladesh so that the boy will learn and practice Islam in its pure way. Having been sent back to Bangladesh at the age of nine, Magid turns to be an atheist to his father's dismay. Samad says, 'There are no words the one I sent home comes out a pukka Englishman, White suited, silly wig lawyer. I keep here is a fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist. I sometimes wonder why I bother' (White Teeth, 407).

While an identity crisis arises, the twin brothers choose entirely different routes to search for identity and a sense of belonging. Magid decides to be an Atheist, believes in science, and prefers British clothing, manners, and outlook, but his sibling Millat opts for a link with his origin in the form of religion, but with a twist. Despite being a namesake Muslim, Millat joins an Islamic group called Keepers of the External and Victorious Islamic Nation (KEVIN). He also feels that his identity can never be a true one.

In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country until the week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel, and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, though it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands (Smith, 234).

Millat's failure to own a complete identity is in the contradiction between his early and late teenage years. His indulgence in bad things like sex, drugs, and violence leads his parents to charge on the corrupting influence of the west. Born and raised in England, Millat's boyhood identity has been shaped like a white boy. Not worried about his origin, the Muslim boy Millat was hanging out with his troublemaker friends, missing classes to watch porn and adult snuff films, running after blondes and brunettes, smoking marijuana, and being the cause of worry for his parents. But his identity and all his beliefs begin to shatter when he joins KEVIN. Millat starts to abandon all these western practices, and he is aware that he has to be himself.

As a woman, novelist Zadie Smith pictures the female character Irie Jones to voice the problem of identity. Irie was born to an English father, Archie Jones, and a Jamaican mother, Clara Bowden. A half-English daughter, Irie develops an obsession with Englishness inspired by the Chalfant. As a buck-toothed girl, she wanted to become a dentist, but after seeing the false teeth of her mother Clara, she wanted to know the root canal of her identity. Whenever Zadie Smith describes Irie Jones, she never misses the words, ' she kept her hand carefully on her stomach.' This act shows that she lacks self-confidence and wants to protect herself from an unknown danger. When she is in her school and tries to warn Millat about the inspection that is about to be done against the smokers and drug addicts, she has her hand carefully placed on her stomach. She wants to get rid of her Afro hair like a wire spring, and she tolerates the tormenting pain and irritation that the chemical Ammonia gives her to straighten her hair. This shows the identity crisis she suffers, and this is also a failed attempt to change the Jamaican feature she wants to shake off. After sleeping with the twins, she becomes pregnant and wants the second son to become the first one, and she doesn't want to know who the father of her unborn baby is. As the Samad's are identical twins, no chromosome test can reveal the parenthood of the child, and thus

she loses the identity of her child as a third-generation individual; Irie tries to know about her roots from her grandmother Hortense. She fears space and wants her mother to explain her childhood, but she is denied. She acts according to her name, which means 'be cool, 'which describes her behaviour. She tries her best to follow the Chalfens, and they are her role models, but she is not welcomed into the Chalfenism as the story concludes Zadie Smith comments on Irie's child writing letter to bad uncle Millat and good uncle Magid.

Conclusion

Zadie Smith, a contemporary British writer, exposes her experiences as a multicultural individual in her novel and focuses on modern society, which comprises people living with other cultures, religions, languages, and lifestyles. She does not have to strive very hard to exhibit the multicultural and multi-ethnic group because she lives among them, and she is one among them. Her first attempt to write a novel has become a successful effort, and that gained her great acclaim. The novel *White Teeth* has become a milestone in contemporary writing, and it shows the beacon of light to those who write about the diaspora and its consequences.

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