

The ‘Dialogical Self’: Reflection on Hybridized Identities and Acculturation Process in Contemporary Indian-American Diasporic Writings

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Abstract

The article analyzes the challenging process accompanying the acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization) that moves from the conventional notion of diaspora construction through the notions of migrations and instead looks through the lens of multiculturalism through multivoicedness and dialogical notions of self-construction. Drawing primarily on the work of Hubert J M Hermans, W.V Wertsch and Jaan Valsiner this article employs a dialogical approach to understand the construction of hybridized identities and hyphenated selves of the new age immigrants i.e., Indian American origin in particular. By applying the methods of dialogical approach, it analyzes as to how the multiplicity of cultural subject positions highlight the often alternating and paradoxical ‘voices’ of the hybrid self of an immigrant which is negotiated in literary works. Given the conceptual explanatory nature of the present chapter the focus of this chapter is to demonstrate an argument to showcase how in the literary writings of Amitava Kumar, theories related to the dialogical self holds relevance in the transnational global space. The present article seeks to discuss the implications of using dialogical perspectives in comprehending the constriction of hybrid identities.

Keywords: *acculturation strategies, polyphony, voices, dialogical-self, hybridity*

1. Introduction

Language and society share a close relation. It has become one of the most important cultural tools to study a society for it not only help comprehend the community but also the people-to-people connection in a given social sphere. In the domain of literature, critics have often argued how literary writings remain one of the key elements to showcase this relationship to the world. While working on the theoretical proposition of language in literature, Mikhail Bakhtin analyzes the role of language utility and its assessment in literary writings. On the relationship between language and society, he proposes that verbal discourse is a “social process” (Bakhtin 241) suggesting how there is a close connection between language and society. Diaspora, as understood, is a social sphere where different ethnic community share a close bonding. The diasporic society that generally thrives on social interactions and engagement become a critical point for discussions and debates around it. In the contemporary global sphere, diasporic society has undergone rapid transition in all its social, political and economic aspects post globalization. These transitions have had a significant impact on the diasporic culture and identity at large. Immigrants try to adopt the host culture in order to imbibe and gel with the host culture which leads to their adoption of hybrid culture giving them a unique cultural identity. This process of acquisition of culture leads to the

process of their assimilation and acculturation process. These processes play a significant role in their consciousness wherein it also delineates their own demarcation of “self” and the “other.” New age immigrants today face issues like alienation, cultural differentiation and acculturation. This chapter basically highlights how cultural differences that arises out of this acculturation are represented through the language of the author by applying the dialogical approach.

Khachig Tololyan (1996) defined diaspora as “communities that actively maintain links with their culture of origin, including the establishment and maintenance of their own religious institutions, language schools, and so on” (Tololyan 2). Similarly, Glick Schiller and others refer to them as “transnational” diasporas because they “forge and sustain concurrent multi-stranded social relations” that connect them both with homeland and host land culture (Schiller 48). Diasporic communities have made a concerted effort to maintain (real or imagined) ties and commitments to their homeland, as well as to recognize and act as a collective community. People who simply live outside their ancestral homeland are not automatically considered diasporas (Toloyan 1). Indian Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Chinese Canadians, and other such communities are examples of diasporic immigrants in America. Questions about acculturation become especially important when applied to new age migrants in light of the emergence of such transnational diasporic communities. Globalization, contemporary technical advancements has led to the rethinking and reconfiguration of the term multiple times. Globalization have paved way for new forms of culture and identity across the globe. Migrants are adopting new cultures wherever they live and therefore, adopt a new identity. So, there is a need to study diaspora in this transiting environment. Since defining diaspora has become quite complicated and is broadening since its ever-changing nature. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to look into varied aspects of literary tools to analyze its complexities and variations.

However, new immigrants enjoy advantage of having a better communications technology today compared to the older European immigrants. Glick Schiller argued that early wave of European migration comprised of the images of permanent displacement and dislocation which included a complete break away from their native culture and homeland and a difficult transition to a new language and life in the new world. It also saw a shift in moving away from their native culture and adopting to a new one and acquiring a new ethnic identity and then the gradual assimilation in the “melting pot” of the dominant culture. Contemporary immigrants are creating and transforming the social networks today. They are travelling back and forth between dual societies while also inhabiting multiple homes, adopting hybridity (Schiller 48). This has also propelled the multicultural society at large. In this multicultural set up, there is an ongoing process of cultural transition where the immigrants often try to adjust and often attempt to adopt the host culture. Diasporic authors have often negotiated this process of cultural transitions and the succeeding acculturation process in their writings where literature becomes a medium to showcase their own struggles and challenges associated with it. Most diaspora writings, as has been observed and researched on, relates to the real-life experiences of the author. These writings often contain the “monologic” view of the author where the narratives contain the conscious writing of a single author emanating from their personal view that is often regarded as univocal and singular. However, in a set up like diaspora, which involves multiple social interactions and constant negotiates of the “self” of the author, I argue that these narratives are more plural and “dialogic” in nature. Taking this into account, the present article will analyze the literary narratives of

Amitava Kumar from the “dialogic” point of view and how the author negotiates the acculturation process that is reflected in his literary writings.

The article analyzes the challenging process accompanying the acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization) that moves from the conventional notion of diaspora construction through the notions of migrations and instead looks through the lens of multiculturalism through multivoicedness and dialogical notions of self-construction. By drawing primarily on the work of Hubert J M Hermans, W.V Wertsch and Jaan Valsiner this chapter employs a dialogical approach to understand the construction of hybridized identities and hyphenated selves of the new age immigrants i.e., Indian American origin in particular. By applying the methods of dialogical approach, it analyzes as to how the multiplicity of cultural subject positions highlight the often alternating and paradoxical ‘voices’ of the hybrid self of an immigrant which is negotiated in literary works.

2. Acculturation Strategies

Diasporas, as discussed earlier, is shaped through these social interactions where language have played a key role in its sustenance and evolution through times. Globalization today have led to efflux and movement of people around the world. The immigrants try to adopt the language of the host nation in order to assimilate themselves which has led to their ‘acculturation’ which basically means to adopt the language and culture of the host nation. Contemporary diasporic authors often highlighted this acculturation process of the immigrants in their writings as they often suffer from double consciousness. The new immigrants’ experience of a web of contradicting discourse related to home, community, nation, and loyalty requires us to reconsider our traditional notions of immigrants’ adaptations and acculturation. The acculturation and assimilation process are an important phenomenon in diasporas. Immigrants migrating to the West often adopt the host culture in order to acquire a different identity which subsequently makes their identity hybrid. Often times they face with the dilemma of having acquired this dual cultural identity that creates an inner conflict in them. The immigrant authors have often highlighted this process of adoption and acculturation in their writings as they themselves have to undergo this complex process of acculturation in the host nation. Therefore, their narratives whether fictional or real-life account, explicates the incidences which they have experienced in and around them. Acculturation is a process which requires social interactions in response to shifting cultural dynamics. (Berry et al 349).

It is one form of the culture change that happens when the other culture comes in contact with it. In actuality, it is this change is often difficult to change as its genesis remains ambiguous that may be caused by external or internal forces. It is because various factors operate simultaneously in a particular culture. As identity is not static, the individual gradually imbibes the host cultural identity. One of the important factors in the acculturation process is the people to people interactions where language or conversations play an important role. First generation immigrants often face with the issue of acquiring a pure cultural identity because they are not able to forget their native culture. This often leads to what John Berry calls “bicultural competency.” According to Berry, immigrants adopt different acculturation strategies which can be distinguished on the basis of four strategies i.e. assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization as

various ways in which acculturation could take place. Assimilation is the complete cultural adoption of the host culture. When the dominant group seeks assimilation, it is termed as the “melting pot” (Berry 354). While integration involves the adoption of the culture and maintenance of the native culture as well. This ‘integration’ strategy is very common in the first-generation immigrants. Separation is the breakaway from the native culture, it happens when “dominant groups demands and enforces segregation” (354) while marginalization involves (Berry 353).

All of these distinctions involve two dimensions: orientations toward one’s own group and those toward other groups. Marginalization is when the dominant group imposes “exclusion” (to its extreme it also includes “ethnocide). The “integration” strategy is primarily pursued in explicitly multicultural societies, such as diaspora, where there exists a preconceived notion. The diaspora society is expected to possess a positive multicultural ideology, positive attitudes and low levels of prejudice such as racism and discrimination and also a “sense of attachment to, or identification with, the larger society by all individuals and groups” (355). The cultural diversity comprises the mutual accommodation strategy which is basically referred as “multiculturalism.” Therefore, integration strategies are practiced in multicultural set up where there exists a “psychological preconditions” (354). Similarly, integration (and separation) can only be pursued if a sufficient number of members of ethnic members who share the desire to conserve the group’s cultural heritage. Former constraints on acculturation strategy selection have also been identified.

3. Polyphony, Voice and the ‘dialogical self’

3.1 Polyphony and Voice

Mikhail Bakhtin, while studying the literary works of Dostoevsky, first propounded the concept of ‘polyphony’ in literary works in his seminal work *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. He compares the writings of Dostoevsky with that of Goethe’s Prometheus and argues that the characters in Dostoevsky writings are not “voiceless slaves” and are independent in their thought process (Bakhtin 6). Literary works contains “*a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses*” (6) in which the characters and fates are not dependent on single author interpretations as there are “*plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event*” (6). On the most basic level, polyphony means “many voices” or “many sounds”; the term is derived from the Greek *polyphonia*. It basically emerged from the amalgamation of various vocal and musical instruments. The Oxford English Dictionary defines polyphony as a “multiplicity of independent and often antithetic narrative voices” where each of them is different from the other (OED 10). Literary polyphony refers to the functions of “voice” in the literature, emphasizing the potential of narrative to be multi-voiced and highlights a plurality of equal and unmerged voices. It emphasizes sound and voice, equality and plurality, autonomy and interdependence. Bakhtin’s literary polyphony showcase the equality and independence of single narrative voice, independent ideology and are interwoven through extra literary component in the narratives.

Researchers like Sunil Bhatia, WV Wertsch, Hermans and Kempen Josephs et al have worked on the role of dialogue that play a constructive role in the presentation of “self.” Their work was majorly inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin writings, his concept on polyphony, heteroglossia and multi-

voicedness that were critically studied and employed by them that challenges the notion of self as “bounded” or “autonomic.” Their studies offer an alternative to the comprehending of “self” that are influenced and emphasize on historical position, cultural process and social engagements. Interpreting Bakhtin, W.V Wertsch writes that dialogues or the process of dialogicality is created through the combination of ‘other’ voices. J.V Wertsch describes the process by which dialogicality emerges whenever one or more utterances of the “speaking subject” come into contact with the “interanimates” voice of the other. He claims that “utterance” is an important component of dialogue construction because it focuses on “addressivity,” which involves two voices, the author and the addressee, or the self and the “other” (Wertsch 51). ‘Addressivity,’ he claims, is a speech phenomenon rather than a language phenomenon.

The other as an addressee can take many forms, according to Bakhtin. Through verbal communication, one can dialogically engage with the addressee. The addressee here is an individual who can belong to any profession who may exist in real or “unconcretized” other (Bakhtin 95). Bakhtin's use of the term “voice” does not refer to “auditory signals,” but points to a “speaking personality” or “speaking consciousness” (Wertsch 51). Ian Josephs’s definition on voice holds importance for the present research:

The obvious characteristic of a voice is its potential to speak, to tell a story. The story is not just any story, but a motivated story, which is rooted in emotions. A voice can talk to other voices, agree or disagree with other voices’ stories. A voice can also be ignored or silenced by other voices, but also by “real” others! A voice can ‘take over the floor’ and become the monological figure on a ground of—temporarily—invisible, backgrounded other voices. But a voice can also support another previously suppressed voice to come to the fore. Last but not least, a voice can change qualitatively due to its interaction with another voice.

(Josephs 162)

3.2 The ‘dialogical self’

In their analysis on Bakhtin's voice, Hermans advocates the ‘dialogical self.’ He defines the ‘dialogical self’ as a set of dynamic but relatively autonomous “I” position or dialogical voice with real, actual, and imagined others, based on Bakhtin's concept of voice. The dialogues that emerge from the ‘self’ purports to different social and cultural positions of the individual. One’s social position also affects the ‘language’ in which one conveys their opinions. Taking cue from the theories pertaining to “self” from William James (I, Me) and dialogues from Bakhtin, he formulates the idea of dialogical self which he calls as a “society of mind” (332). For him, “self and society both functions as a polyphony of consonant and dissonant voices” (Hermans 148). He regards “self” as more than an “internal multiplicity” that occurs from various roles and circumstances and thus is a “dialogic polyphony” where various voices are contrasted and translated via multiple experiential positions that co exist simultaneously. His other critical concept formulates the idea of dialogic self-theory where “self” is expressed in relation to the society which also functions as a “society of mind.” The dialogical self is conceived as a dynamic multiplicity of “I” positions. There is a collective voice in the self and that is why when a diasporic author writes about his experiences it also tantamount to the collective voices of the other diasporans.

According to Hermans, the “polyphonic self” actuate in “an imaginal space,” inhabiting different “I” positions at the same time, with each position gets involved in dialogical relationships with the others., “agreeing or disagreeing to one another” (Hermans 7). He argues that the “I” position is not static instead they change their positions depending upon the time and circumstances. Similarly, from a dialogical standpoint, the positions of “I” can change depending on their sociocultural settings, where one can take positions of ridicule, agreement, disagreement, understanding, oppositions, and contradiction towards another “I” position. The “I” in this case is fluid, able to shift from one position to another as time and circumstances change (47). So, in case of the immigrants’ self that involves to and fro movement between different voices or the perspectives associated with these voices. Like their current life in the US, earlier life in India etc.

A dialogical self model shows how migrant identity emerges from varied negotiations with larger sets of socio-cultural and historical positions, and it encourages us to explore the contradictions, complexities, and never-ending shifts of immigrant identity construction. The “dialogical self” theory faces a challenge in explaining how individuals synchronize and appropriate the voices of the dominant other during transnational immigration, cultural dislocation, and identity hybridization. Jaan Valsiner has also discussed varied forms of dialogicality that is integral to the development of the dialogical self. He argues that there is ‘voice’ that move towards stability i.e. mutual infeeding, polyphonization, and there are other voices that arise instability in dialogicality like expropriating, ventriloquating, dominating and neutralizing different voices. For instance, in mutual infeeding, one’s own voice can contradict in ways like “life is good here” with the other voice countering with ‘life is bad here’. Such mutual conflictions, he argues, doesn’t negate the other voice, instead it dynamically reverberates within the self that gives “stable feedback to each other.” These forms of dialogicality that feeds into each other is integral to one’s own sense of stable development. In the similar vein, Hermans argumentation regarding the “I” positions move in imaginal space creating dynamic fields in which ‘self-negotiations, self-contradictions and self-integrations’ lead to various meaning constructions of self. Hermans explain that as a “mini society,” the “self” evolves from deep interactions with their social set up and is also bounded to specific position in time and space. (7).

In the context of spatiality, the “I” has the potential to actuate different position while in the context of temporality, the position of “I” is fixed. Therefore, the “I” is in perpetual fluctuation in its spatio-temporal aspect and is in position to compare and contrasts its position within “self” or between “self” and are perceived and ideate their position in a dominant social power structure. Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram argues that the theory of dialogical self offers to explain individual’s coordination through “cultural and personal positions in the wake of transnational immigration” (Bhatia and Ram 298).

4. Negotiating the ‘dialogical self’ in Kumar’s diasporic writings

In the literary writings of Amitava Kumar like *Passport Photos*, *Bombay London New York*, *A Matter of Rats* and *The Lovers*, what is observed is that the author is involved in the dialogical process within self and people through this interaction that also expresses his own diasporic consciousness. The author negotiates with the ‘self’ through his internal conversation that are brought to the fore for the readers. My contention is that the narratives written through his

“monologic” point of view i.e., from his own subjectivity isn’t a univocal or static one rather it is in constant dialogue with the self, this, rendering his literary writings a multivoicedness and polyphonic in nature. These negotiations, represent the acculturation process of the author that also affect and influence his writings. His writings showcase the dynamics of immigrants’ acculturation process pertaining to race, the East versus West, the “prejudices;” wherein he often contrasts and entwines the life of India and America. These periodical contrasts in his writings showcases the dynamics of the acculturation process that the author constructs his own dialogical self. There is also political dynamics that are palpable in his writings and often the issue of being “colored” or otherness becomes the high point in his writings.

The novel *Passport Photos* highlights the immigration issues of the contemporary times where the migration to the West have become rapid post globalization. The author narrates his own account of migration when he came to the US in the late 1980s as a young student to pursue his higher education. The author while writing his own account of the journey of immigration connects to the older Indian labour migration. The author feels that migration to the west hasn’t changed much in contemporary times, it’s just that the forms of transportation and working ethics and environment has changed. As a professor working in a New York college, he feels that he too belongs to that breed of labour migrant that came to the US centuries back. In the chapter titled ‘Name,’ he makes a connotation with those migrants through an inner dialogue:

Among the Pals, Kals and Dalaals, As an Indian immigrant in the US, I feel caught between two histories: an earlier one, in the beginning days of this century, when Indians on the West Coast were called “ragheads” or “the filth of Asia,” and a more recent history, in which privileged, middle-class, often rather conservative presence of fellow Indians has earned us the narrow status of a “model minority”

(Kumar 25)

We see a polyphony in the above statement wherein the author who works as a ‘professor’ in America sees himself as the one who had brought to servitude in the West as has been the case of indentured labours centuries back. He makes an analogy to them with his own history of migration when he came to America seeking education and a good job. The polyphony of ‘past’ and ‘present’ is brought to the fore in the above statement by Kumar. While at work as well, the author is often reminded of the state of affairs of his homeland which also brings in the sharp social and political contrast, “As I teach my seminars in the classrooms of the US universities, I sometimes need to stop and remind myself of the distance in time and space from that scenario in my birthplace where conditions are such that even the PWD of the govt. has a special Naxalite cell” (44).

While contrasting both the world, the binaries of modernity and conventional comes to the fore wherein the impoverished state of Bihar where he was born and brought up has been slammed as the ‘fourth’ world that basically testify the backwardness of the place where grew up as a child. He claims, “different standards of human conduct prevailed in Bihar, and the visitor could never know what to expect” (90), implying to the civic mentality that persists in his former ‘native’ land. In the chapter “Date of birth”, he throws light on the people’s imagination about the West as most of them as he feels aren’t aware of the global transition. He writes:

I would have liked to tell Lallan bhaiya that the America that he imagined as being so distant is already within reach where activists stage street plays, where my friends worked as journalists and teachers, where young girls were harassed by men in city buses, where workers from my home state were badly exploited and underpaid in the giant construction projects, where the monsoon sky was held aloft in the month of August by thousands of colorful kites.

(121)

In his negotiations with the 'self,' Kumar reflects upon the process of inflicting superiority and inferiority syndrome by the Western hegemony. The author believes that the "English" language has played a pivotal role in the emigrations from the "Third world"¹ economics to the United States. A perception of superiority is also built around the language. The author delves into the history of English education in India. In the chapter titled 'Profession', the author throws a critical insight into how the westerners were made to feel superior to other. It was subtly done through the introduction and teaching of English by the British that continue to have its effect till day that has been one of the catapults of contemporary migration to the West. He argues that even in today's India, English speaker are taken as somebody possessing good knowledge and knows modernity. Kumar wants this to showcase to his students and would want to tell them that English teaching in India is more like "propaganda" where the language speaking and education have been made a symbol of superiority in the third world countries. In the chapter "Identifying marks," he brings up the discrepancies of "wages" imbalance. He recalls the history of migration and the currently employed professionals working in America throwing light on how the people from the 'East' are paid less than their Western counterparts where they remain beholden to their employees in "a form of indentured servitude" (Kumar 199), referring to the indentured labours that were sent a century back. What he suggests is that the 'discriminatory' practices exist today even after the globalizations has taken the center stage. There is polyphony in the acculturation process when the author goes on to visit one of his fellow immigrants, a computer programmer, whose name was Satish Appalakutty:

In his second floor apt (...) influences of Indian culture (...) shoes left at door, living room has a TV and stereo (...) walls unadorned except for Indian calendar. A poster of Golden Gate bridge poster (...) It is here, in the mapping of migrant every day, in this impoverished geography of affect, that I find more clearly the identifying of my own history as an immigrant (...) Each element in this description, in spite of – rather, because of – its bareness, introduces us to an economy of transience and dislocation.

(Kumar 199-200)

For Kumar, home and his college become the sites where cultural difference between 'being an Indian' and 'being an American' are contested. His identity struggles are manifested through the voices that tell him to be an American in one context and see himself as an Indian in another. We see the dialogical negotiations being undertaken on several fronts in his writings: homeland, languages, customs, food and so on. Such forms of dialogical negotiations where one dynamically moves back and forth; and the between opposite 'I' positions are being observed in contemporary diasporic authors. These negotiations add complexity in his literary writings which are represented

¹ Third World: it refers to the countries with below to average economic status and financial position.

through his dialogical self. His negotiations between his own Indian identity with that of his 'acquired' American identity goes beyond just torn between two cultures.

In another nonfiction *A Matter of Rats (AMOR)*, Kumar delineates the social spaces while also focusing on its glorious past and the present apathy of the government. The narratives in this novel are political in nature where the constant interactions of the author with the self is the major highlight in it. Patna, the state capital of Bihar is very integral to his immigrant identity because of the historical fact that Bihar was once the hub of 'indentured' labours that migrated to the West. Even today, countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname that have Indian diaspora have majorly from Bihari ethnicity. However, in the contemporary scenario, the process of migrations has changed but the one thing that has remained constant is that these populations are still a "job seeker" in the West. Kumar writes:

Not everyone who leaves Patna to construct a better life necessarily finds fame or fortune; as with most such stories of migration, forced or otherwise, for every success there are tens of thousands who fail. But there are also those who find something that cannot be expressed in zero-sum terms of success and failure. There are migrants who have left home in search of the perfect if elusive 'balance of kama and azaadi', that is to say, of income and liberty.

(Kumar in *AMOR* 78)

Kumar's constant negotiation with the self-showcase how self is constructed via dialogue. The varied conversations on different topics highlights how these are entailed in the intermediation of national identities in the Indian diaspora. The exercise of watching Indian movies and music, promotion of the desi foods and culture showcase how the cultural identity can be engrafted and then reconstructed. These examples foreground Herman's' arguments that the dialogical self can be conceived through discrete dynamism where the "I" is in perpetual shifting position. Their position highlights the character's projection of voice that incorporates voices concerning homeland, community, host land and so on. The electronic and cyberspace revolution too have led to the intermediation and transfiguration of space and time that compels to acknowledge the dialogical self as inherently wrapped up.

The Lovers (2017); also published as *Immigrant, Montana* in the US is a novel of variations. It is one of the few literary works of Kumar that has the literary elements of part fiction; other being *Home Products* (2002). In an interview given to the Indian daily *Hindustan Times*, Kumar asserts that he was just curious to experiment with a new genre so much so that he wanted to mess up with it:

Novels describe what it means to be alive at a given moment. My reportage attempts to convey that feeling – of living on a university campus in the US in the early nineties, or writing a novel at the current moment. Also, I very much wanted to play with, or mess with, the somewhat fixed distinction between fiction and nonfiction.

(Kumar 2017)

In the introductory part of the novel, AK writes about the issue of sexuality in immigrants who somehow suffer from inferior complex. Bhatia asserts that sexuality remains an issue in the Indian diaspora that rarify the issue of self and identity (Bhatia 21). This lay tangible in the narratives of

Kumar who through AK discuss his own personal experiences coming to terms with sexuality in America which is also brings in a sense of “inferiority” in him. Growing up in India, AK writes that how in India the sexuality is suppressed from the beginning because of the social dogma attached to it. For many Immigrants from developing nations, being “othered” often complicates their pain of migrations. The referring voice of the “other” gets internalized in them. AK talks about the sexuality he encounters in America, “the land of the free and home of the brave,” it was possible, figuratively speaking, to examine genitalia in public. Then he mocks the Indian men who suffers from premature ejaculation and calls India a “nation of silent sufferers” (6), In this quote, we see a polyphony of voices that simultaneously exist with each other.

There are words like America the “land of free and brave” with India a “nation of silent sufferers,” many of south Asian immigrants who see a liberal American society where people freely talk about sex and relationship which is uncommon in India. However, sexual disorders are a common ailment in India and that happens actually when there is suppression of those desires. AK reminds the readers that these are the issues that affects their sexual self-concept. This notion showcase that the dialogical voice and its underpinnings offers a challenge to immigrant identity that are entangled in their cross-cultural sentiments.

In the novel, the protagonist is involved into a series of dialogue with the self. The novel is about the self-discovery of the central character. AK upon his first arrival in New York constantly engages himself with dialogues with a virtual judge that creates in his mind. Throughout the narratives, the readers learn about the varied discussions he takes up with this virtual judge The expressions mainly concern the binaries that he has in his mind and also showcase the representation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which is a primary feature of diasporic consciousness. The topics that he discusses highlights how oftentimes immigrants are misunderstood and misinterpreted in the diasporic context. It also showcases the author’s own guilt and confessions that exterminate from his own experiences in the host land. It is the negotiations of ‘self’ and the ‘other’ that underlines the whole conversations with the ‘white judge’. The fact that this virtual judge is ‘white’ also underscore his own diasporic sensibility. Through this constant negotiation with the ‘white judge’, AK creates his own ‘dialogical self’ whose views and commentaries can be read through the lens of the character himself, rather than that of Amitava Kumar.

At the beginning of the novel, AK makes sure what he would say, and the author wants to understand those experimental nuances that immigrants’ inner speech that has seldom been discussed in diasporic novel. It is through these discussions that we see the final person that AK is today. AK to bring out those desirable words in which he claims that people in the west think that immigrants come for jobs. However, immigrants’ life is more than just seeking jobs.

I am telling you all this in Immigration Court, Your Honour, because I want to assert that I knew about sex, or at least discoursed about sex, prior to my arrival on these shores. I have chosen to speak in personal terms, the most intimate terms, Your Honour, because it seems to me that it is this crucial part of humanity that is denied to the immigrant. You look at a dark immigrant in that long line at JFK, the new clothes crumpled from a long flight, a ripe smell accompanying him, his eyes haunted, and you wonder whether he can speak English. It is far from your thoughts and your assumptions to ask whether he has ever spoken soft phrases filled with yearning or what hot, dirty words he utters in his wife’s ear as she laughs and embraces him in bed. You look at him and think that he wants your job and not that he just wants to get laid. I offer you the truth without shame and

thank you, Your Honour, in the name of the dark hordes that have nothing to declare but their desire.

(11)

Hailing from a small town in India, the feeling of small-town man continues to have a bearing on his consciousness. These aspects bear similarity with that of the author who in his earlier works have discussed about his days in Patna, the small town where he was brought. It often seems to the reader if it is exactly Kumar that is represented through AK. However, the goodness lies with the fact that Kumar has kept the characterization of AK independent of his authority. This also led him to nostalgia when as a young man he used to travel in India in trains. Even the fuel for stove comes in pipes unlike in India where people queue up for cylinders. The binaries of advanced world to backward world is palpable in his writings and that is what makes him confess to the judge. What he meant to convey is that whatever he is today or any shortcomings in his characteristics is because of may be small town upbringing. The small-town upbringing is very important to note here. The socio-economic discrepancies that he sees around him, which opens the door for comparison and contrasting between them. Like for example, the Human Development Index (HDI) on which the scale of livelihood is mentioned is very poor for Bihar in India and US is one of the developed nations. Patna is still a developing city where things are improving at a slow pace. A person hailing from Bihar would definitely notice the lifestyle gap between these cities. He confesses this to the white judge:

Even the people who collect garbage have their own truck. You cannot travel in a train without a ticket. To go from one part of the city to another, I use the train that runs underground. When I cook, the supply of gas is just like water. It is delivered through a pipe connected to my stove. No standing in long lines here for gas cylinders.

(15)

AK writes that his own company with the fellow immigrants brought up the first step of change in him. Alienation is another that leads him to what he is today. The discrimination against the immigrants in the United States is something that he'd like to discuss and that subsequently leads to the construction of his immigrant identity.

5. Conclusion

The author's hybrid identity is constructed in his literary writings through a back and forth play between different cultural voices pertaining to his own Indian identity, of being brown, the feeling of differentiation, cultural differentiations, being brown in America, and his own 'intellectual' identity. These voices reflect his constantly fluctuating cultural selves. It is in this concept of voice that these fluctuations cultural positions of the author that sense of self is constructed through the dialogical process. The literary writings of Kumar showcase these conflicts and negotiations where his own self can be taken into account as the 'voice' for other immigrants that faces a challenge in the different culture sphere. As observed through the lens of dialogical process, the author's hybrid identity is not static or fixed, nor is it defined by some core singular, essential, or

universal trait. These negotiations and contradictory voices represent and show that acculturation is a dynamic and complex process rather than the other strategy of assimilation or marginalization.

His literary language allows the readers to infer that his effort to rework on the voices of culture and ethnicity does not point to a movement toward acculturation strategies like assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization but showcase an ongoing dialogical movement between the feeling of these voice that is dynamic and in constant process of identity construction where he feels assimilated, integrated, separated and marginalized at the same time. Kumar's struggles with his various "cultural voices" call into question the notion that being 'bicultural efficient' entails happily incorporating the cultural aspects or voices between both the side of his individual identity.

The concept of voice helps to analyze the asymmetrical power relationship of the differentiated cultural aspect of the self. For many immigrants, the acculturation experiences incorporate of being discriminated and constantly living in nostalgia of the homeland and this only leads to their incorporating of a hyphenated and fractured identity and also their sense of in betweenness. Kumar's literary writings showcases his diasporic consciousness of being the 'other', marginalized and exclusion as a non-American in which he showcases a differentiated cultural position. His literary reflections emphasize the fact that his diasporic voice is shaped by the oblique relationships that exist and are interpreted by the larger American society with regard to the immigrant community. It is through the dialogical process; we identify the multiplicity and plurality of his cultural self that also highlight the contradictory power relationship that exists within these voices.

The process of recognizing and identifying the polyphonic self of Kumar through his literary writings help us to locate how the acculturation process isn't a static category for the immigrants living in contemporary diaspora where a complete adoption of the host culture isn't easy for a transnational diasporan like him. The acculturation process being reflected through the dialogical process further asserts that acculturation in transnational diaspora remains one of the dynamic, plural and infinite process which leads to new cultural meanings and definitions and that will always resist finitude. His literary writings also showcase and also question the classification based on four acculturation process (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization) propounded by the cross-cultural psychologist like Berry et al. His writings and statements by him explicate both the Indian and American voices that compete in differing ways based on their sociocultural context.

The polyphony of voices represented through the dialogical literary negotiations of Amitava Kumar showcases his acculturation experiences as fluid, dynamic and contextual rather than fixed or singular as can be seen in the linear and universal concepts of marginalization, integration and separation. His hybrid literary language is guided by topics of larger sociocultural and political world. The literary language represented though voice interact and compete each other and showcase that these are "emotionally grounded and personally constructed" (Josephs 162). This is what makes his literary writings different from other contemporary diasporic authors where the literary writings showcase a dynamic, fluid and socially inclined yet personally constructed.

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