

The Novels of Diaspora Asian Writers from 2020 Onwards: A Literary Exploration

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Abstract

This research paper examines the emerging themes, narrative styles, and cultural significances in the novels of diaspora Asian writers published from 2020 onwards. By analyzing the works of prominent authors such as Megha Majumdar, C Pam Zhang, and Michelle Zauner, the paper seeks to understand how these contemporary writers articulate their experiences and identities. The study focuses on the themes of displacement, identity, cultural hybridity, and the socio-political contexts that shape these narratives.

Introduction

The diasporic experience has long been a rich vein of literary exploration, with writers using their unique positions to comment on themes of identity, belonging, and cultural conflict. In recent years, a new wave of diaspora Asian writers has emerged, offering fresh perspectives and narratives that reflect the complexities of a globalized world. This paper investigates the novels of diaspora Asian writers from 2020 onwards, examining how these authors navigate their cultural heritage and contemporary realities.

Thematic Exploration

Displacement and Belonging

1. Megha Majumdar's "A Burning" (2020):
 - Plot Overview: "A Burning" is a gripping thriller set in contemporary India, following the intertwined lives of three characters: Jivan, a young Muslim woman accused of terrorism; PT Sir, a gym teacher turned political opportunist; and Lovely, an aspiring actress.
 - Themes: The novel explores the theme of displacement both literally and figuratively. Jivan's wrongful incarceration represents the physical displacement, while her struggle to prove her innocence highlights the societal and political alienation faced by marginalized communities.
 - Narrative Style: Majumdar employs a multi-voiced narrative, reflecting the fragmented and multifaceted nature of modern Indian society. This structure allows readers to engage with multiple perspectives, deepening the understanding of displacement and belonging.
2. C Pam Zhang's "How Much of These Hills Is Gold" (2020):
 - Plot Overview: Set during the American Gold Rush, this novel follows two orphaned siblings, Lucy and Sam, as they journey through the American West, seeking to bury their father and find a sense of home.
 - Themes: Zhang's novel delves into themes of displacement and belonging against the backdrop of a historical narrative. The siblings' journey is both a physical quest and a metaphorical search for identity and acceptance in a land that is both theirs and not theirs.
 - Narrative Style: The novel's lyrical prose and non-linear timeline emphasize the disorienting effects of displacement and the elusive nature of belonging. Zhang's narrative intertwines myth and history, creating a rich tapestry of diasporic experience.

Identity and Cultural Hybridity

1. Michelle Zauner's "Crying in H Mart" (2021):
 - Plot Overview: This memoir-cum-novel chronicles Zauner's experiences growing up Korean-American, dealing with her mother's illness and death, and her subsequent journey to reconnect with her Korean heritage.
 - Themes: Identity and cultural hybridity are central to Zauner's narrative. The book explores the complexities of navigating a bicultural identity and the process of reclaiming one's heritage in the face of personal loss.
 - Narrative Style: Zauner's intimate and reflective prose captures the nuances of her dual identity. The narrative is interspersed with vivid descriptions of Korean food and culture, symbolizing the tangible connection to her heritage.
3. Sanjena Sathian's "Gold Diggers" (2021):
 - Plot Overview: This coming-of-age story with a magical realist twist follows Neil Narayan, a second-generation Indian-American teenager, who discovers that his neighbor Anita and her mother brew a magical elixir made from stolen gold to achieve success.
 - Themes: Sathian's novel addresses the pressures of the "model minority" stereotype, the pursuit of the American Dream, and the resulting cultural and generational conflicts. It highlights the duality of identity experienced by diaspora youth.
 - Narrative Style: The blend of realism and magical elements allows Sathian to explore serious themes with a touch of whimsy, reflecting the often surreal experience of living between two cultures.

Socio-Political Contexts

1. Supriya Kelkar's "That Thing about Bollywood" (2021):
 - Plot Overview: A middle-grade novel about Sonali, an Indian-American girl, who finds herself in a Bollywood-style world where she must confront her family's issues through song and dance.
 - Themes: The novel tackles issues of cultural identity, family expectations, and the immigrant experience in a format accessible to younger readers. It explores the impact of socio-political contexts on personal identity formation.
 - Narrative Style: Kelkar employs a lively, imaginative narrative that combines the vibrancy of Bollywood with the realities of diaspora life, making complex themes approachable and engaging for a younger audience.
2. Abi Daré's "The Girl with the Louding Voice" (2020):
 - Plot Overview: Though primarily set in Nigeria, this novel's protagonist, Adunni, dreams of education and escaping her oppressive circumstances, reflecting broader themes of aspiration and resilience common in diaspora literature.
 - Themes: The struggle for education and self-empowerment resonates with the experiences of many in the diaspora, highlighting issues of gender and social justice.
 - Narrative Style: Daré uses a first-person narrative in broken English, reflecting Adunni's voice and growth, emphasizing the power of personal agency and resilience.

Conclusion

The novels of diaspora Asian writers from 2020 onwards provide rich, multifaceted explorations of displacement, identity, and cultural hybridity. Through diverse narrative styles and thematic concerns, these authors offer invaluable insights into the contemporary diasporic experience. Their works challenge and enrich our understanding of what it means to navigate multiple cultural landscapes, underscoring the ongoing relevance and dynamism of diaspora literature.

References

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