

A STUDY OF WOMEN DIASPORA

(With Special Reference to Selected Indian Women Writers)

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Abstract: Much of the literature available on the Indian Diaspora pertains to Indian migration, the socioeconomic and cultural experiences and experiences of adaptation and assimilation of Indian people in the host societies. Overseas migration of Indians maybe examined in terms of three phases: a. The Ancient and the Medieval, b. The Colonial and, c. The Post-Colonial. The migration in the Post-Colonial period was entirely different as compared to the earlier forms. Here, the migrants are from the middle class with instruction in English and are skilled. The writers of Diasporic literature translate reality and their personal experiences in two or more different systems, which is why their work can be regarded as an enrichment of both cultures. Diaspora, the dispersal of various people around the world, often caused by major historical and political changes, carries with it the collective cultural memory and capital of the past, overseas or across the border, the acknowledgement of the old country as a concept deeply embedded in an individual language, religion, customs and folklore. Diasporic writings today connect the past and the present and forges new notions of transnational identities; it opens up spaces for new expressions of a transnational global culture. The present research article focuses on the writings of the Indian Women Diasporic writers such as Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee – Divakaruni, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Zhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander, Uma Parmeshwaram, Kamla Markandaya etc.

Index Terms: Women Diaspora, Indian Culture, Literature

Indian women writers in English have made the most significant contribution in the field of English literature. Indian literature has grown considerably in bulk variety, and maturity. The development of Indian literature follows certain definite patterns, and it is not difficult to trace its gradual progression from the imitative stage to the realistic to the Psychological to the experimental stage. Feminist writings were of crucial interest to the post-colonial discourse for two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism could be seen to exert different forms of domination over those, subordinate to them. Because of this, it was important for the experiences of women under the patriarchal influence to come out to the forefront and expose the undue cruelty be held on them by men. It was necessary for the women to oppose this male dominance over them. We observe that women continued to define the borders of the community, class and race. They tried to exert feminism through their works.

The Indian born writer Bharathi Mukherjee is one of the most widely known immigrant writers of America. The immigrant writers in America can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the 'Willing Immigrant Writers', who settled in America from Europe and Asia and who have made it theirs home. The second category consists of the 'Unwilling Immigrant Writers', with American origin whose forefathers were brought to America in some slave trips. But Bharati Mukherjee considers herself different from other European writers for a variety of reasons. Bharathi Mukherjee's female protagonists are immigrants and suffer cultural shock but they are potential women and are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys.

In Bharathi Mukherjee's first novel 'The Tiger's Daughter', the protagonist Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years stay in America. The story is drawn on Mukherjee's own experience and those of her sisters who had gone to study in America. In her second novel 'Wife', the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple, a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl, is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waits for marriage. The third and most accomplished novel 'Jasmin' is an account of adaptation and not a defeat. It is the story of a Punjabi rural girl, Jyothi. Prakash, an energetic and enthusiastic young man enter in Jyothi's life as her husband. Bharathi Mukherjee's succeeding novel 'The Holder of the World' reinforces expatriation as a journey of the human mind. In her next novel, 'Leave it to me', Bharathi Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman, sociopath, named Debby Dimartino, short name Debi who

seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. Bharathi Mukherjee's latest novel 'Desirable Daughters' is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of dealing with situations. 'Desirable Daughters', as the title suggests, one kind of daughter, which parents would be proud of and for whom every parent would crave. Bharathi Mukherjee's last novel is 'The Tree Bride'.

One of the most prominent voices of Indian writing in English at present, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents the concept of 'New Woman' in its true colour. She depicts the unending struggle of Indian woman against patriarchy, society and her own family. Her female characters are strong and fearless. One important observation regarding the novels is the way Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's own assimilation with the adopted land has changed her view and projection of women in her writings. If, 'Mistress of Spices' reflect out landscape of characters projecting the situation of the immigrants and gives a picture of the way the various characters struggle through their own selves and with the outer selves, 'Sister of my Heart' focusses on the bonds of womanhood and the way they cope with the conflicting situation. It can be called a story of women narrated through a woman and with 'The Vine of Desire' Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has shaped the complexity of relationships into a web of desires which weaken humanity at large. The entire gamut of relations has been studied in detail against the backdrop of two cultures intersecting with each other in the ideology of the characters. With 'Queen of Dreams' the author has presented an emotional aspect of the desire to explore and understand the native land of second generation immigrant and presented the contemporary problem of terrorism plaguing the world. In 'The Palace of Illusions' the mythical character represents the modern and contemporary 'new woman'. With the novel 'One Amazing Thing' the spirit of human beings to survive the disasters and the challenges have been made vocal and not just the Indo-Americans but the South Asians in general living in America have been brought together on one platform. Finally, the novel 'Oleander Girl' brings in the question of identity as against the broader canvas of inter-racial and inter-national geographical spaces.

For centuries, women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. In patriarchal bourgeois society, the matriarchal community has been humiliated, afflicted, silenced and tortured socially and economically. With the post-modernizing age, women began to see the universe with their own eyes and not through the male gaze. In India, with the matriarchal struggle against patriarchy another inner revolution started manifesting itself in literature, especially women's writings. The voices of women began to view with those of men.

Anita Desai has treated psychological realities very minutely in her novels. Her purpose of writing is to discover herself and then aesthetically, convey the truth. She has tried to probe into the depths of a woman's psyche and showing its relation to society. And, this concern can be drawn through the portrayal of the neurotic like Maya and Sita. Both these women present sensitive individuals in their moments of intense struggle and their efforts to seek neurotic solutions. Anita Desai is widely recognized as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. The prominent feature of her works is her art of the portrayal of characters. She examines the psychological inner workings of women and presents their reactions in her two novels 'Cry, the Peacock' and 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?'

What makes Desai's fictions so fascinating is that the vast canvas of our contemporary society in which the themes of alienation, cultural clashes, displacement and exile are presented in the broad perspective of globalisation. The sensitive socio-political issues concerning hybridity, insurgency, immigration, intercultural communication, identity crisis, loneliness, multiculturalism, poverty, racial discrimination, social realism, and search for home also find expression within the ambit of her novels.

Kiran Desai has used the technique of magic realism and socio-cultural realism in her novels. Her first novel 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' (1998) has presented different perspectives of life. In her second, Man Booker Prize winning novel, 'The Inheritance of Loss' (2006) she has analysed several current issues of modern civilisation. In 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard', Kiran Desai portrays the dreams and aspirations of an Indian middle-class family. She invests the story with a keen sense of humour. The Guava Orchard becomes the epicentre of all the characters when Sampath Chawla, a middle-class, good for nothing post office clerk tries to escape his failures by climbing a guava tree and gaining the reputation of a hermit. Kiran Desai's second novel 'The Inheritance of Loss' lucidly demonstrates the socio-political situation in Kalimpong. It is a brilliant study of Indian socio-cultural scenario in its transitional phase. In fact, significant social changes have occurred in India due to the people's craze for western values, manners and life-style; impact of modernization, consumerism and globalization. As a diasporic writer Desai presents the characters who fail to assimilate new culture and give up their original culture in totality.

Jhumpa Lahiri, Pulitzer Prize winner was born on July 11, 1967 in London. The daughter of Bengali Indian immigrant is an American author. 'Interpreter of Maladies' (1999) is Lahiri's debut short story collection. 'The Namesake' (2003), was adopted into the popular film of the same name. In her recent 'Unaccustomed Earth' (2008) she moves on to a scrutiny of the fate of the second and third generation. 'The Lowland' is the latest novel. The Namesake is her highly-anticipated novel. The book spans more than thirty years in the life of a fictional family the Gangul's. The Culcutta born parents immigrated to the United States as young adults and their children, Gogol and Sonia grow up in United States experiencing cultural compromise and the constant generational and cultural gap between their parents and them.

Meena Alexander explores themes of memory, migration, Diaspora and displacement in her diasporic work. Her creative work lies at the intersection of post colonial ethnic American, and women's studies. Like her life, which has included multiple border crossings, her poems crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and generates interdisciplinary dialogues. Poetry has been widely published in the New York Times Magazines. Meena is a genuine diasporic voice expressing her own life's diasporic experiences in her poetry uprooting and exile, alienation and identity, migrant memories and traumas, separation and loneliness all the way from India to Sudan and USA.

In her collection 'The Shock of Arrival', Alexander embarks on precisely on the mythological image of Indian women like the long-suffering Sita of the Ramayana. She dwells on the issue of female sexuality in the national imaginary of India. In the fundamental myth of India, women have to bear the burden of female sexuality. To conclude, her works marked by the sense of loss, the pair of exile and dislocation. Diaspora literature is the literature of the migrants, expressing their experiences and sense of displacement and loss of social constructs like nation, ethnicity, race, culture, language etc. their identity crisis, sense of alienation, nostalgia, loss and emptiness. They experience social isolation, cultural shock and stress. Therefore, in diasporic literature we come across the themes of emptiness, frustration, disillusionment, home sickness, racism and discrimination.

Uma Parameswaran was born in Madras, India in 1938 and was raised in Jabalpur. She completed her undergraduate studies at Jabalpur University, received an M.A. in English from Nagpur University. An M.A. in Creative Writing from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in English from Michigan State University, Uma Parameswaran immigrated to Canada in 1966 and settled in Winnipeg, Manitoba where she continues to live. She is a retired professor of English at the University of Winnipeg and has a special interest in the area of South Asian Canadian literature. In her novel, 'A cycle of Moon', Parameswaran explores the subtleties of love, marriage, intimate style. Her novel, 'Mangoes on the Maple Tree' is set in Winnipeg against the 1997 'flood of the century'. This novel spans twenty days in the life of an Indo-Canadian family—the Bhaves and their cousins, the Moghes. In the novel members of this extended family face their individual crises, and emerge with a better understanding of themselves as they establish roots in Canada. Her novella, The sweet smell of mother's milk-wet bodice is Inspired by real stories, the novella tells the tale of a sponsored wife of a landed immigrant, who soon experiences abuse followed by divorce with no spousal support from the husband that betrayed her.

Kamla Markandaya can be called a feminist writer on the basis of her feminine perspective. She shows the woman who is struggling to find out her identity in the male dominated world. Awakened-Women is represented by Kamala Markandaya in her novels like 'Nectar in a sieve', 'A handful of Rice', 'Some Inner fury', 'The Golden Honeycomb' and 'A Silence of Desire'. A woman's quest for identify and refining herself finds reflection in her novels and shows an important motif of female characters. She portrays a realistic picture of contemporary women through her characters i.e. – Rukmani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc. She explores the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with sympathetic understanding. Her heroines are in constant search for meaning and value of life. They are ready for sacrificing themselves. They move from self denial to self – assertion and from self negation to self affirmation. The feminist voice is heard in all her novels. Character of Rukmani in 'Nectar in A Sieve' is stronger than other characters in her novels. Her life is full of hopes and frustrations, pleasures and pains, rise and fall. An awakened- woman is completely different from the woman who thinks of seeking equality with man, asserting her own personality and emphasizing on her own rights as a woman. She is gifted with depth and rationale thinking. Quite contrary, the awakened woman is the woman whose pet words are self- assertion and dominance and who calls herself emancipated and economically independent. Such face of the woman is diagnosed as eccentricity. Thus, the awakened woman, clinging to

her basic values modifying herself according to the modifying circumstances, goes ahead on the way seeking for her own identify with new depth and getting recognition but never the aberration type.

Though the Indian women writers try to depict the women as strong and focused in their vision to succeed in lives, they were, however, abled to succeed in their lives only in the space allotted to them by the men. However, the Feminist writers tried to stamp their authority in a male dominated environment as best as it is possible to them. It was a very difficult path, as the women had to break through years of male dominance, taboos and beliefs that had heavily impregnated the society. In addition, critics argued that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men. This was so because women were subjected to both general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women addressed as 'double colonization.

Indian women writers are expressing too artistically. Moreover, Indian women Writers, in English too, in the recent times have managed to excel in all areas of literature and achieved global recognition. The Indian women writers expressed the role and position of woman through their writings in English, have enlightened the literature with its quality and vividness. Truly, it represented the culture, history, and all the variants necessary for the enrichment of the literature worldwide. In fact, India is the third largest producer of the novels after USA and UK. Although the writings profoundly deal with regionalism, they crossed the natural boundaries with universal themes. India is the land of diversity with so many languages, religions, races, and cultures. This multiplicity gave the writers an enormous liberty to deal with various themes. The voice of Indian women writers also dealt with historical, cultural, philosophical and much more basing their themes around mankind. The Indian women writers have concentrated their themes around sociological, Diasporic elements, feminine subjects, science and technologies, explorative writings, and much more. The Indian women have significantly contributed to the overall world literature as equal with men writers. This contribution of India has been chiefly through the Indian writing in English, novelists being in the forefront in this respect. A number of novelists on the contemporary scene have given expression to their creative urge in no other language than English and have brought credit to the Indian English fiction as a distinctive force in the world of fiction. To attempt creative expression on a national scale in an alien medium has seldom happened in human history, and it speaks of the prolific quality of the Indian mind to assimilate the newly confronting situations and the complex dilemmas of modern World. The new English fiction exhibits confidence in tackling new themes and experiments with new techniques and approaches to handle these themes. The novelists come to their task without any preconceived notions of what constitutes literary content. This encourages them to focus on a vast and comprehensive canvas and to invest their themes with epic dimensions.

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