

CULTURAL DISLOCATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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Abstract

Bharathi Mukherjee is a Third World Feminist writer whose preoccupation is to deal with the problems and issues related with the South Asian Women particularly India. Like her contemporary feminist writers she upholds the cause of women, but she differs from them because her basic concern is to delineate the problems of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants. In Bharathi Mukherjee's first novel 'The Tiger's Daughter', the protagonist Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years stay in America and after a stay of considerable time she starts facing a sense of alienation and returns back to USA. Jhumpa Lahiri believes that for immigrants, the challenge of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienations, the longing for a lost world are more explicit and distressing than for their children. The Namesake is essentially, a story about the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrate to the United States to form a life outside of everything they know. The novel is a narrative about the assimilation of an Indian Bengali Family from Calcutta, the Ganguli's, into America, over thirty years; the spatial, cultural and emotional dislocations suffered by them in their effort to settle "home" in the new land. The present paper is thus a representation of the cultural dislocation and identity crisis in both the worlds they stay. The paper also aims at comparing these two aspects by the perspective of two different female diasporic authors the characters land up to search their dislocated identities.

Key Words: *Displacement, Immigration, Identity, Home, Exile.*

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Diaspora is not a new phenomenon just as exile or expatriate, only it's exceptional scale in our globalizing new world. The reason for that willed migration of people from their place of origin especially from third world countries to others in search of better future. The modern Diasporic Indian writers can be grouped under two categories. One category contains those writers who spent a part of their lives in India and then migrated to other countries. The second category comprises of those writers who were born on foreign land. Prominent writers of diaspora are Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamala Markandaya, A.K. Ramanujan, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt.

'Alienation' is a circumstance in a social relationship where an individual suffers from the feeling of not connecting to his social institution that surrounds him. This feeling is also known as 'Isolation' or 'Foreignness' in one's own surrounding. Alienation is a feeling that one experiences in life whether in one's work place, family, society, culture, community, and country at large strive hard with alienation and often found struggling is a result of the real life struggle of the people. They often have the feeling of discontentment in life. Alienation is a powerful force which moves an individual towards the negative urge of self-pity, helplessness, violence and deep self examination. Many authors have used this theme to trace the feeling of discontent which is a result of this alienated self.

After a gap of seven years Tara plans a trip to India. It was dream for her she had planned of this Return and she thinks that all vacillation, all shadowy fears of her stay abroad would be erased quite magically when she returns home to Calcutta, but this never happened. It was so because she was no more Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, but now she is Tara David Cartwright an Americanized lady - who fails to bring back her real Indianness. Her entire view has changed. So does Tara in America but when she sees her own changed outlook, she feels broken. She realizes that she has lost her childhood memories in the crowd of America. Her landing at Bombay airport made her realize:

"First the corrosive hours on Marine drive, then the deformed beggar in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offence." (The Tiger's Daughter, 5)

Namesake is the story of Ashima Bhaduri, a student in degree class who becomes Ashima Ganguli after her marriage to Ashoke Ganguli. After marriage they shift to Boston. One meets with Ashima Ganguly who is upset, homesick, and emotionally alienated from her family home, trying to develop the taste of her favorite Indian snack, thereby trying to reconstruct her past. She thinks of her past with nostalgia of her home and spends her time off in reading Bengali poems, stories and articles. Ashima's immigrant experience, identity problems, the tension between India and United States and between family tradition and individual freedom, the generation gap, the relationship between parents and children, the uneasy status of the immigrants are the major themes dealt with in *The Namesake*. Ashima represents the majority of women expatriates who are unwilling to change or adapt to the culture of the host country and the social, cultural, religious and ideological conflicts faced by them in the host country.

Tara was always under anxiety being conscious of her foreignness. She felt rootless but things do not appear better in India also. Tara herself wonders at the foreignness of her spirit which never permits her to develop any kind of emotional bonding with her friends and relatives. At one place, the novelist writes:

"She meets her friends but even their company can not soothe her. She recalls: Seven years ago she had played with these friends, done her homework with Nilima, briefly fancied herself in love with Pronob, debated with Reena at the British Council. But now she feared their tone, their omissions, and their aristocratic oneness." (The Tiger's Daughter, 65)

Aashima finds it very difficult to become acquainted with the host culture. Pregnancy was a arduous time for her as there was no one to soothe her in the strange land. Motherhood is a magnificent stage for a woman but for a migrant in a foreign alien land, loneliness and strange surroundings nearly kill such feelings. She was the only Indian in the hospital with three other American women in the adjoining room. Ashima "is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare" She is always nostalgic about her relatives in India. After

Gogol's birth she says to Ashoke, "I am saying I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back"

On the other hand Tara forgets the next step of ritual while preparing for worship with her mother and she realizes that it was not a simple loss. Tara notices a lot of change in her surroundings and feels disturbed at the lack of seriousness in the group of her friends. Everybody wants to hear about her experiences in America. In this situation, she misses David extremely.

"It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much when she was surrounded by the Bengal Tiger's chairs, tables, flowers and portraits." (The Tiger's Daughter, 63)

Aashima wants her grandmother who is staying in India to give a name to her new born which shows her desire to hold fast to the conventions of her culture and the resulting disappointment because of the failure to do so. She suffers from sleep dispossession in a house alone with her baby and she visits the supermarket where everyone is a stranger to her. Often recalls her paralyzed grandmother and is never able to give up her Indianness. She gives her children full freedom to move out and explore the world, teaches the culture of her own country but never force them to do or practice it.

Tara visits a funeral with Joyonto Roy Choudhury the owner of a tea estate in Assam. There she had an meet with a Tantric who asks her hand for forecasting but she misunderstands his intentions and thinks that the man needs *money* . This misunderstanding again shakes her belief in her identity In this way her mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities – one of an Indian and the other of an American. During such moments she feels like going back to David, her husband because she would be more at ease there.

For Aashima everything related to her husband is valuable but for Moushmi the things related to Gogol are just property carrying no importance. Aashima stand apart from all other characters in her commitment towards marriage. Aashima is always reminded of the words of her elders who told her not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family. Tara moves to Darjeeling with her family and friends for a brief holiday where she enjoys the evergreen beauty of hills, but some ugly and violent incidents destroy her trip. Everything appears frustrating and horrible to her on finding that conciliation is impossible and she frets to go back to David. She reserves a seat on a flight to New York.

After a short while she becomes a victim of violence caused by the marchers who were proceeding towards the Catelli- Continental in a mob. The old man Joyonto Roy Choudhury is unfortunately killed by the mob.

The end of Tara remains mysterious but it is predicted that she does not survive in the violence of the mob. Locked in the car she only thinks about her husband David, and the novel ends with these lines:

“And Tara, still locked in the car across the street from the Catelli – Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she did not, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely.”(The Tiger’s Daughter, 210)

Ashima like many immigrant Bengali women is not culturally immunized by America’s multi culture, is a strong admirer of Indian culture and gives importance to family and relationships. She tries best to play the role of a homemaker and tries to uphold the traditional values against the materialistic values of America. The fear of losing her Bengali culture and of her children’s neglect of their original culture secretly torments her. Through the existential struggle of Ashima and Tara both Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee presents the cramp of a woman living in an alien land, caused by a sense of isolation. She misses her homeland and this refugee experience of being neither in home country nor in foreign nearly kills them. They are a genuine representative of diasporic people living in similar hidden suffering. Like a traditional Indian wife in appearance and in ideologies, her life revolves around her husband and children only. Thus the present paper focuses on the identity crisis of Tara Banerjee in India and Aashima Ganguli in America where they face dissatisfaction with their lives and an emotional vacuum.

It is observed that Tara loses her Indianness when she comes to her own motherland, but Aashima’s heart still beats for their tradition and culture. On the other hand we find presence of true love for their husband in both Tara and Aashima which is the soothing part of this fiction.

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