

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DIASPORIC ISSUES IN THE WORKS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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Abstract

The basic problem of diasporic writings is the feeling of dislocation without roots. The diasporans feel homeless and alienated in the foreign land. Dispersal of roots involves pain, alienation, identity crisis and other feelings to the accultured ones. Displacement not only leads to separation but it also leads to alienation and rebirth in a new country, new culture, new society and new adjustments in an alien land. Indian diaspora pertains to Indian migration, their socio-economic and cultural experiences, experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host societies. Literature written by these diasporic writers is clearly inspired by their personal experiences. The pain of migration and displacement felt by these writers flows in their narratives too. Novels and stories are the tales of deep anguish, nostalgia and of rootlessness where characters feel more emotionally and mentally tortured than physical fatigue. Predicament of dual identities i.e. of their homelands and of nations they migrated to, corrodes their psyche. Jhumha Lahiri and Bharti Mukherjee are the prominent diasporic writers. The protagonists of their works look back to their native country with pain and nostalgia but after all these sufferings they are not ready to look back. They raise their voice for the rights of migrated Indian women and highlight their sufferings faced in abroad. The picture that emerges from the study of the novels are not only those of women being alienated and depressed due to the circumstances but also those of women coming out as bold character to overcome the challenges those come in their lives. The present paper throws light on comparative study of alienation and identity issues through the mouth of protagonist who gets success in bringing about social and cultural change by presenting her condition in society. Both these writers present feminist perspective and also create an image of oppressed woman due to displacement and alienation

Key Words: *Diaspora-Alienation-Identity-Migration-Nostalgia*

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INTRODUCTION:

Etymologically the word, "Diaspora" traces its history back to its Greek root. It is derived from the Greek word "Diaspeiro", literally means scattering or dispersion of people from their homeland. Diaspora has arrived as well as established itself as a distinct literary genre. Diasporic writings occupy a significant position around cultures and countries. Diasporic or expatriate writings explore the problems and experiences of migration and diasporic life. The diasporic writers not only write about their past but also write about their experiences in the alien land. This combination of nostalgia and reaction to the alien land lead to a kind of hope for change of the alien land into a new homeland. Their background serves as the basis of their writings upon which it flourishes. These writers in their writings showcase the life of immigrants who are marginalized because they are not only immigrants but also they are minorities in sense of racial, linguistic and usually religious. The alienation of being an immigrants and the bitter stings of racism and the hard realities of day to day life, their native civilization and traditions are important factors in shaping their life. An immigrant always faces the challenge of to be challenged on the basis of discrimination, inequality, prejudices etc. The diasporic writers locate and establish the cultural nuances with the diasporic space. While negotiating between the parent and immigrant culture diasporic writers occupy what Homi Bhabha calls "interstitial space".

The diasporic writers, though moved the country for past so many years, still feel alienated in their new country and who tend to write about people, food, and events that are typical of their other land. The diasporic writings are the records of the experiences of the diasporic communities living in varied socio-cultural settings. Study of the diasporic writings reveals that the common features noticed in the writings of the old diaspora and the new diaspora are nostalgia, homesickness, and the sufferings due to being far off from their homeland. Both Bharti Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have discussed the problems and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in United States or the Western world. These two writers are one of the most significant contemporary novelists and short story writers whose writings have received world-wide recognition. The novelists depict how the immigrants try to adapt to western society and how they feel rootless. The present

paper is an attempt to observe the comparative study of the selected works of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. With the entry of women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakuruni, Jhumpa Lahiri etc., the English language has widened its umbrella in Diasporic writing. Diasporans migrate to an alien land to live happily, severing their roots of native country. The diasporans' feelings are truly documented by the Indo-American diasporans like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri in their novel by placing their central character on different contexts.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* focuses the status of the immigrant women experience, social oppression, east-west encounter and culture conflict. Both Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have discussed the problems and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in United States or the Western world. These two writers are one of the most significant contemporary novelists and short story writers whose writings have received world-wide recognition. The novelists depict how the immigrants try to adapt to western society and how they feel rootless. In the present age of diaspora one's biological identity cannot be one's real identity because due to immigration both physical and psychological changes come. In the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, the heroine of the novel Tara Banerjee comes back to India, her native land after seven years to meet her relatives and friends. But when she reaches, she finds the condition of India has been changed and she does not feel comfortable herself in such situation. She realizes that her ways of thinking and living are changed and she is no more an Indian now. She even does not remember about the rituals and Indian festivals. She also realizes that the attitude of her relatives, her friends and even her mother has been changed. Due to these conditions, she feels alienated even on her native land. This situation appears because of her displacement to USA from India. She does not feel happy while her journey in a train and now for her America is a dream land. When she first time goes to America for higher studies, she is afraid of unknown and unfamiliar ways of American culture but now for her Indian ways are also unfamiliar. First she feels isolated and alienated in America, now she has same feeling for India. She realizes that she is now neither Indian and nor American and due to these circumstances, she is totally confused and lost in the world. Sometimes she also thinks that she is going to be mad.

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* is the psychological study of Dimple Das Gupta, a middle class Bengali wife who accompanies her husband to New York from Calcutta. The novel develops in three parts; the first part taking place in Calcutta, the second in America, the third part develops in Manhattan where Amit and Dimple are subletting an apartment. Here the writer focuses on cultural displacement and dislocation causes new identities. Through the protagonist the novelist expresses and highlights the challenges of multicultural society of an immigrant. Dimple, the heroine of the novel emigrates from her native land India to the United States and suffers under the pain caused

by a different society. She separates herself from others. She spends her most of the time in watching TV and sleeping. She also does not feel happy when she comes to know about her pregnancy and finally she gets success to abort her child by skipping. As she thinks that her child will be the reminder of the past, India and the old world. In that environment because of dislocation and alienation she becomes a patient of insomenia and even after this her husband, Amit does not take it seriously. At the end of the story, she becomes totally frustrated and out of fear and personal instability she ultimately murders her husband and eventually commits suicide.

In her next novel *Jasmine*, the writer discusses about the life of Jyoti, heroine of the novel. Later her name is changed by her husband and he calls her *Jasmine* instead of *Jyoti*. By changing anyone's name means changing her identity. In the same way when *Jyoti* was a child an astrologer told her about her widowhood. This thing comes true when she was of seventeen years, her husband died in a bomb attack. After this incident, she migrates to the United States of America. But her sufferings do not end here. She comes into contact with a brutal ship captain and he rapes with *Jasmine*. After this cruel incident *Jasmine* does not loose her heart and decides to take revenge and finally kills that beast. Due to dislocation she is changed. She acts like a person that is not according to her personality. Even after this she faces everything very strongly. *Jasmine* passes through one situation to another and one country to another. Whatever happens in novel that relates to *Jasmine*, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly? *Jasmine* experiences not only physical but mental violence also and this influences her life and forces her to reborn as a different person. Through her character the novelists reflects the psychological pain that comes with the changes of culture and life. Her another novel *Desirable Daughters* belongs to the genre of American literature which deals with the issues of immigrant life, cultural assimilation and alienation. It presents the conflict arising from native and foreign culture. The novel presents the life of three Brahmin daughters-Tara, Padma and Parvati. Here the novelist illustrates the situations faced by diasporic women. Tara's journey as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother and as a woman is well represented by Bharti Mukherjee. Tara Lata was first married to a tree, as a measure to mitigate the malefic aspects of her horoscope. Tara migrates to America with her husband, Bishwapriya Chatterjee. When she reaches America she feels gap between tradition and freedom. She tries to find herself in the new system.

Like Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri also discusses the problems of displacement and alienation. In her first novel, *The Namesake*, the main protagonist Ashima Ganguli, a Bengali woman moves to Cambridge Massachusetts, with her husband and is about to give birth. Later s gives birth to a baby boy and she mourns the fact that her grandparents, her family and her friends do not surround her and her baby. When she comes back from the hospital, Ashima says to Ashoke, "I don't want to raise Gogol alone in the country. It's not

right. I want to go back." Ashima feels lonely and alienated in such a condition. Later her son, Gogol also feels alienated, especially when he realizes that "no one he knows in the world in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake." Ashima lives alone in the house on Pemberton Road. She tries to adjust and settle herself to her surroundings but all in vain. She totally fails and feels strange and lost in this country. She spends hours thinking about her parents and family, and rereads the same five Bengali novels. The theme of alienation also appears in Moushumi's life. She tells Gogol how she rejected all Indian with whom her parents tried to match her up. She tells him, "She was convinced in her bones that there would be no one at all. Sometimes she wondered if it was her horror of being married to someone she didn't love that has caused her, subconsciously, to shut herself off." Gogol also feels alienated sometimes in his marriage to Moushumi.

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, Lahiri points out that communication is necessary, both for individuals and societies. Lack of communication and miscommunication lead her character to isolation and cultural displacement. Immigrants feel divided between the customs of their native land and adopted society. Mr. Sen does not feel comfortable in American life and her separation from her family also derives her to isolation. Her alienation increases because she is even unable to communicate successfully with her husband. Her husband does not understand her feeling of isolation. After the accident, she becomes more isolated. In the same way, Eliot's mother is also incapable in communication. Eliot's mother's isolation comes into light through her failure to cook.

CONCLUSION

Literature provides an excellent pattern to reveal the fragmentation of the self and generating of feelings that can be stirred up by migration. Diasporic writers have beautifully narrated the "destructive, agonizing and painful" (Frank, 2008:18) experience of migration in their works. Indian diasporic literature uncovers a migrant's struggle between desires and opportunities- as a reflection of past circumstances and of expectations for the future. Through their works Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri mention the desires, wishes and expectations of immigrant women who want to live their native culture in abroad. Above discussed works of both the writers are related to the diasporic situation of the lives of Indians and Indians-Americans. It also discusses the theme of cultural transformation. Both the writers show how these female characters keep hold on their native cultures and also create their new identity in foreign cultures. But the fact is that, relationships, language, rituals and religion all help these characters to maintain their culture in new surroundings. Migrated women are isolated from their families, parents, home, culture, relatives, friends and the communities also in which they live. The lives of such women in above discussed novels and short stories end with a sense of loss.

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