



**A PERSPECTIVE ON COMPLEXITIES OF DISLOCATION, ASSIMILATION AND
TRANSFORMATION IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES OF SELECTIVE DIASPORIC
WOMEN'S WRITINGS**

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At the advent of globalization, multicultural societies of the present days are a result of extensive Diaspora that has been taking place especially over the last 200 years at various levels. Indian immigration in the last century was mainly a personal choice of individuals, particularly for academic pursuit or economic gain either towards the Middle East or to western countries particularly the US. The inhabitants of these countries reacted differently to the ways of immigrants. In almost all the cases the expatriate face a close of contrasting cultures and feeling of alienation, which was then followed by the attempts to adjust and to acclimatize, either from a separate identity as a racial group or be assimilated. These are acclaimed as "accultured". These are reflected in the writings now generally placed under the umbrella of "expatriate writing" or "writing of the diaspora".

In the Post Modernism, diaspora writings has become popular and the diasporic women writers have special place Indian Diasporic writings. The New Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Diaspora' drawn from Greek: "the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian captivity. Etymologically, dia means 'through' and speiro means to scatter. Now the term is used in a more generalized sense to refer the migration population along with their ways of life to the place of destination abroad. However, the term diaspora and diasporic communities are increasingly being used as metaphoric definition for expatriates, expellees, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities living in exile. These terms now reached a stage of being used synonymously and as interchangeable ones. Bharathi mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Jhumpha lahiri, Anita desai Kiran Desai, Nayanathara sahal, Meena Alexander, Sunitra gupta, Manju Kapur are the some of the prominent contemporary diasporic women writers.

The paper presented here consists of mainly Diasporic women writers who have portrayed the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. These writers are deeply attached to their centrifugal homeland and they are caught physically between two worlds. Their experiences as living in-between condition is very painful and they stand bewildered and confused. In their aim at self-definition and the expression of their expatriate experiences, women from 1970s onwards chose literature to pour out their passions. Diaspora women writers sought to find words and forms to fit their experiences and



have chosen narrative strategies like the auto-biography, the novels and the short stories to do so.

These women writers can be studied under two different categories as postcolonial migrant writers of the first generation and second generation. In the early migrant writers' group Kamala Markandaya comes first and foremost. Her novel *No Where Man* deals with the identity of a male protagonist Srinivas who migrates to England to escape the wrath of the British Government. Bharati Mukherji, and Chitra Banerjee are accepted as writers belonging to this category. Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Meera Syal, a second generation expatriate who write about the dynamics of migration. This discussion on Indian immigrant writers can be further illuminated with the powerful observation of Salman Rushdie.

He observes thus...

The Indian writers who write from outside India .. is obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost... (and he) will create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible Imaginary Homeland, indias of the mind...(Rushdie 10-11)

The modern diasporic Indian writers can be grouped into two distinct classes. One class comprises those who have spent a part of their life in India and have migrated alien land. The other class comprises those who have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of their origin. Both the groups of writers have produced an enviable amount of English literature. These writers while depicting migrant characters in their fiction explore the theme of displacement and dilemma of cultural identity. The diasporic Indian writers have generally dealt with characters from their own displaced community. Two of the earliest novels that have successfully depicted diasporic Indian characters are Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. These novels depict how racial prejudice against Indians in the United Kingdom of the 1960s alienates the characters and aggravate their sense of displacement. Bharati Mukherjee's novels like *Wife* and *Jasmine* depict Indians in the US - the land of immigrants, both legal and illegal - before globalization got its momentum. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* depicts Tilo, the protagonist, as an exotic character to bring out the migrant's anguish. Anita Desai in the second part of her novel *Bye Bye Black Bird*. It examines the plight of Indian immigrants in London, they become the target of racism and humiliation even in public places which leaves them discontented and miserable.

The Indian diasporic women writers such as Bharati Mukherji, Chitra Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai have unveiled the complexities of discrimination, assimilation, social and demographic change, which not only affected the society itself but the lives of the various ethnic groups and the immigrants. The cultural barriers, identity crisis, racism, and violence faced by the immigrant expressed in all the Diasporic literature.



Bharati Mukherji's novel *Jasmin* deals with intense gender portrayal in diasporic situation. *Jasmin* is a story of a naïve young Punjabi girl who could have lived like many Punjabi women "content" and "happy" with common lifestyle, she could have also lived a subdued life of suffering and widowhood after her husband's death, on the contrary Jasmine always desired for challenges she had dreams to emigrate to America the dreams which were instilled by her husband Prakash. After Prakash's death Jasmine migrates illegally to America in order to fulfill her deceased husband's dreams. In America, first she becomes victim of rape but she gets even by killing him as goddess 'kali'. The trauma of violence and displacement transforms her totally and changes her identity from a docile Indian girl Jasmine into Jane Ripple Mayer, a paradoxical identity in the American world. Her portrayal is one of self assertion and transformation in a complex alien world from Jasmine to Jase. Bharati Mukherjee's other writings, *Wife*. Dimple, the protagonist of the *Wife*, on the other hand, is another transformed woman who changes her identity from the dutiful Indian house wife to a killer of her husband - a negative transformation. Migration casts a cruel shadow upon her character and finally her expectations fall short. The racist views towards the third world aggravates her situation when she tries to imitate the western culture and she fails in her attempts and ultimately ends up being a 'nowhere woman'. Bharati Mukherjee's, 'Darkness' portrays pragmatic problems of racial discrimination, homeless, loss of identity, cultural differences, including language issues of Indian immigrant life. The collection of twelve short stories exhibit a clear picture concerning the Indian immigrants have in all shades of struggling to adjusting to life in Canada and the United States.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is another woman writer of first generation who brilliantly portrays gender in its vivid. Her female protagonists are memorable and real representations of diasporic Indian women. Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* is a true representative of diasporic identity. She was born in India, becomes trained in spices and called *The Mistress of Spices* finally lives as an individual in America. She comes across many characters representing vivid identities of diasporic life like scattered identity, marginalized, rebellious, docile, traditional and modern. Chitra banerjee represented younger women, first and second generations who find their true identity in American land, is an example of complexities of transformation and assimilation.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation diasporic women writer. In her novel *The Namesake*, the expatriates are oppressed by two cultures the native land and the alien land and seem to be forever in a state of flux belonging and not belonging and in the country of migration. Her writings interpret the emerging global culture in its multifaceted form. Her characters generally reach the new land by lawful means unlike Bharati Mukherjee's characters. The second generation of diaspora also experiences some cultural displacement, feeling of in-betweenness and hybridity but the main features that marks their identity is cultural assimilation in the land of adoption or birth. Thus they acquire a hybrid identity. The protagonist Gogol experiences all ambivalence of his parents who has not yet been able to assimilate into the new land.



Ashok and Ashima Ganguli and their children Gogol and Sonia are all exiles constantly juggling from past to present. Ashima is surrounded by loneliness suffers from displacement with the new born baby and spends most of the time crying and depressed.

...On her own with Gogol for the first time in the silent house, suffering from sleep deprivation for worse than the first of her jet lag, (Ashima) sits by three sided window in the living room on one of the triangular chairs and cries the whole day.....(34)

She was like majority of expatriate woman who are reluctant to adopt the culture of the host country. Gogol was troubled by his unusual name, he is relieved when he changes his name to Nikhil. he begins to feel that he was reborn. Most of these portrayals are the portraits of women protagonists fit in to the image of Indian new woman. Mrs Parul Choudhary of the story “*Once in a Lifetime*” faces the initial trauma of dislocation, soon adopt the American conditions and assimilate into her new found identity as American Indians. The younger women characters like In the story “*Temporary Matters*” (*Interpreter of Maladies*), Moushmi in the Namesake, Sandhya in “*Only Goodness*” (*Unaccustomed Earth*) etc. are independent, educated women who knows what they do and what they want. They have definite identities of their own and they represent the new woman of new generation.

Kiran Desai is yet another young woman writer of second generation of diaspora. Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, again, has sensitive gender portrayals. Both her male and female characters are truly diasporic. The two main protagonists, Jemubhai and Biju, as migrants in London and New York respectively, represent the expatriate consciousness. The rebellious Nepal, in which the novel is set, contributes to the instability trauma and displacement of the characters of the novel. Jemubhai, the retired judge, faces identity crisis in England when he happens to be a student of law. After the completion of his graduation goes to England for higher education. In London, Jemu feels acutely lonely and sad in a completely alien land. He feels hesitant and nervous to go out and talk and deal with people comfortably. Jemu in reality remains conscious of his brown colour, Indian accents, pronunciation and, above all, the despising as well as biased racial attitude of the whites. He used to take refuge in the library to escape the embarrassment of his peers and young girls who used to giggle at his curry smell. Being the target of laughter he develops an inferiority complex and this creates fissures in his personality which he carries throughout his life. Similarly, Biju, a young man, the cook’s son migrates to America illegally without proper visa, with all dreams of economic freedom and opportunities but his hopes are shattered. Biju works in different restaurants as an illegal immigrant and thus encounters unhappy social as well as cultural experiences in the West. He ends up feeling dejected to endure in deplorable conditions as illegal immigrant and often cheated by his employers. Biju’s failure is the failure of the downtrodden in the land of plenty, he undergoes feelings of disgrace and humiliation and Biju eventually returns India with the resolve, better to be a poor Indian than a hated Indian in America. The portrayals of women are more sensitive in Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*. Jemubhai’s wife becomes a



sufferer of the patriarchal views of her husband, and being a docile and ignorant creature who suffers due to Jemubhai's atrocious nature, and finally dies heartbroken. Their experiences are different and so are their reactions as well as expectations. For some, migration to another land brings bewilderment, displacement and alienation and thereby their tragedy, and for some others it reveals their true identity and attempt to assimilate and transform to adopt to the complexities of the alien nation. Contrary to the second generation, the parents echo the words of G.S.Sharat Chandra in 'Sari of Gods'

I leaped from one life to another, and in between lay nothing but vacume.....We remain at large distant and clothed by our separate worlds. We know that the bonds we shared while growing up do not unite us anymore...In these new worlds, immigrants readjust and reinvent themselves, struggling to find their place in an alien landscape, netting some gains but also incurring deep emotional losses....(7)

The Indian Diaspora plays a significant role in reflecting the complexities of diasporic experiences in literature. It aims to examine the displacement and the nostalgia for their homeland and alienation caused by displacement or dislocation as well as conflict between generations and cultural identity. Diasporic women writers tend to portray the cultural dilemmas, the generational differences, and transformation of their identities during displacement. The spirit of exile and alienation enriches the diasporic writers to seek rehabilitation in their writings and establish a permanent place in English Diasporic literature.

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