



DIASPORIC DILEMMA IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE, CHITRA BANERJEE, AND JHUMPA LAHIRI: AN ANALYSIS

K. M. KEERTHIKA

Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)

Dept. of English & Comparative Literature,
Madurai Kamaraj University,
MADURAI-21 (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the diasporic dilemma in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, as diasporic novelists; they travel in their search for self-hood and meaning life, this made them to voice out the feelings of the immigrants in the alien land. In Indian diasporic writing, these writers have gained a special recognition because of their choice of theme, characterization, style of writing and narrative techniques etc.

Key Words: Cultural Conflict, Diasporic dilemma, Isolation, Self-hood, Identity

INTRODUCTION

“Migration and dispersion are natural phenomena, widely familiar both in the world of plants and in the animal kingdom. Human beings have been no exception”

-Jayaram

In the present scenario large numbers of people are migrating from one nation to another, they willing leave their countries in order to satisfy their ambition, to have better quality of life, education, stable economy or due to the attraction of materialistic life. The very first seed of human diaspora begins when Adam and Eve shows their appearance to the earth from heaven.

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In the beginning the word 'diaspora' was used to refer to the Jews, who exile from their homeland after 538BC, who lives in the different parts of the world, and then later the term associated with the expatriates, exiles, immigrants, and refugees etc. Diapora got associated with the people who spread over different parts of the world.

When people migrate from place to place, they are forced transplant to new culture and language in the alien land. They face great challenges in adapting to new culture, customs and tradition, so this lead to alienation. Many diasporic writers have dealt with the issues of separation from unknown surroundings, alienation, and isolation. So migrants have to face large number of dilemmas in the host land. Rushdie in his essay on *Gunter Grass* remarks that migrant is a person who suffers 'triple disruption'.

Through the growth of commonwealth literature, diasporic writing started its development and later in the literary field the word diaspora has become a very culture specific term. In the recent years there has been a growing interest in the field of Indian diaspora. In the words of Bhikhu Parekh:

"Indian diaspora represent half a dozen religions...seven different regions of India...nearly a dozen castes and is like a banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, spread out his roots in several soils, drawing nourishment from one when the rest dry up. Far from being homeless, he has several homes, and that is the he has come to feel at home in the world"
(*Contemporary Thought* 105).

True to the words of Bhikhu Parekh, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri confines oneself to the literary world. As diasporic writers they live on the margin of the two societies and cultures, transforming their experience about their native country and the host country in their writings. They have portrayed their experience through the women expatriate characters in their novels. They depict all the dimensions of migration as they themselves has experienced through the women protagonist in the novels.

In Indian, almost all girls are trained and raised to be as a daughter, wives and mothers; this helps them when they migrate to foreign land. In Indian context women are always supposed to obey men. Most of the diasporic women writer picturizes the life of women who are adaptable, and have been raised to please and been trained to be adaptable as wives, daughter-in-law, etc. Manusmriti states:

"A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently even in her own house- In childhood a woman should be under

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her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons" (Manusmriti).

Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri under this impression bring out their character Ashima, Jasmine and Tilo starts their journey with adaptation, but all of them end it at different destination. Mukherjee is one of the earliest and most successful women writers of Indian Diaspora. As an immigrant she was fully aware of the various problems faced by the expatriates and she voice out the feeling of the expatriates and chose to write about them. Tejinder Kaur points out that "Mukherjee deftly portrays the immigrant experience from a multicultural point of view that she acquired through her own diasporic experiences" (Kaur 206).

In the novel *Jasmine*, Muhkerjee portrays the character as strong and feeble women, she pass through dense problems and moves on, as if living a new life. To exist in the society she adapts to the situation and overcome the entire situation wisely. Jasmine marries Prakash, but her martial life does not last long as her husband is murdered. As a faithful wife she decides to complete the unfulfilled mission of her husband. She leaves to America where she faces many problems of immigrants in order to adapt herself to the new environment. Her adaptation moulds and changes her cultural influences of the country. She learnt to adjust herself in the new social set up for her survival. She even changes her name from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jase to Jane. Though she changes her name and identity she was unable to explore new facets of life. As women she struggles against her existential adversities t for her existence in the host land.

Lahiri's novel *Namesake* is concerned with the life of second generation in the host land but also it depicts the plight of Ashima, who tries being as an adaptable wife in the alien land as she migrates to US after getting married to Ashoke. Ashima as an immigrant faces many clashes. She as a typical Indian wife, never says her husband's name, she resembles Jyoti in the novel *Jasmine*, who hesitates utter her husband's name. She gets engrossed in the reminences of the past. As an immigrant she faces different crises related to her identity and also wide cultural gaps between her own homeland and the land to which she got migrated. Lahiri picturizes the Bengali culture through her protagonist Ashima, she tries to fill the cultural gap and in that process she gradually moves towards reconstruction, assimilation and adaptation towards the host culture.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as an immigrant in the United States, she is able to connect herself to the life of the immigrants. In her novel *The Mistress of Spices* she projects the life of an immigrant Tilo, from India who runs a spice shop in California. She provides spices not only for cooking, but also for the homesickness and alienation for Indian immigrants. Tilo moves back and forth between one existence and another. She leads her life with the Indian

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American community. Tilo selects on her own to become as a mistress on a far away island, and she selects America to help the battered, marginalized and suppressed women. In the land she lives in the store as an isolated female in the land. She learn to adapt to the new and changing culture.

So the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri shows the diasporic dilemma of modern woman and it also reveals about the cultural displacement of immigrants. By adapting various ways of assimilation, the protagonists try to understand the value of both the cultures. Therefore it can be concluded that the novelists have projected the issues of home, homeland, diaspora, alienation, adaptation, assimilation and belongingness in their fiction to highlight the diasporic consciousness.

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