

# WOMEN IN INDIAN DIASPORA

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**Abstract:** *The term 'diaspora' is used to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed through out other parts of the world; and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.*

*Indian diaspora possess a vivid and vital portion in Indian English Literature. And in this perspective we have to cite the role of Indian women writers who bears a brilliant and dazzling part of the Indian diaspora. Various ism like post-colonialism, feminism, post modernism are mingled proportionately in the writing of these Indian diasporic women writers. Their creation emits a salient flavour of exotic land as well as they bear the exquisite and receded beauty of their homeland. Multiple dimensions of life within a multicultural milieu has been elevated by their writing. And in this relevance we have to mention the matter of Americanization. America, the dreamy abode of prosperity and material comforts confers their writing a different charm. The cadence of language floats from the penury to opulence; from superstition to pragmatic knowledge and from gloominess to conflagration. The dual nature of the life impeccantly pictured by these women writers. Gradually they have become the facet of Indian diaspora.*

*Fiction by Indian women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary Indian diaspora literature. The women novelists of Indian diaspora in USA are Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Sujata Massey, Indira Ganeshan and Jhumpa Lahiri. These writers have made their homeland memorable and popular by writing about it. Through the movements of migration on immigration writers are turned diasporic. It depends upon individual's response to the adopted country and acceptance by the host. This acceptance also depends upon the value/importance of diasporic individual to the host society. In the initial stage they are 'outsiders' and face the question – who am I ? The initial works of diaspora writers are autobiographic and focus on the issues like nostalgia, rootlessness, homelessness, dislocation and displacement. There are two moves of the diasporic writers – 1) Temporal Move – a look backward to the past and a look forward at the future. It produces nostalgia, themes of survival and cultural assimilation. 2) The Spatial Move – involves a deterritorialization and reterritorialization connected by journey. It is observed distinctly in the writings of Bharati Mukherjee (Jasmine, Desirable Daughters, The Tree Bride), anjana Appachana(Listening now), Jhumpa Lahiri(Interpreter of Maladies, Namesake), Kiran Desai(The Inheritance of Loss, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard) and others.*

**Keywords :** *Indian, Women, Diaspora, Rootlessness, Immigration, Deterritorialization, Reterritorialization.*

## Full Paper

Life and literature mirror the uncertain theory that surrounds the man and the migrant fills them with a feeling of panic and anxiety. The ambiguity of the present retrieved by the past grows from the fear of the future and records an on going social transformation. The diasporic writers depict the plight and problems they face in the alien land, their fear of environment and the struggle they face to discover their own identity in hostile environment. Diasporic writings are the records of experiences of the diasporic communities living in a varied socio cultural setting as far as Indian diaspora is concerned, people have acquired new identity by the process of self fashioning and increasing acceptance by the west. Many are the first generation expatriates who continue to consider India their true home, the place of their nurture values and extended families as well as their deepest sympathies and attachments. The Indian diasporic writing covers every continent and part of the world and has made a substantial contribution to the literary output of their host countries and served as a powerful network connecting the entire globe.

Literature is like a vast canvas in a framework in which writers portray their characters. It records life social responses to it which is embodied in author's creation. The aim of the paper is to flashlight the social realities depicted in the novels of Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and others. In the house of fiction are many mansions the Indian English fiction in post independent India has assumed all kinds of colourful tradition. The novel thrives in a complex society with a dense social structure. It explores the the ordinary and common place in all their bewildering complexity. Truthfulness is it's motto, realism is its animation principle. Being the daughter of representative of Indian novelist, Kiran Desai had own the booker prize where her mother could not succeed though Anita Desai's novel was listed thrice. Kiran walked on the footsteps of her mother continued along the contours marked by the mother's experience and the way of writing. Mother and daughter have decidedly different writing style. Anita is deceptively quiet writer, Kiran is a little bit more showy as a writer. Why her had to learn to teach in a different country, she struggle with learning to write. Her prize winning novel The Inheritance of Loss is like her mother's, she manages to explore every contemporary issue, globalization, immigration, economic inequality and multiculturalism. Kiran explained that The Inheritance of Loss as exploration of post colonial chaos, did revolve around the same initial story line as one of her mother's original novels. Kiran does take same interest in the psychological working of her characters. Anita individualizes the characters by giving them names. Anita Desai's Bye bye Black Bird though a work of 1972 based on the theme of immigration of native Indians to England and it has still its bearing on the cultural relationship of these two nations. This is bound to be the clash of ideas, traditions and social systems where to opposite cultures collide and create confusions. The theme of immigration and consequent alienation of characters concern has been the subject matter of choice for many Indo Anglian artists. The sociological implications of diaspora have been incorporated into literature to produce a flourishing genre in post modernism: Diasporic literature. Although the Greek etymology restricted itself to refer to the migration of Jews post the Holocaust, the term Diaspora now encompasses the experiences of the diasporic imaginary speckled all over the world. The Indian Diaspora has been chronicled by the likes of Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Agha Shahid Ali etc.

Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine (1989) revolves around a 17 year old widow's strife to comprehend her husband's romanticized conception of America and her parallel quest for identity. The ignorant village girl, Jyoti is married off to Prakash at an early age. Fuelled by radical ideas, Prakash denounces the feudal system and draws his wife into his envisioned democratic world by giving her the pseudo

American name, Jasmine. This transformation introduces her to her husband's dream of the American life. Although she shares his dream, it is not her vision. Had she followed Prakash into his American dream, she would have been his mere shadow.

Jhumpa Lahiri's character, Hema traverses the fate that Jasmine escapes. For, second generation Bengali immigrants Hema and Kaushik, migration is not a matter of choice. As is the trend of the new Diaspora, Hema's parents move to Cambridge in search of better economic opportunities. She nurses no strong link with her 'homeland' and accepts her American nationality without dispute. For Kaushik, the second move to America is linked to his mother's impending death. Unlike in Jasmine where the 'Trauma' or 'Impossible Mourning' is the actual murder of Prakash, for Kaushik it is the consciousness of the inevitable. The trauma that triggers the move to America is the knowledge that his mother is to die.

Zizek's idea of the Nation as the 'Thing' can be used to justify the escapist behavior of the diasporic imaginary. Prakash's death breaks the illusion of an egalitarian society that he had created for Jasmine. She is stifled by the feudal structure of Hasnapur that shatters Prakash's claims of gender equality. Thus Jasmine sees America as her calling. She seeks America in her quest for a democratic society and realization of Prakash's envisioned world. She is charmed by the equal status that the women of American society enjoy. She sees her own standing as a notch above her position in India.

For Jasmine, Mukherjee marks the clear transition by rechristening her, Jase. The 'Thing' gives her an independent and adventurous identity. Lahiri's character Parul (Kaushik's mother) covets the liberation that the Thing promises. She chooses to spend her last days away from her land of birth. In America, she wants to create a world wherein she is healthy and happy with her family. This echoes Frederic Jameson's view as given by Simon Gikandi in his essay *Globalization and The Claims of Postcoloniality*. It gives her an opportunity to begin afresh, without the weight of restrictions that she carried in India. However, the same experiment does not work well for her son. The recurrent displacements during his formative years leave him with an inability to form permanent relationships. Although he falls in love with Hema, he cannot bring himself to commit to her. He is on a constant search for his identity.

This is true of most experiences of the diasporic imaginary. The literature of Diaspora entails characters that find themselves in the search for their true identity. This loss of identity arises from their need to 'belong' to a place.

"I envy them, that," Hema said

"Do you?"

"I've never belonged to any place that way"

Kaushik laughed. "You're complaining to the wrong person."

The diasporic imaginary is torn between the dual and often conflicting ideologies of the homeland and the host land. The vast boundaries of the Western society are a space too huge for the constraints of the Indian culture. The vacuum that thus remains makes them pose the inevitable question 'Where do I belong?' In his essay *Imaginary Homelands* Salman Rushdie has addressed the identity crisis of the Indian Diaspora. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools.

The issue of the identity crisis has been cradled by Lahiri through effective citation of multiculturalism. *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) deals with stories of Indian Americans and the conflict between their inherited culture and the New World that their hyphenated identity causes. In some stories like *Mrs Sen's* the characters cling to the Indian culture without attempting to assimilate in the New World. In *The Namesake* (2003), Gogol lets go of his inherited culture to assume an American identity.

The search for identity has been best enumerated by Bharati Mukherjee in *Jasmine*. Jyoti, the vulnerable teenager is nudged on to become Jasmine. The free American society makes Jasmine the bold Jase. However, accosted by love, Jase flees to Iowa to become the cautious Jane Ripplemeyer.

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's *au pair* in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today.

Diasporic literature is strained with the imperative presence of melancholia. This stems from the concept of home. As much as Jase or Jane does not want to go back to being Jyoti, memories of Hasnapur flood her mind. The Trauma of the death of her husband is the principal trigger to her migration and sows the seeds of nostalgia for India in her. However, the melancholia does not evoke any wish to return to her homeland. Jasmine solely wishes to return home. The question is where lies home, and what is home? Is it the physical space one inhabits or the symbolic conceptualization of where one belongs? Jasmine flees to Iowa, and is pregnant with Bud Ripplemeyer's child. However, she cannot bring herself to make a home with him. For her, home is Manhattan, with the sweet innocence of Duff and the quiet promises of Taylor. For second generation immigrants, home is quite a dilemma. They cannot relate their diasporic experiences to their own memories of a time before migration. Their memories of the 'homeland' are fragmented.

Hema: 'I didn't know what to make of you. Because you had lived in India, I associated you more with my parents than with me.' For Hema, it happens to be Rome. Born in Cambridge, she has no intimate association with India. America gives her a nationality, but she strikes her roots in Rome, drawing from it on each visit, knowledge of her self. The reader finds Hema congregate her life in Rome: the past, the present and the future; her escapade with Julian, her involvement with Kaushik and the anxiety of the arrangement with Navin. The metaphor of 'roots into unaccustomed earth' is especially applicable to Kaushik. Since his mother's death, he attempts to remove himself from every place that had felt her presence. He convinces himself that 'As a photographer his origins were irrelevant.' The only place that comes to matter to him is the Rome he toured with Hema. As if to reiterate his belief, fate washes over his design to take up permanent residence in Hong Kong. The culmination of both books is beautifully crafted. *Jasmine* breaks away from the conventional structure of Diaspora and poses itself as a possibly happily-ever-after. However, even when she decides to flee with Taylor and embrace love, the reader feels that her journey hasn't had a justified conclusion. Jasmine's quest for her identity continues.

The final story in the trilogy, *Going Ashore* switches from the Second Person to the Third Person Omniscient point of view. After the strong bond established by the first two stories, the sudden change is quite unsettling. However the last vestiges of any link between Hema and Kaushik have faded, and thus there is no reason for either character to hold on to the other. The last part of the story switches to Hema's perspective. Kaushik has come to mean so much to the reader through Hema that to have the news of his death delivered through a Third Person would be belittling his character. Lahiri is shrewd. She makes the reader tell himself about Kaushik's death. Hema only confirms the loss. 'We had been careful, and you had left nothing behind'. And we know he's gone. And that we could not have had it another way. For the lost generation with hyphenated identities, a manifestation of their larger sense of loss is a channeling of the emotions. As for the readers, we are left with a sad, knowing smile. For as Yeats put it, 'What was it that the poets promised you/ If it were not their sorrow?'

Migration has become a universal phenomenon in the current world. Immigrants, the people who come to live permanently in a foreign land play a significant role in this process. A diaspora is the group of people who are living away from their original homeland and share common experiences. Diasporic literature or immigrant literature is generally referred to the literary work done by immigrants. Diasporic Indian English literature in the universal diasporic literature has gained much credits during the last few decades. There is a significant place for diasporic Indian English fiction in portraying mainly about Indian diaspora in a wide span. Inspired by the vast spread of migration, immigration or emigration, diasporic literature gained prominence in universal literature in a backdrop of post-colonial context, simultaneously developing with post-colonial literature. The reader would generally expect a diasporic writer to be an immigrant but some critics emphasise that it is not compulsory that the particular writer to be an immigrant himself or herself as long as he or she occupies the themes regarding actual experiences and mentalities of a diaspora. The salient characteristic of diasporic literature is that it is not based on any theory or philosophy but on the life experiences of immigrants. It creates an emotional haven to its diaspora by discussing their own physical and emotional conflicts. Diasporic literature focuses mainly on themes like discrimination, cultural shock and reverse cultural shock, problems in adjustment and assimilation, orientalism, identity crisis, alienation and displacement, dilemma, depression, hybridity and generational gap. Combination of words, phrases or idioms of homeland is frequent in diasporic literature, adding a unique flavor to its language pattern and style. For instance, Hindi words like 'Dhanyawad. Sukriya' which mean thank you are used in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Kamala Markandaya is considered to be among the first few diasporic female Indian writers. She was born in Maisoor in 1924 and later immigrated to England. The protagonist of her novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is oppressed by the discrimination even after living about thirty years in England. He lives in a dilemma as he can neither accept India nor England as his homeland. Anita Desai, who was born in 1937 in Dehradun and immigrated to England and America respectively is another prominent diasporic female Indian writer. Her novel *Bye Bye Black Bird* (1971) portrays the immigrants who are in search of their identity in another land. Additionally, it carries the viewpoint of young immigrants, aspects of discrimination, east-west cultural dichotomies, disappointment and isolation faced by immigrants in a post-colonial context. Bharati Mukherjee, another famous diasporic female Indian writer who was born in 1940 in Kolkata and later immigrated to America. Her novel *Wife* (1975) depicts the transformation of a modest, conventional Indian wife to the murderer of her husband. Her fantasies about a high standard of life in America catastrophically shatter after the immigration and she becomes a victim of mental trauma, which leads her to commit the murder. In contrast to her novel *Wife*, the naive, dependent female protagonist of her novel *Jasmin* wisely uplifts herself to be an independent, brave woman after the conflicts she faced in an unfamiliar context.<sup>8</sup> Born in Kolkata in 1956, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni immigrated to America and came into spotlight as a female writer in diasporic Indian English literature. Her award-winning novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) portrays an Indian girl who works in a spice shop in Oakland, America and helps other immigrants to resolve their problems with the magic of her spices. Thus Divakaruni has Diasporic Female Indian Writers in Diasporic Indian English Fiction 139 flourished her novel with the elements of magic realism. It was also adopted into a movie of the same name. Meena Alexander was born in 1951 in Allahabad and later she immigrated to Sudan and then to America. Her novel *Manhattan Music* (1997) is set on Manhattan as well as on India. There she has portrayed the immigrant life, identity crisis, racial intolerance, international affairs and marriages in a sensitive style of writing. The female protagonist of Sunetra Gupta's novel *Memories of Rain* (1992) immigrates to England after falling in love with a British man but she soon realises the true nature of her husband. Disappointed by his rude, mean behavior, she returns India with her children. Gupta's novel *A Sin of Colour* (1998) too portrays the dilemma and isolation faced by Indian immigrants amidst the complexities of a new context. Sunetra Gupta is an Indian immigrant herself who was born in 1965 in Kolkata and later immigrated to England. Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation Indian American who was born in London, 1967. Her parents were immigrants from the state of West Bengal, India. Her award-winning novel *The Namesake* (2004) is considered to be one of the best fiction written about immigrant life. In this novel, Lahiri has successfully engaged aspects like the generational gap between first and second generation immigrants, conflict of east-west beliefs, cultural displacement, nostalgia, loss of identity, alienation and despair. The movie which was adopted by this novel too gained much attention worldwide. Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai is also a famous writer in diasporic Indian English literature. She was born in Chandigarh on 3rd September, 1971. She immigrated to England and then to America with her mother, who inspired her towards literature. Kiran Desai in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), subtly portrays the life struggles of Indian diaspora as well as the aspects of globalization, racial intolerance, terrorism and multi-cultural societies. This novel brought her much credit through awards like 'National Book Critics Circle Award' and 'Booker Prize', making her the youngest female recipient of 'Booker Prize' so far.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is appropriate to say that diasporic Indian English fiction is an important genre depicting the experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora in a broad sense. It makes space for the discussions about Indian immigrants and offers emotional security to that particular diaspora. Being the representatives of the Indian diaspora, diasporic female Indian writers are successful in addressing the readers of Indian English literature in a sensitive, unpretentious style while carrying a sense of the universal experience of immigration. Furthermore, diasporic Indian English fiction keeps their writers linked with India and the entire world.

**Source:** a) A history of Indian English Literature by M.K. Naik.  
b) Indian Writing in English by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar.  
c) An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra.