

Predicament of Women in Diasporic Writings of Indian Diasporic Writers

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Abstract:

The twenty-first century is an age of Technology; which brings together the people from different countries in search of better education, services, commerce, material success, prosperity and so on. As a result of it, there is increasing crosscultural interaction and awareness about the international communities. The issues related to even other cultures, religions and geographical locations have not been alien to the people belonging to certain place. Thus, the world at present has transformed to the status of 'Global Village'. This identity as the Global Village has brought the world into new horizons, issues, concerns, aspirations and etc. The Cross-cultural interaction and migratory movement are the issues prominently attached and interlinked with the cultural, social, psychological, gender-related, economical, political and geographical concerns. The cross-cultural migration has been continued for centuries and it has increased during the previous couple of decades. It has resulted in emergence of problems related with identity awareness and aspects of assimilation. Thus, the people in migration face various problems with the people and the land they visit, which results in the sufferings in their life. In this context, it is necessary to acquaint the contemporary educated young generation with the problems emerging due to cross- cultural migration. It has been a need of time to increase awareness in young generation about the possibilities of and the problems emerging in the cross-cultural migration because migrated people belong to a particular cultural background.

The literature by the Diasporic writers is a type of self-analysis, a sort of therapy for survival in this Darwinian global village, in which surrounding forces determine the creative output. The predicament and problems of women due to crosscultural encounters in immigration have remained an issue of discussion for the South Asian Diasporic women writers. The predicament of women portrayed by Diasporic writers may be studied from different points of view such as the cultural, feministic, political, psychological, biological, sociological, economical, geographical and so on. A comparative study of the predicament of the women protagonists in immigration as presented in the novels and short stories, may lead to the findings of the common and diverse problems faced by women in the alien countries, which may be concluded with a collective Diasporic consciousness.

Keywords

Cross-cultural, Migration, Self- Analysis, Autobiography, Protagonist, Crisis of Identity,

Content:

In the contemporary age the people are migrating out of their motherland in search of better opportunities. Migration causes various problems in the life of migrating people. In the global-village world, it is the need of time to acquaint the new generation with the problems emerging in the cross-cultural migration. As women are considered inferior, submissive and weaker, they face more serious problems in migration than the migrant men. To the immigrant women, the burden of the cultural, moral and religious values at their motherland makes it more difficult to adjust with the new country. The Diasporic literature is the best and authentic tool to discuss the problems of women in migration. Indian Writing in English is, in a way, a product of the cultural clash with the Westerns and the clash is presented in the Indian English novel from its beginning. While evoking the colonial legacies in the contemporary society with the similar theme of cultural clash, the contemporary Diasporic Indian English writers impress the international readers. A number of women writers of Indian Diaspora portray immigrant women's problems in the crosscultural encounters. A comparative study of such problems helps to widen a sense of understanding and to bring accuracy in understanding the intensity and also to put forth comparatively more acceptable conclusions.

The women writers of Indian Diaspora illustrate the problems of migrants and reveal their relationship with the homeland and the host land. The women writers' perspective to the problems of migrants is either unique or akin to one another. The women writers of Indian Diaspora like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Shauna Singh Baldwin present the problems of women in the cross-cultural encounters during their immigration. The facts related to the life of migrated women may be best explored with the help of the feministic and cultural points of view.

Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* presents the psychological, cultural and feministic problems of an immigrant Indian woman while she tries to assimilate in the alien culture and after her return to India. Her immigration is naturally followed by a process of adjustment and transformation into a hybrid personality. The immigrant woman protagonist Tara suffers from many problems due to the tension between the two cultures, feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. Tara passes through the deep psychological suffering while realizing her ambitions. She experiences a sense of liberation from her tradition. She develops a new hybrid personality with the lost native taste and emotional touch. While surviving on her only optimism, she abandons her inherited culture during the process of transformation. On return to India this transformation causes the feeling of alienation. The new perspective in her hybrid self and the deteriorating social change disrupt her pleasure and cause discomfort, disgust and frustration. She remains neither fully Indian nor American, and this split causes the loss of the familial, social and national prestige.

Mukherjee in *The Middleman and Other Stories* realistically presents young women of the Third World countries, who cherish the dream of emigrating to America for higher prosperity and permanent settlement there. Mukherjee's immigrant married or divorced women try to form relationships with the American men. These relationships turn in to the sexual misadventures. Most of her immigrant women particularly use sex as a means

to establish the relationship with the Americans. The immigrant women constantly break away from the partners of opposite sex and while establishing the new relationships the pattern remains the same. They mix up with the men so freely to satisfy their sensuality and one cannot call them truly liberated women. Her immigrant women protagonists try to erase their past by adopting a country which provides them unrestrained liberty to realize their dreams. Their disorderly conducts and promiscuity cause the doubts about their notions and dreams of immigration and settlement in the United States. The unstable and breaking up marriages cause the pathetic condition of the immigrant women, who become emotionally uprooted and unbalanced individuals. They try to solve their problems with the help of sex, but contradictory that creates more serious problems in their lives. Mukherjee presents characteristically the American situations and experiences, which are too complex for the women as everywhere the smugglers, robbers, pimps and middlemen exploit the desperate immigrant women. She portrays the realistic picture with great fidelity of details of the situations and difficulties the immigrant people face in getting visas and travel documents or foreign exchange and underground activities of the guerrillas. In the American diversity of cultures, the concepts of security and stability of family life for women are totally different than the Indian. The past life of immigrant women is rich and gorgeous, but the chosen adopted life in America proves disgusting. They desire not only for the social and cultural conglomeration but also a transformation into a new person.

Mukherjee's abundant use of the sexual element in each of the stories sounds unrealistic because the powerful familial, cultural and moral protest is not considered seriously. She gives the equal dignity and equal freedom to her women who are neither restrained nor bound by the obligations towards their family. The social and cultural assumptions, prejudices and background are totally neglected. She has focused only the immigration from the Third World countries to the West and the Eastward movement of the Westerns is ignored, which too may have the similar adventures.

Jhumpa Lahiri explores the conflict in relationships between the couples, families and friends to discuss the ideas of personal and cultural isolations and identities. Her immigrant women frequently encounter the identity crises, which are tied to their inability to reconcile their American identity with the Indian identity.

Lahiri often leaves these crises unresolved. She often correlates her women's cultural isolation with their extreme personal isolation to suggest that the cultural isolation causes the personal. In her *The Namesake* the Indian-American lonely women struggle to create and nurture their identities in the new American landscape. Lahiri attributes her women the power to gain impact on others' consciousnesses and their communal bonding, though they are the silent and jobless housewives. In short, though projected outwardly as powerless in the Western society, Lahiri reveals her female characters' inner adaptabilities. Ashima's cultural growth is intertwined with the growth of her children because while educating the children, she too gains a sort of education. Lahiri makes a decisive breakdown in the culture which turns out with the potential for pessimism. A pure cultural Bengali identity is irretrievably lost when the characters come to the United States. Ashoke's Bengali-American identity

is lost along with his death. The next generation creates its own manifestation of the crosscultural identity. The breakup between Maxine and Gogol reminds us the case of Paul

Morel of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*. Along with the strong cultural ties with mother, Lahiri also indicates the impossibility of a perfect union between the Indians and Americans. The breakdown in Gogol's marriage with Moushumi is a concrete example of the failure in an identity creation within the Bengali-American culture. In other words, in the generational growth immigrants lose their roots. The immigrants remain in a perpetual search for their own definition. The blending of Indian and American cultures manifests the different cultural identities warranting a new definition for the Indian-American immigrants. Ashima does not face the troubles of the Diaspora in its endurance of slavery and racial violence. In spite of this, her cultural essentialism is in vain. If a culture ever existed in its purest form, it cannot be saved. The white woman Mrs. Buxton at the library helps Ashima to gain career independence and to share her Bengalingness with the American co-workers. This causes a real intercultural bonding that characterizes the global/international cooperation of women. The narrative implies that the cultural retention is important but with the revision of cultural elements so that they remain useful and realistic.

Lahiri's presentation of a Bengali-American woman proves insightful to the feministic discussion over the local and global connections and transferability of a woman. Lahiri not only brings forth the new articulations of woman-maternity but also highlights a need for further articulation of the larger feminist tenets. Lahiri's relocating her Bengali woman into the American soil metaphorically indicates a challenge to the regional feminism.

Jhumpa Lahiri's stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* trace the influence of India in the life of immigrants existing simultaneously in the two cultures: the American reality and the sphere of Indian tradition. Lahiri's use of the details makes assertions about the sense of isolation that governs each event of the story. Lahiri's women are not at a loss of the cultural identity, but rather relieved when they adjust to their new world with help of the power of relationships and the personal connections. They are regretful for their cultural displacement due to the separation from their original cultures. The Indian food marks the difference between the American culture and the Indian culture. The 'force' of relationships and religion seems doomed to failure because of the powerful 'sentiment' and tears of protest. While focusing on the marriage, Lahiri presents the disconnected feelings, the feelings of disorientation associated with the immigration, the cross-cultural differences and the people who feel like foreigners 'at home or abroad'. The difference lies in the manner in which characters struggle to relate to one another, to themselves and to their changing positions in the life.

Shauna Singh Baldwin answers through the predicament of Noor in *The Tiger Claw* to the rising religious fundamentalism today, the emergence of the extreme Right worldwide, and the branding and packaging of people in these days as the Indian Sikh man, British Muslim terrorist, French white Supremacist, American redneck and Saudi Muslim woman. Baldwin takes the reader on a meditative experience and compels to explore his/her life through the life and world of her characters. The novel leads the readers to wonder if the times in which Noor

lived are any different from our own. It is the harrowing story of one courageous woman's predicament in the face of racism, betrayal, hypocrisy, loyalty and love on one hand and the veils of war on the other. At the same time, it is also a love story between a

Muslim and a Jew told in a language of mysticism and romance. Noor's love is lost amidst the turbulence of war and human dislocation. The novel is honest in its assessment of the inner motives and ambiguities. It confirms that Baldwin transcends the borders that divide the human experience. It is a fascinating story of a woman's moral complexity, inner conflict and exile. Through a magnificent portrait of a very courageous woman, legendary French Resistance fighter Noor Inayat Khan, Baldwin presents a woman's divided conscience between the drama of Nazi-occupied France and British-occupied India. The novel reminds us that sometimes only fiction can really tell us the truth.

It brilliantly reveals the allegiance in the times of war and the duplicity required for survival when all who operate underground are interdependent but no one can be trusted fully. This is a historical novel about the complex Noor Khan's earnest predicament, especially when she contemplates her absent lover and the child they conceived and then aborted. Her brother Kabir is the strongest character of all. He eventually becomes a Sufi holy man, a paean to Sufi Universalism, preaching the ideals of peace and tolerance in cosmopolitanism, while remaining dangerously close-minded with the people he loves.

The novel is a completely riveting story of the predicament of Noor that comments elegantly on the universal victims of oppression of free will and human dignity. It portrays the life with the thousand tiny details that spring from the most involved research to show us how an embracing multi-faceted identity can turn the victimization into resistance. It shows how helpless individuals are resisting the state-sponsored fear and hatred against their fellow citizens. It links the plight of all victims, whether they are called Noor or Rivkin, through the danger, romance, concentration camps and safe houses. After burning half of the SOE files some information comes to the surface that 'Noor was doomed spy, an innocent, slaughtered for the unworthy cause of imperialism, very naïve, extremely idealistic'.

The book poignantly addresses the obsession with race and identity through the Hitler's Germany which gives an imaginative insight into the woman protagonist's psyche. The book is a love story, a spy thriller and a personal journey of a woman to find herself. It traces the roots of conflicts. The story shows how the motivations of soldiers and the casualties of war are many, varied and deeply personal.

Baldwin's stories in *English Lessons and Other Stories* capture attention through the details of tradition and culture. All the details are purposeful. The imagery provides views about the characters of different generations and social spheres and about their positions and postures. Baldwin examines the bruises and wounds endured by the immigrant Sikhs who try to learn how to live in the immigration. The family, place and politics are rendered like the precious intaglios. Her stories are the metaphor for the life, family and universal values. To understand the intended meanings of the metaphor, one must be attentive to the cultural nuances. Baldwin portrays the Indian collectivist cultural values in contrast to the individualistic values of the West.

Baldwin presents the traditional fact that women have to learn silence and the women who don't comply with the traditional modes of living are severely punished. Her women protagonists are sometimes simple, but show that every person has the unique and extraordinary qualities. Baldwin has a good measure of compassion for the women characters in her complex and multi-layered stories. She projects the compassion, empathy and love between the characters like Amma and her mistress.

Baldwin reveals the complicated textures of the lives of South Asian women in all of their absurdities and painful truths. She is adept at entering the minds of her characters to reveal for the readers the different ways her protagonists think about the traditional and ethical values, and the way they act on their own choices. Baldwin writes with the immediacy of a conversation with a restrained passion which describes the friction between the East and West and the traditional and modern. While never sentimentalizing or overplaying the emotion, her stories provide some of the inside stories for the Diaspora and also account of the rising awareness and strength of women who must tap their own minds and hearts to enter the new emotional and material worlds. Her protagonists are merely ordinary women who find their courage in the most paradoxical of places.

In this collection, Baldwin brings out several interrelated issues of race, gender, ethnicity and immigration by interpreting and evaluating the immigrant experience particularly of the Indian Sikhs. They represent issues related to the Asian American, black, Eastern, ethnic, immigrant, minority, diasporic, hyphenated, hybrid, inferior, subaltern, other, refugee, outsider, expatriate and many more people in the world. Nevertheless, beside the identity of immigrants, it focuses on the life and predicament of the Asian Diasporas in the Western world.

After comparing the predicament of immigrant women in the selected texts, one can claim that the problems in immigration due to the cross-cultural encounters are increasing all over the world as the major problems. The selected novels and short stories picture acutely the problems of immigrant women. The problems faced by the immigrant women from different countries are pictured by these diasporic women novelists. In the cross-cultural marriages immigrant women suffer more than the native men. There are some differences as well as similarities in the problems that the women face in the Westward and Eastward immigrations. The feministic and cultural points of view assist to understand the major problems of women presented in the contemporary literature. The intensity and differences of the problems faced by women in the cross-cultural marriage and migration depend on the cultural, religious, social, geographical, political and economic conditions. The literature of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Shauna Singh Baldwin is feministic literature. They contribute to the feministic literature explicitly or implicitly. They discuss the problems and its roots and the ways the immigrant women prefer to come out of them in context of the cross-cultural marriages and immigration.

The present research puts forward the following points to acquaint the young generation with the problems emerging due to cross-cultural marriages and immigration. The following findings may help as guidelines or suggestions to the young people aspiring to migrate outside the motherland to the other countries.

1) The immigrant women have to struggle through the crisis for their identity. The identity for Diasporic woman perpetuates through the complexity of plurality in the singular self. They lose the Indian identity while

gaining a new one in America. In the host countries they attempt to maintain the Indian identity by using objects from India like silk scarves, greeting cards, letters of parents, the recorded voices of their relatives and magazines, as tools to make the feel of Indian. The hybridity in their personality causes a multiple identity. The objects play a diabolic role in shaping and influencing the immigrant's psychology, anxieties and behaviour. They frequently encounter the unresolved personal and cultural identity crises because of their inability to reconcile their American identity with their Indian identity. A few of them like

Ashima become the cultural mothers gradually for their community in America and start gathering people around them from the same background. The importance of a name and identity become a central concept throughout the life of the second generation immigrants as they struggle with the Indo-American identity and rebel against parents. They attempt for the similar cultural identity construction. But the breaking of such identity implies that the hybrid Indian-American identity lacks the essentialism of the purer types of identities. Along with the struggle to create their identity in the cross-cultural society, women also struggle first within the family to create an identity. They come out of the traditional India in search of their identity in the Western world. The women in these stories construct their own unique racial subjectivity and gender agency. Mukherjee's immigrant women do not try as hard as Lahiri's to maintain their Indian identity in the foreign land; instead they try to come completely out of their Indian tradition where they are denied the full freedom. Many of Lahiri's women characters wish to mix up or marry within their community and come back to that even after some misadventures with the foreigners. They build a reputation for Asian-Americans with remarkable educational and professional success and serve as the cultural backdrop.

2) The immigrant women feel culturally isolated in the host land. The literature of the selected three writers focuses the immigrant women's cultural isolation. Their women protagonists' isolation becomes more intense because they come out of the stability of the cultural frame at the motherland where other women of their community may identify with them. But in an alien country the immigrant woman feels double isolated; first from their close relatives and second among the strange people. They are isolated as women first and then as women belonging not to the native culture of the host country.

3) The immigrant women are doubly marginalized because on one hand they are victims of the familial, religious, social and cultural compulsions at home and on the other hand they are also victims of the differences in the alien society. Their appearance, costume and color of the skin attract the people of the host land to express superior oneness.

4) Most of the immigrant women use the sex as a means to establish their relationships with the natives of the host land with the purpose of getting rooted in the foreign soil permanently. But that creates the more severe problems in their life. The immigrant women are seen as an object to satisfy the sexual lusts by the native men and they are never considered as equal human beings in the world of patriarchal cultures. The writers raise questions on the facts related to the sexual exploitation of the immigrant women in the context of cross-cultural encounters. They are sometimes blackmailed and sexually exploited by the Native Americans.

5) The immigrant women are disillusioned when their dreams do not come true in the face of reality. Most of the immigrant women keep dreaming, hoping and expecting from the host land, but they find nothing more than the frustration. The immigrant women face disillusionment in their relationships with men in the family and then in the society and the intensity of their feelings is sharpened by the context of cross-cultural encounters.

6) In the patriarchal cultures most of the women feel guilty for being a woman and in addition to this the immigrant women feel guilty for staying far away from their home. During their adaptation to the host country, the immigrant women either fall a prey or willingly break away from the tradition, but both the cases result in the frustration, which ultimately leads to the nagging sense of guilt. The immigrant women carry forever a sense of guilt in their heart for breaking away from their family, status, tradition, culture, religion and motherland.

7) The immigrant women face the clash of cultures. When a woman migrates out of her motherland she carries the deep rooted culture to the adopted country. The cultural practices at homeland do not match with the host one. Her social interactions turn into the cultural class. The clash of cultures begins first in the mind of the dislocated woman and then in her social interactions with the native citizens of the host country.

8) The people of various races create and retain their own cultures. When a woman of a particular race migrates out of her race to an alien place, she becomes an object of the racial discrimination. She seems to be odd in her colour of skin, physical appearance, tone of language, cultural and religious rituals, personal and social attitudes etc. In the Western countries where white people consider themselves superior to others, the Asian and African immigrants are racially discriminated. The selected works of these writers present the experiences of racism in Canada and America, the biased view towards immigrants and how the government agencies handle assaults on particular races. All of them focus on the immigrant women and their mistreatment in the States and their experiences in the interracial relationships.

The Western people call the immigrants with adjectives like ‘American-Born Confused Deshi’(ABCD), ‘others’, ‘a brown monkey’, ‘*mischlinge*’, ‘black’, ‘a damn Paki’, ‘an untouchable’ and ‘a hubshi’.

9) The immigrant women suffer from the sense of dislocation in the host country. When they migrate out of the stability of their original culture, they feel dislocated in the alien one because of their differences and the views of the natives to look at them. The geographical, social, political, legal and cultural setup of the host country, which does not match with her own motherland, leads her to feel dislocated among the foreigners.

10) Similarly, the immigrant women feel alienated in a totally new location at the host land and when they spend a few years there and later return to the motherland, they find the motherland also alien one, because it too passes through tremendous changes. Thus, the immigrant women happen to be alien as ‘other’ in the host land and alien as ‘a foreign returned’ in the motherland.

11) The immigrant women suffer from the feeling of nostalgia in the adopted land. They explore out their motherland through the memory and reminiscence. They express their feelings of nostalgia through their

behaviour and prefer certain convenient ways to come out of it. They attempt to retain their past memories with the help of the objects like Indian silk scarves, greeting cards and letters from parents, the recorded voices of their relatives, books and magazines.

12) The immigrant women try to trace their roots in the motherland. The immigrant women never easily escape from their roots whichever the alien country they go. Though a few of them like Tara try to escape, they find themselves in a fractured spilt hanging between two edges. Most of the first and the second generation immigrant women try to trace their cultural roots in their land of origin.

13) The immigrant women carry the expatriate sensibility throughout their life. No migrant can totally wipe out the past memories of his/her motherland and transform completely into a new person in the hostland. The immigrants develop an expatriate sensibility out of the nostalgia and the fear of losing the cultural roots during their stay at the adopted land. They explore their motherland through the memory lane, which does not match the changed contemporary situation at the motherland. Their projection of it seems to be totally different and based on the periphery of two worlds.

14) Most of the immigrant women become victims of the insider-outsider sensibilities. The immigrant woman who belongs to a different culture is considered as an outsider in the hostland. Her entire way of the life distinguishes her from the mainstream society and she becomes an object of comparison and discrimination. She tries to define herself while considering the factor of the 'other' in the process of it. She tries to form self esteem or articulate her identity by filling in the absences or missing parts of personality in comparison with the native others.

15) The experiences at the host land lead the immigrant women to feel at an intense loss of their culture, language, relationships, religion, heritage and roots. This feeling of intense loss is strengthened when she returns to the motherland.

16) The immigrant women pretend to be satisfied with their achieved identity, liberation, new experiences and a sort of success. Hanging between two worlds they pretend to be satisfied, but they suffer deep in their heart of heart for knowing the fact that their life in the host land is not the dreamed one. They have to negotiate constantly with the ties they want to strengthen with their host country. They also negotiate with their ethnic cultural background that they wish to preserve or modify or fully re-invent.

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