

Revisiting Diaspora Through Gendered Spaces in the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri And Bharati Mukherjee

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Abstract - Diasporic literature, which draws on the social implications of the diaspora, is a thriving subgenre of postmodernism. The study questions the truth of generalized beliefs and pushes back against efforts to create meta narratives that claim to represent the diasporic mind. In the latter sections of the article, we briefly discuss the creative imprint of the diasporic realm of life as shown in diasporic literature. Research into diasporic and feminine studies is an essential and fascinating part of modern literary studies. The history of diasporic literature begins with the emigration of the poor to more prosperous countries like the United States, Britain, Canada, Trinidad, etc. Migration is a common result of a country's colonial past. The purpose of this article is to examine Bharati Mukherjee's and Jhumpa Lahiri's depiction of immigrants, focusing on their profound sense of isolation in the current circumstances, their longing for the past, and the difficulties of bridging the two cultures via their sense of identity.

Keywords - Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Diaspora, Gender, Novels

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INTRODUCTION

William Safran, in his early work, characterized the diaspora as a group that had been historically scattered yet had a similar yearning to return to the motherland. The primary feelings associated with such a movement are those of loss, memory, and an inextricable link to the past; the Jewish, Armenian, and Greek movements were seen to represent such definitions which retained the binary division of the diaspora as adhering to a homeland dichotomy. The idea of migration has been developed further in subsequent interpretations, such as those of Robin Cohen, who argues that diasporas may be classified in different ways according on the motivations that first prompted them to go. Since then, all models of dispersion have heavily borrowed from this paradigm of binaries, expanding it to see Diaspora as a dichotomous occurrence according to the homeland dichotomy, with its emotional imagination centred upon evoking the sentiments of loss, remembrance, and nostalgia. Interpretations that came after Robin Cohen's proposed that the phenomenon could be adequately analysed and categorised on the basis of impulses that lay at the core of such "dispersion" or travel to uncharted lands. In order to account for the wide variety of persons who can suffer diaspora, he divided them into "victim," "labour," "trade," and "colonial" diasporas.

JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARTI MUKHERJEE

• Jhumpa Lahiri

American short story writer, novelist, and essayist Nilanjana Sudeshna "Jhumpa" Lahiri (born July 11, 1967) is also noted for her work in Italian. This is her first book of short tales. Her debut book, *The Namesake* (2003), was made into a successful film of the same name, and her second novel, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), earned the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award. *The Namesake* was adapted into a successful film and named a New York Times Notable Book. It was also a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Both her first book, *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), and her second, *The Lowland* (2013), were finalists for the prestigious Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction, respectively. Lahiri's novel *The Lowland* was awarded the 2015 DSC Prize for Literature on January 22. Lahiri examined the lives of Indian immigrants to the United States in these writings. Since relocating to Rome in 2011, Lahiri has published two collections of essays, her first novel in Italian, titled *Dove mi trovo*, and the Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories, a collection of forty short stories written by forty different Italian authors. She has also done some translation work, from Italian to English, of both her own and other writers' works. Author Jhumpa Lahiri is well-known for her portrayal of the trials faced by Bengali immigrants in the United States. Her tales generally centre on

characters who are forced to leave their homes and start over in a foreign land. Isolation and identity, both individual and cultural, are key themes in both *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. They risk having their name, which is intimately associated with their individuality, changed when their cultural and ethnic identities get muddled in a new country. In both stories, the protagonists struggle with an identity problem stemming from their conflicting feelings of Americanness and Indianness.

- **Bharti Mukherjee**

Professor emerita of English at the University of California, Berkeley, and Indian American-Canadian author Bharati Mukherjee passed away on January 28, 2017. She wrote fiction and nonfiction, including many novels and collections of short stories. Mukherjee has written extensively in both fiction and nonfiction, and he has also served as an instructor at McGill, Skidmore, Queens College, and City University of New York before joining the UC Berkeley faculty. For her story collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*, Mukherjee earned the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1988. Mukherjee told Ameena Meer in an interview from 1989 that she did not see herself as an Indian expatriate writer but rather an American one. On January 28, 2017, at the age of 76, Mukherjee passed away in Manhattan from rheumatoid arthritis and takotsubo cardiomyopathy complications. Her husband and kid were left behind after her passing. Bart, her other son, died in 2015. The amazing works of Bharati Mukherjee—including *Jasmine*, *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Desirable Daughter*, etc.—have earned her a prestigious place among Indian authors who have emigrated to other countries. Her writings are deeply rooted in the immigrant experience, exploring themes like the anguish of leaving one's home and family behind and the challenges of adjusting to a new nation and culture. Despite her Indian heritage, Bharati Mukherjee spent the most of her writing career in the United States and Canada.

DISCERNING DIASPORA THROUGH GENDERED LENSES

Although the gendered experience within the Indian diaspora is as diverse and real as mainstream diaspora, it was underrepresented in the empirical structures graphed by early theorists who focused on migration, relocation, settlement, and economic contribution. Women's perspectives and identities as a distinct social category were ignored, and their mostly passive presence was downplayed and studied only peripherally in the context of mainstream critique of the Diaspora. The intense endeavour to standardise and offer meta narratives about the event drowned out her own experience. Amba Pande argues that, in general, women have been seen as passive actors or that their experiences have been ignored due to generalised views. Therefore, the term 'migrants' predominantly represented male migrants and their families until the 1960s and early 1970s.

Feminist epistemology's rise to prominence, which made the female/gendered experience central to migration studies, ushered in a paradigm shift in the conversation by giving previously silenced voices and uncharted territories of women's diasporic experience a place at the table in the context of Indian diasporic studies. Feminist studies have attempted to take a gender-sensitive stance, but despite this, there is still a strong bias towards generalising about the experiences of all women migrants from developing countries and portraying them as helpless "victims" who have no say in policy decisions. To try to understand women's place in diasporic discourse, one must first familiarise oneself with the feminist academic initiatives that have brought the female experience to the fore. Closer inspection, however, indicates that 'migrant women' histories were an afterthought in conventional feminist studies but had a significant effect on migration studies. To better include discussions of migratory women within the larger corpus of feminist studies, previous migration theories were reviewed and revised.

Gendered Spaces in the Diaspora: A Retrospective

The narrative of diaspora, which often uses imagery of women engaged in traditionally feminine activities like knitting, quilting, and cooking as metaphors for the experience, connects it to the traditionally female role of preserving history via documentation and remembrance. Although many studies have shown that men are more likely to uproot their lives and move to a new location, women continue to bear the brunt of the responsibility of holding on to and reimagining their homeland's culture in the context of their new lives. Current diasporic discourses center on the difficulties posed by this paradoxical circumstance, which mirrors the difficulties of gendered roles inside an act that continues to be performed without women's agency. While transnationalism, globalisation, hybridity, and multiculturalism have all been addressed in relation to diaspora, the confluence between gender and diaspora and how they have influenced each other has been less investigated. Issues within diaspora studies continue to be fundamentally normative, and their emphasis on feminine and queer subjectivities within the rhetoric of transnational migration is only one example of this link to the idea of diaspora as a heteronormative experience. More and more people are challenging these standard conventions and looking to women for insight into the diaspora and related issues.

Space plays an important role in how we feel and express our gender identities. The body and physical space have played significant roles in the oppression and subjection associated with patriarchal rule in India. Gender-based identity politics in India have a long history of enforcing strict rules on who may enter certain buildings, where women can and cannot go, and how they must express themselves based on their gender. Understanding the interplay

between gender and geography in the Indian setting is complicated by intersectionality. Gender discrimination takes many shapes in the new century. Literary representations capture these new selves in a variety of ways, sometimes via the experimentation with semiotics and stylistic elements. The fragmented identities of postmodern, post-globalised Indian individuals manage these challenges in distinctive ways.

THE DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE IN THEIR WORKS

Diasporic literature, which draws on the social implications of the diaspora, is a thriving subgenre of postmodernism. The word "Diaspora" currently incorporates the experiences of the diasporic imagination, which is scattered all over the globe but whose Greek origin was limited to relate to the exodus of Jews after the Holocaust. Authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Agha Shahid Ali, etc., have written on the Indian diaspora. The protagonist of *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee is a young widow who, together with her husband, struggles to understand her spouse's idealized view of the United States. Jyoti, a young girl from the countryside, gets married off to Prakash despite her lack of education. Prakash's extreme ideals lead him to reject the feudal system and to give his wife the pseudo-American name Jasmine in the hopes that she would join him in his vision of a more egalitarian future. Through this metamorphosis, she is exposed to her husband's idealized vision of life in the United States. She agrees with his hope, but it's not her own. If she had followed Prakash to America, she would have been no more than a shadow of him.

Hema, a character created by Jhumpa Lahiri, goes through everything Jasmine avoids. Hema and Kaushik, second-generation Bengali immigrants, did not voluntarily leave their home country. Hema's parents follow the new Diaspora trend of relocating to a more prosperous location, in this case Cambridge. She has no sentimental ties to her 'homeland' and unquestioningly embraces her American citizenship. Kaushik's second trip to the United States is tied to the passing of his mother. For Kaushik, the 'Trauma' or 'Impossible Mourning' is the realization of the inevitable, whilst for Jasmine it is the murder of Prakash himself. The shock of learning his mother has terminal cancer compels him to leave for the United States.

Authors of the Indo-American diaspora, such as Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, use several narrative strands to explain the experiences of their heroes' suffering. The former, *Wife*, depicts a young bride's alienation and isolation, while the latter, *The Namesake*, depicts the difficulties experienced by a Bengali couple upon their immigration to the United States. The hardships faced by a first-generation immigrant in a new country are eloquently depicted in

these two works. English has expanded its reach in Diasporic literature with the help of women authors like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. To find happiness, diasporic individuals uproot themselves and go to a foreign nation. By putting their main character in a variety of situations, Indo-American diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri accurately capture the experiences of the diaspora. Topics explored in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* include women's immigrant status, societal oppression, the east-west cultural encounter, and cultural conflict. The characters in *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, set in the United States, have difficulties in adjusting to their new home. Her book is autobiographical like Bharati Mukherjee's. Dimple, a young Indian lady, is the protagonist in Mukherjee's book *Wife*. Dimple's husband, Amit Basu, is a young engineer. The alien society had her under its thumb. Due to anxiety and insecurity, she is unable to settle into American life. She isn't resilient enough to handle New York's society on her alone. Dimple's acculturative stress causes her to kill her spouse in the novel's climax.

Authors such as Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Kavita Dasvani, M. G. Vassanji, and V. S. Naipaul challenge readers' assumptions about concepts like "home," "nation," "native," and "alien" in their accounts of the experiences of refugees and immigrants. These authors argue against a dualist understanding of the cultural differences between the East and the West. Diaspora authors typically challenge established concepts of identity and solid rules that govern life at home and abroad, in contrast to the older writers who depicted cross-cultural contact and constructed traditional forms of life and characters to emphasize the inherent difference between the cultures. In the postcolonial era, the inhabitants of the former colonies have taken on a new perspective, which is explored in works of diaspora literature.

CONCLUSION

We can say that this research argues that diaspora studies need to expand its scope to include women's migration, with a focus on the multifaceted migrant experience and a rejection of the polarizing binaries that have traditionally defined these fields. In third spaces, different kinds of cartographies and representations collide to provide a rich and varied social and cultural environment. As a component of social exclusion and marginalization, certain places come to serve as crucial markers; the inclusion of gender further complicates the situation. Gendered identities in space are nuanced and crucial to cultural depictions. All studies of social life are incomplete without considering the role that gender performances play in defining these places. Representing the challenges, subversion, and perseverance of marginalized gender identities as third space experiences is an effective way to do so. These women authors have a deep personal

investment in exploring feminism. Their paintings show how women have been alone and marginalized from the beginning of time in a phallogocentric society.

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