

The Creative Launcher

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Diaspora Literature- Comparative Analysis of Bharti Mukharjee and Jhumpa Lahiri

Dr. Mangesh M Gore

Head, Department Of English
Sundarrao More ACS College,
Poladpur, Dist Raigad
(MS), India

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Abstract

There are prominent expatriate Indian writers known for their Diasporic literature. Writers like Rohinton Mistry, Ashish Gupta, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banarjee -Divakaruni, Uma Parmeswaran etc. have contributed their literary genius to express Diasporic experiences. The eminent writers, especially South Asian Women novelists Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharti Mukharjee contributed a lot in the area of diasporic literature. Their contribution is recognized at the international level with applaud. The similarities and distinctions between them are briefly taken into consideration in this paper.

Keywords- Diaspora, Ethnicity, Expatriate, Location, Culture, Tradition

Diasporic Experience is common basis for this comparison among these English novelists of Indian origin. The diasporic sensibility and multiculturalism is fully reflected in the contemporary writings of Lahiri and Mukharjee. While comparing Mukherjee and Lahiri reader's attention is mainly captured by their characters. Mukherjee's characters face external struggle with the main culture and Lahiri's characters confront inner conflict. In other words, it can be said that the conflict is the common issue in both writers, the only thing that differentiates them is Mukherjee's portrayal of external conflict of her characters and Lahiri's projection of internal psyche of her characters.

"Tamurlane", one of the stories in Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness* realistically presents picture of immigrants and their conflict with the surroundings. Gupta is a chef in a restaurant run by Indian owner in Canada. He is brutally assaulted by some racist Canadians. Their hatred, contempt crossed all the boundaries of humanity. They throw him on the subway tracks in the city. In "The World According to Hsu", the narrator reveals the ugly face of Canadian racism. Ratna, a character of Indian origin recalls the memories of bitter incidents related with immigrants. Dr. Supariwala, a competent and potential candidate is rejected in an employment interview only on the basis of her foreign origin in "isolated Incidents".

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Bharati Mukherjee constantly compares United States and Canada in relation to the issues of racial and colour discrimination and the treatment given by the majority community to the minority communities. She represents her characters as troubled souls exposed to frequent and severe incidents of external conflicts. Her characters face verbal abuse and physical violence. Lahiri's characters belong to well-educated group. They are not illegal immigrants. Obviously the problems faced by them are different from that of Mukherjee's. Lahiri skillfully presented the psyche of the immigrants. She analyzed the inner conflict of these characters. They are torn between the old and the new world. Lahiri illustrates Indians overseas who face dislodgement, stick to their native culture and failed to incorporate the new culture. e. g. Mrs. Sen from "Mrs. Sen" exhibits an immigrant Indian woman who constantly misses her homeland. She keeps listening to the tape in which the voices of her relations at home are recorded. This is the only way to compromise the feeling at home.

Mr. Pirzada loves Indian food especially pickles and rice in his everyday meal. He relives the past by putting a pocket watch which is set according to the time in Dacca to which he belongs. Mr. Pirzada is physically present abroad, but his soul is wandering in his country lanes around his daughters.

Bharati Mukherjee's characters constitute a group of immigrants constantly fleeing. These immigrants live in fear in the alien land mainly because they have reached there by unlawful means. In other words, Mukherjee's characters are illegal immigrants; While Lahiri's characters are legal ones. This aspect of immigration differentiates both writers. In case of Mukherjee, illegal immigration results into various problems such as the problem of lodging. They are constantly worried about the raids of the immigrants' authorities. These immigrants cannot live a normal life. They try to purchase Green Card by unlawful means. They cannot voice injustice done to them because of their status as illegal immigrants. Majority of characters penned down by Mukherjee are illegal immigrants. Her world is full of such immigrants who entered the new world by unlawful means and routs. These characters are smuggled into America and Canada with the help of shifting agents. They are indebted to the shifting agents. These characters belong to different social strata. Most of them are skilled labours, hotel waiters and low class workers.

"Tamurlane" painfully presents the woes and sufferings of these illegal immigrants working in a restaurant. They are deprived of normal life. The characterization of the story takes us to the world of illegal immigrants who constantly move under the threat of arrest and encounters by immigration authorities. This fear confines them to kitchen and even underground storehouses. They take their rest in such places whereas others are deputed on the vigilance.

Jasmine is the supreme female creation of Mukherjee. This female protagonist of the novel "Jasmine" is the most striking example of illegal immigrant. However she does not face all the problems which are faced by the illegal immigrants in the "Darkness". Jasmine

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enters America in an illegal shuttle. She constantly takes shelters herself in different families to hide her from the immigrant authority. She often changes her name as Jane, Jase and urges Prof. Devinder Wadhwa to make availability of Green Card.

The case of Lahiri's characters is different from that of Mukherjee's. Her characters are lawful immigrants to America or Canada. On the surface, they are free from the experiences of external problems as encountered by Mukherjee's characters but they are not at all free from the conflict because it is rooted in their own psyche. On the contrary, Lahiri's characters need not face such problems. They are legal immigrants. Most of her characters are well educated. e.g. Mr. Pirzada, a scholar. Mrs. Sen, Sanjeev and Twinkle, Ashima and Ashok Ganguli in "The Namesake" are qualified. Mukherjee's characters try to transform themselves into the new culture. They are flexible enough to adopt with new culture. They try their level best to Americanize themselves by following common traits and customs prevailing in the society. In "The Lady from Lucknow" Nafeesa indulges in a thrilling post marital sexual relation with a married white man. This act of her act of doing so is not mere change but an attempt to live free life.

In "Visitors", Vinita tries to be American by allowing a stranger to enter home in the absence of her husband. She presents herself as a modern, liberal and broadminded individual living abroad. Jasmine transforms herself with new identities as per the demand of situation. Jasmine becomes Jase in Taylor's family, 'Jane' in the company of Bud. Jasmine changes not only her name but also her approach. She adopts new culture and successfully assimilates into the main stream. She never tries to retain her Indian identity rigidly. Jasmine is an epitome of successful immigrant who at least attempt to cope with the new world.

On the contrary, Lahiri's characters live a life of seclusion away from the main stream. They try to retain their Indian identities. On the opposite, Lahiri's characters live a life of loneliness. Her characters purposely retain their Indian identities. Most of her female characters like Mrs. Sen, Ashima Ganguli in 'The Namesake' wears saris. These immigrants try to maintain their own cultures by using their native language and following religious customs, traditions, beliefs, food habits and social manners of the homeland. Ashima teaches Gogol, her son, to memories the poems of Tagore and the names of Indian gods. However, Lahiri clears the fact that the first generation of immigrants follows this social and cultural life of the old world. But the second generation is cut off from their homeland customs and traditions.

The life of Mukherjee's characters is filled with violence. They have to face physical as well as verbal abuse. This violence is the result of racial and colour discrimination. Lahiri's characters project a more sanitized version of the expatriate community. Most of her characters represent a group of educated individuals undergoing internal conflicts. Mukherjee portrays wide variety of characters as compared to Lahiri. Lahiri offers a greater variety of themes compared to limited range of themes in Mukherjee.

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Mukherjee presented a variety of characters in her immigrant writing. Her fiction world includes immigrants of different age groups, genders, religion and social status. In “Darkness”, characters from all social and economic classes are found in ‘Darkness’. “The Imaginary Assassin” comprises the Sikh family migrated after partition of India. These differences in generation can be viewed through Grandfather-Father-Son relationship. “Tamurline” presents the world of illegal immigrants living pathetic life. These immigrants belong to low economic class.

“Visitors” depicts cultural conflict in the mind of a newly married and just settled Indian woman in America. Lahiri’s characters are coloured by her Bengali origin. Almost all characters of Lahiri are Bengali. e.g. Ashima, Ashok Ganguli, Mrs. Sen, Mr. Das etc. The diasporic Bengali community is shown in ‘The Namesake’. This migrant community is living abroad but still maintains economic, social, political and emotional ties with their homeland and with other diasporic communities of the same origin. There is a lot of importance given to children in Lahiri’s short stories collection with a view to the act of transforming between cultures, serving as a catalyst for giving intercultural message. Lahiri draws on children in a number of her stories to provide the readers with a more snoping insight, may be because she feels that her grown-up characters might allocate into cultural dissimilarity and adjustment.

In this way, the writers belonging to same genre or field of literature have minute differences in their ideologies and approaches. Though they are diasporic women novelists, they gave different treatments to the world of immigrants.

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