

Images of Immigrant Women in Select Works of Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee

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Abstract

This paper throws light on the life of immigrant women writers in the contemporary literary studies, as a diasporic novelist they voice out the feelings of the women who leave their mother land, and settles in the alien land. They also picturizes the struggle, obstacles and sufferings faced by the immigrant women in the male chauvinistic society. In the diasporic writing, both Mukherjee and Banerjee have gained a special recognition for their style of writing and characterization.

Keywords: Immigrant, Isolation, Alienation, Sufferings, Male domination

“A broken immigration system means broken families and broken lives”

-Jose Antonio Vargas

Immigrants are the people who migrate to alien land and experience a sense of loss there. They feel themselves lost in the alien land and alien culture. The psyche of the immigrants changes according to the problems they face and their struggle to survive in the alien land. In the process of adapting the new culture, makes them to lose the cultural bond, traditional values, with the country of their origin. They undergo the plight of identity crisis, cultural dilemmas and displacement.

Diasporic writers live on the margin of the two cultures, transforming their experience about their native land and alien country in their writing. Various women writers have portrayed their experience through the women immigrants in their novels. Diasporic literature focuses mainly on themes like discrimination, cultural shock, assimilation, identity crisis, alienation, displacement, depression, and generational gap.

The immigrants in the alien land often recognized in great dismay, the loneliness of their condition. The uncertain hazards of new lands exposed their suffering and struggle of their life. The immigrants alienated from his homeland, his people and his family feels the wrench of separation. They feel as if they are thrown out from the nest of their birthplace. They got overwhelmed in the feeling of nostalgia; this distorts the life of the immigrants.

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The experience of adapting to a new society is a process in the life of immigrants. In the beginning they feel difficult to get adapted in the new society. Time is seen as a great healer, once if they overcome the impact of shock and anxiety. They establish new roots and start a new begins. Truly speaking Indian English literature is defined as literature written originally in English by the authors Indian by birth. Bhikhu Parekh states out that:

The Indian Diaspora is like the banyan tree, the traditional symbol of the Indian way of life, spreads 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 only way he has increasingly come to feel at home in the world. (Parekh 106)

Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri have explored and portrayed the struggle, evolvment and survival of the women in exile. As women writers they depicts about the life of immigrant women in all the dimensions that they experienced on their own life. In recent year's Indian women writers' picturizes the inner life and obstacles faced by women through the female protagonist in the novel. Women become the central focus in the novel.

Mukherjee's works focuses on the life of immigrant women and their feeling of alienation, often experienced by an Indian woman and their struggles. Mukherjee's own struggle as an immigrant from India then as an expatriate in the alien land led her to write about the life of the immigrant women. In the novel *Jasmine*, Mukherjee depicts the character as a path-finder, who finds her own way by crossing many obstacles and she moves on, as if she is leading a new life. To survive in the world, Jasmine changes herself and re-born herself for a number of times. Jasmine as Jyoti struggles, fights and adapts to survive in the new land. She undergoes many transformations from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jase, and Jase to Jane. But in all her transformations she undergoes many rebels and revolts in her life. Mukherjee in an interview states that:

“The village girl Jyoti becomes Jasmine, then turns to Jase, also into Jane. She is a pioneer in the true sense. I am going to make mistakes. I am going to try out many new identities”

Jasmine's life is transformed, the roles she plays in society changes according to the situations. The docile role of Jyoti as a poor, inhibited, insignificant widow in India paves way to the next role as a lover, care-giver, care-taker, life-giver, and comforter and as a healer in the alien land. In her each transformation she is in need of male supporters. “I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for

Jane. Half-face for Kali.” (Jasmine 197) Though men play a major role in shaping her identity, she wants to create her own identity.

Women are discriminated from womb to tomb. But Jasmine refuses to be bound by crippling traditions and customs. She hates the feudal society in which women have no freedom and independence. Jasmine tries to shape her own life by facing adventures in her life. She adapts the American culture, by passing through the stages of acculturation, assimilation and finally becomes the part of the culture. Jasmine’s immigrant experience creates a new identity.

Indian women writers explore women as their main subject and portray their life style from childhood to complete womanhood. Through their panoramic view of the lives of women, they have given new dimension to the literature. Among them Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni draws her own experience and also from the lives of other woman in her works.

Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Heart* deals with the difficulties faced by the women and the manners through which they overcome their problems. In her works she focuses on the ordeals of Indian women in the patriarchal society, Indian culture and traditional values comparing it with American lifestyle which is totally different. Through this Divakaruni brings out the traditional values, religious orthodoxy and also about Indian joint family system. In Bengal the traditional orthodox families are bound together by strong cultural, social, religious and communal ties.

The heroines of the novel Anju and Sudha are brought up in the traditional joint family system in Calcutta. As their father have already passed away, in the typical patriarchal family the responsibility of running the family lies with the mother. The woman has to support the family both economically and emotionally. Anju and Sudha complement each other; they share same views and ideas among them. The compassion, kind and love they share make them to face all the difficulties in the family. They both dislike their father and Anju says:

I hate my father. I hate the fact that he could go off so casually in search of adventure, without a single thought for what would happen to the rest of us. I blame him for the fired circles under mother’s eyes, the taunts of the children at school because I don’t have a father. None of it would have happened if he hadn’t been so careless and got himself killed. (Sister of My Heart 24)

Being born as fatherless children, Anju and Sudha are bound closely with each other emotionally and psychologically, they cannot imagine their life without the other. The two sisters are separated after their wedding. Being born in the patriarchal, male chauvinistic and male dominated society, they undergo troubles after their marriage. But Anju and Sudha are

bound together. They easily overcome all the critical and difficult circumstances, because of their mutual understanding and love towards each other. Sudha is portrayed as the strong and stubborn woman. She has to face to face problem in her in-laws home. But finally, she takes the decision to join with Anju in America. Sudha rejuvenates and energizes all the women in the world.

Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee's have received a special mark in English literature. Their novels have received a special attention among the women readers through their women protagonists, they project the diasporic dilemma of modern woman and it also reveals about the cultural displacement of immigrants. 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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