

Diasporic Female Indian Writers in Diasporic Indian English Fiction

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සංක්‍රමණය යනු සිය වස් ගණනක් පුරා ප්‍රචලිත ව පැවැත ආ මානව ක්‍රියාවලියකි. විවිධ ජාතීන්ට අයත් සංක්‍රමණිකයන්ගේ ජීවන අරගලය නිරූපණය කරන සංක්‍රමණික සාහිත්‍යයෙහි ඉන්දීය සංක්‍රමණික සාහිත්‍යයට හිමි වන්නේ විශේෂ ස්ථානයකි. ඉන්දීය සංක්‍රමණිකයන් ඉංග්‍රීසි බසින් කළ සාහිත්‍ය නිර්මාණ ඉන්දීය ඩයස්පෝරාවේ අද්දැකීම් හා සිතූම් පැතුම් දෙසේ විදෙස් ඉංග්‍රීසි පාඨකයන් වෙත සමීප කරවීමේ සාර්ථක උත්සාහයකි. ඉන්දීය සංස්කෘතියෙන් ගොඩනැගෙන සාම්ප්‍රදායික පරිසරය අතහැර තරගකාරී බවින් යුත් විදෙස් සමාජයකට අනුගත වීමේ දී ඇති වන කායික හා මානසික පීඩන සංක්‍රමණික ලේඛිකාවන් විසින් ඉංග්‍රීසි බසින් රචිත නවකතාවල ස්ත්‍රී දෘෂ්ටිකෝණයක් හරහා මනා ව පිළිබිඹු වේ. මූලික වශයෙන් සාහිත්‍ය විචාර පදනම් කරගනිමින් සිදු කළ මේ අධ්‍යයනයේ අරමුණ ඵ්වැනි සාහිත්‍ය නිර්මාණ සහ ඒ ධාරාවේ ලේඛිකාවන් කිහිප දෙනෙකු පිළිබඳ දළ අදහසක් ලබාගැනීම යි.

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සංස්. පී. ඒ. අමීල මදුසංක, ජයමල් ද සිල්වා, දිල්ෂාන් මනෝජී රාජපක්ෂ,
වන්දන රුවන් කුමාර, එච්. ඒ. ගිනන් මධුසංඛ, නන්දුලා පෙරේරා
'ප්‍රභා' ශාස්ත්‍රීය සංග්‍රහය, සිවු වැනි කලාපය - 2014/2015
මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨය, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය

Diasporic Female Indian Writers in Diasporic Indian English Fiction

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.¹ 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*'² which mean thank you are used in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*.

The origin of English literature written by Indians can be tracked back to the era of colonization in which India was under British rule. J. V. Desani's novel *All about H. Hatter* (1948) and Ved Mehta's novel *Delinquent Chacha* (1969) have the first references of immigrant experience in Indian English literature yet they lacked the depiction of life struggles or despair of Indian immigrants. Thus *The Nowhere Man* (1972) of Kamala Markandaya and *Wife* (1975) of Bharati Mukherjee are considered to be among the first few novels which depict the discrimination, disappointment, despair and isolation faced by Indian immigrants who are living in foreign contexts. Hence the establishment of diasporic Indian English literature as an independent genre of Indian English literature is regarded at the end of 1980s.³

Today, migration and immigration has become a famous phenomenon among Indians as well. In addition, many people are aware of cultural diversity and migration, as a result of globalization and technical development. English education in India which commenced during the colonial period and continued through the post-colonial India has now become eminent among the majority of Indians. Thus the diasporic Indian English literature is significant in conveying the experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora to the readers of English literature. There are two types of Indian immigrants portrayed in diasporic Indian English literature: Indians who emigrated from India to countries like Mauritius, Surinam and Fiji as laborers to work in sugar plantations during the colonial era and Indians who immigrated to western and middle-east countries in search of a better standard of life. Furthermore, associations and gatherings of diasporic Indian English writers worldwide create many opportunities to discuss, review and improve their literary work. Diasporic Indian English literature is flourished with the common experiences of Indian diaspora, such as problems of adjustment, discrimination, identity crisis, hybridity, nostalgia and alienation.

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Writers of diasporic Indian English literature can be divided into two categories: first generation immigrants and second generation immigrants. First generation immigrant writers become representatives of immigrants who have lived a considerable period of time in their motherland and now are trying to adapt into new contexts after immigration whereas second generation immigrant writers represent the descendants of first generation immigrants⁴. Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth, Meena Alexander, Sunetra Gupta, Aravind Aditya, Vikram Chandra, Neel Mukherjee, Hari Kunzru, Thrity Umrigar, Sameena Ali, Kalyan Rai, Raja Rao, Anurag Mathur are some of the prominent writers of diasporic Indian English literature.

It is considered that the portrayal of Indian immigrants in fiction written by diasporic female Indian writers has more subtlety and sensibility. As mentioned by Ashalata Kulakarani, Latha Rengachari in her article *Debating Expatriate woman's Writing* has said,

“In their aim at self-definition and the expression of their expatriate experiences, women from 1970s onwards chose to use literature. Literature became a means of establishing autonomous selfhood. Third world women sought to find words and forms to fit their experiences and have chosen narrative strategies like the auto-biography and the quest novel to do so. They use the auto-biography to give shape to an identity grounded in these diverse experiences of expatriation and self-definition.”⁵

Thus it is evident that there is a significant role of female writers in diasporic Indian English fiction which is enriched with experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora.

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.⁶

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.⁷

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.⁸

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

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flourished her novel with the elements of magic realism. It was also adopted into a movie of the same name.⁹

Meena Alexander was born in 1951 in Illahabad 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.¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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.

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.

End Notes

1 Pourjafari & Vahidpour, 2014, p.682.

2 Desai, 2006, p.49.

3 Joshi, 2004, pp.83-93.

4 Kulkarani, 2015.

5 Kulkarani, 2015.

6 Larson, 2013.

7 Kulkarani, 2015.

8 Kulkarani, 2015.

9 Divakaruni, n.d.

10 Shankar, 2006, p.109.

11 Kulkarani, 2015.

12 Joshi, 2004, pp. 86-87.

13 Desai, 2006.

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