

Feminism and Indian Female Diaspora Writers

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Abstract:

The word globalisation has made the world a small village and with moving times it is very common but, yet important the manner in which it has been portrayed by different writers. Especially by many Diaspora writers, no doubt women have reached the space; they are members in political parties. It can rather be said that sex is a biological tag which has been acquired by birth and in today's time there is no such field where women has not excelled. In spite of all these achievements Feminism in International says with thinking about men they are rather more concerned about women in general. It has also come to notice that in today's times there are more of female Diaspora writers than their male counterparts. Why is this so? Is it because literature which gives them a free hand to show their performance, and among these a few of them are Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine and Desirable Daughters*, Chitra Benarjee Devakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices and Sister of My heart* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake*. Besides rootlessness and identity search, very little has been said about feminism in Diaspora, therefore this paper would relate to feminism with respect to the novels by the afore said women writers whom the presenter has selected who are Indian born, brought up in India and later moved to the West, to U.S and at present they are into teaching profession and have become well known Diaspora writers. Many Diaspora writers have written about their country and culture but hardly anyone has focussed deeply on this subject.

Key words: Diaspora, Feminist, views.

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As Diaspora has become really very interesting as people are migrating and trying to discover new places. Just not discovering new places, but due to over development as well as opening of new horizons people try and move out from their country for their better prospects. Here the paper presenter has tried to discuss two such topics with amalgamation that is Diaspora and feminism. As in English literature we have various types of writers as prose, poets, dramatist, and novelist and so on. Among these there are some who focus more on feminine writers thinking about females and that has come to be labelled as feminism and along with this the presenter has combined Diaspora which would make my paper an important point of discussion. First of all I shall say about feminism which has no doubt become very old taboo, for in today's time feminism hardly exist for women have come up in all walks of life. Standing along with men side by side sharing shoulder to shoulder, it is different that the society doesn't yet give them an equal platform. But as such if one goes to see we find women are far better in all aspects. I am not boasting this is the fact which is acceptable by the society, as they are able to handle feminine works which is specifically created for them, besides they are also able to stand side by side sharing the work assigned to them at work place. Wherever a woman may go she is always going to outstand in her work, for woman as we all know at home she is a daughter, sister, mother, friend, wife so many names she has who is always ready to do whatever the need and demand be. She has never bothered for herself always cared for near and dear ones. As and when it comes to her work place she has also always excelled, as there are so many women CEO's who have always improved the status of the company for she has always remained a very good organizer as well as a real goal achiever, this makes woman always at the forefront.

Now coming to my paper it speaks about three such women writers who are diasporians as well as feminist as per the paper presenter's views. Beginning with Bharti Mukherjee who was born in 1940 and brought up in Kolkata along with her two sisters; they were given ample opportunities in academics which brightened their future. Later as their father migrated to the United Kingdom on getting a job and settled there in 1951. He has called them to United Kingdom, which gave them the opportunity to improve their language skills. Among

the three sisters Bharti Mukherjee who turned out to be a prolific writer. She has written a number of short stories as well as novels, to name a few Jasmine, Desirable Daughters, The Tiger's Daughter, The Tree Bride, etc. From these to be discussed here is Jasmine and Desirable Daughters which has typical traits about feminism, here Mukherjee has tried to transform the protagonist into new women. Jasmine from her very birth being the third girl child is shown to be as unwanted by the elderly people, and after reaching a certain age the fortune teller telling that she would be widowed at the age of seventeen, she disagrees to it and the fortune teller hits her on the forehead and she considers the wound to be her third eye. This incident transforms her and has given her a new identity, she gets married and her husband even passes away and she transforms herself without carrying of becoming a widow. With this taboo of widow she doesn't sit back and brood like other Indian females in fact she changes her identity moves ahead all alone. She goes to US as was her husband's wish to go and complete his higher studies, here she has first changed her name from Jyoti to Jasmine having undergone many difficulties she reaches America by ship she even murders the person who had raped her and it is here the total change starts in her life. Wherever she has found shelter and protection, she has tried to take that help and always moved ahead with a new hope in life. After being raped for the first time in life she did learn a lot from that, no doubt the scar which she had received on her forehead has really acted as the third eye which she has called it Kali as the protector. No doubt she has changed names from Jyoti to Jasmine and from Jasmine to Jane and Jase, this all had happened just to remember her identity. Not just remembering her identity besides the identity has also changed her personality her work and made reach to great heights which have provided her a platform to stand for herself. These heights have helped her in many ways wherever she has worked, the work was full of dignity in spite of her having lost her virginity while moving from India to U.S. Besides these types of identity has helped her a lot and make her realize about the male dominated society, as well as about life that which was not easy to live alone yet somehow she did survive with lots of ups and down but with dignity without waging a war in her inner subconscious. As she says, "I wanted to become a person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, and affectionate. Not illegal, not murder not widowed, raped, destitute, and fearful." (Jasmine 171) the abilities have helped her to adjust to the requirements of a changing environment

and to free from the past are Jasmine's skills. Such things have changed Jasmine and reality is revolving round her and she has realized the truth about the prevailing society.

The next novel **Desirable Daughters** also show certain feministic trends as well as autobiographical. It is a story about three sisters who are born and brought up in Calcutta in a very traditional, wealthy Brahmin family but they are never constrained by a society with little regard for society. All three sisters have a constant conflict in their minds of native and foreign cultures. As we have the main protagonist who was from her very childhood told that she would be widowed immediately after her marriage, to mitigate the malefic aspects of her horoscope she was married first to a tree prior her engagement. These are certain feministic views but such feministic views would never be approved by the American feminism in fact these would be considered as orthodoxy. Here it clearly shows that Tara Lata the protagonist and her sisters confront throughout the novel. In the beginning we find Tara who had been married to rich wealthy Brahmin even bears a son from him and later moving to U.S. divorces him and stays with her white boy friend and her son Rabi. They even come to India which not liked by her one of the sister's named Parvati who didn't move to the west. Her taking divorce is known by all but nobody mentions about it nor do they dare to ask her. Parvati another feminist has married to the person whom she loved rather than undergoing an arranged marriage and settled in Mumbai and the third sister Padma who was a well-known news anchor has also moved to the west and runs a designer sari business. This shows the main traits of feminism as all the three had been educated in convent school and belonged to wealthy Bengali family.

Besides we find Padma having affair with a Christian man and she also bears a son from him who is illegitimate named as Christopher Dey, this is shown when both come to visit Parvati and he calls her aunty. Such things are intolerable by the Indian society and especially by the Brahmin caste to which they belong. Such things happen with all the three sisters which forces them to think for their past, as to what culture they were rose. Along such things an incident takes place with Tara her boy friend leaves her and moves out of the apartment they were sharing. Here we find all the three sisters with a life full of inconsistency are forced to find their past, though they live a liberating life but an unknown feminist way. There is self destruction and self construction taking place in parallel. They seem to be rather more as

modern feminist approach as there is independence among them, mobility and outspokenness with a deep sense of affinity with familial and communal others.

We find all the three sisters have taken a break from the traditional and clichéd roles and started living a life of their own way. They are trying to adjust with the so called modern society. The three of them have their own way of adjusting themselves, with different aspects of society. Padma lives a complacent life, where as Tara lives a free ultra modern life though a divorce yet she lives a life full of freedom. Whereas Parvati is opposite of the two staying with her husband following both modern and traditional values. Here Bharti Mukherjee seems to be showing the traditional as well as modern aspects of female characters balancing female identity. Padma and Parvati are following the safer zones whereas Tara is shown to be more preoccupied with modernity. Padma who also lives in the U.S. reminds Tara to follow the role of Sita and Savitri but Tara is self engrossed and considers Padma's instruction as male chauvinistic and ignores them as she looks at her son who was a gay and this has changed her entire life setup which she has accepted to be modern. She also has indomitable courage to transcend the boundaries and form a new life for herself. These are certain feministic traits in Bharti Mukherjee's *Jasmine and Desirable Daughters*.

Coming to next novelist Chitra Benarjee Divakaruni she too belongs to Bengal, transcended boundaries negotiating two different worlds from various perspectives. Here as I am supposed to show her as a feminist I have selected her novel 'The Mistress of Spices'. In fact 'The Mistress of Spices' was also filmed by a British film maker Gurinder Chadha. In **The Mistress of Spices** no doubt she is autobiographical as well as diasporic, for whatever having witnessed and experienced in her life has put down making it autobiographical. Then as she relates every incident with her home town and the importance of the things utilized and how she has shown an Indian girl the protagonist named, Tilo whose life is transformed after one particular incident which has forced her towards selling spices. These spices she relates each of them to healing something or the other in life and how most of the Indians coming to buy those spices at the shop have a feeling of being helped by Tilo. Besides the healing power she also turned to be the fortune teller, she sets her practice at the grocery store in Oakland, California. She vowed to be mistress, and she could foretell what would happen and what had happen. As of who stole the water carrier's buffalo, where the gold was buried etc... One day

pirates came to know about her and she tried spells to stop them. Yet she was carried away and she was named as Bhagyawati, Bringer of Luck. Such things portray her as feminist for the experiences which she undergoes and yet she remains in the prayers of her customers and works for them in their times of needs which alone is enough to be called as a very strong headed woman. She is shown to be very fearless in spite of undergoing such a lot of torment, she never moves back on the contrary is always at the fore front ready to help anyone at any time.

Tilo holds together supernatural life and the vicissitudes of modern life, considered as witch woman with all magical powers; she is portrayed as a living breathing real, she is one of the finest creations by Devakaruni. She is the structural and magical pivot of the novel; she holds together the various characters and events in the novel. She is uniting and harmonising force who feels the need of anyone visiting her store. She has sympathy and consideration for the transplanted Indians in America. Thus can be considered as a female principle in life, which presents the disruptiveness of change and the power, beauty, strength and validity of redefining one's own individual identity within a broader universal context making it a complete feminism Diaspora. Devakaruni at times is said to have undergone all the torment in her life to survive by herself which has forced her to mention certain things in her novel through the mouth of Tilo the protagonist of the novel as Tilo is the bridge between herself and the sufferers. She is an elegant advisor, an up bringer of healing powers, a remedial Champion. How does she possess these magical powers? Is it possible? Is it real? All these questions coming to one's mind is secondary and dismissal. She can be accepted as she is a life giver, restorer of health and hope. She admits frankly and says that she is a mistress of spices. "she can work the others too like mineral, metal, earth, sand and stone, the gems with their cold clear light; the liquid that burns their hues into our own eyes till we see nothing else." Pg 5. She learned them on the island of spices. Such things make her a real feministic person which can undoubtedly call her a feministic person as well as her novel can be considered as a feminist novel. There are various such incidents mentioned by Devakaruni through the mouth of her protagonist Tilo who resemble her and make it an autobiographical as well as a feminist novelist.

The third feminist novelist is Jhumpa Laheri much has been said, discussed and written about her as a diaspora writer, but very little has been considered about her as a feministic person. This is what has made me focus on and put it down as a feministic person her most famous novel **The Namesake**. She too was a second generation Indian America her parents also migrated from West Bengal to London where she was born and later settled in the U.S. she has spoken a lot about east west encounters, cultural displacement, loss of identity alienation and despair. With all these things she too has a tinge of feminism, in her novel Namesake as well. As such the title of the novel suggest as to how the entire novel focuses on the name of the protagonist 'Gogol' this has an autobiographical tinge for it had disturbed Lahiri when her teacher had changed her name from Jhumpa to Lahiri and this name had always given her an embarrassed feeling. Besides her husband who had read a Russian novel named Gogol and on the basis of that novel he had wanted to give his son this name that is what makes it an autobiographical. Now here in the novel as such the story revolves around Gogol only son of Ashima and Ashoke, yet according to my perception Laheri can be also called feminist, for Gogol who was first dating Ruth leaves him and moves apart, later he meets Moushumi who a family friend's daughter he gets engaged with her and after a period of time they get married as per their Bengali ceremony. Soon she also meets her ex-fiancé and getting infatuated towards him, soon Gogol finds out about their relation and he divorces her. Here Laheri has very well shown how her female characters are also very strong. After Ashoke's death Ashima doesn't want to rely on her kids in fact she wants to be independent and return to Calcutta, she doesn't want to be burden to her kids. Even though her kids are ready to keep her, it is Ashima who wants to have an independent life. All Laheri's female characters Ashima, Moushumi, Ruth, Maxine, Sonia whatever be their role don't repent anywhere for whatever happens to them nor do they move back in life they are always shown as moving ahead which is a feministic nature. Though most of her novels reveal a lot of autobiographical element, with a tinge of dilemma which is usually the nature of Diaspora novels. Besides this due to the strong headedness of her female characters she can be called a feminist. As most of the Diaspora novelist are always in search of rootlessness clinging for it as a part of search of identity, as they are always struggling and shifting to be away from their culture so as to achieve a new identity.

To conclude as my paper speaks about Bharti Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri all the three have started their lives either in India or abroad but each one has independently to speak more about their female characters focusing on their lifestyle, shunning away the taboos of women should be confined only to house, looking after the family and taking care of the family chores. In fact they have tried to portray the women as more affluent both with house work as well as outside work, similar to the women in the west. Besides they have shown their female characters have strived hard to achieve their identity, New woman has emerged in their writings speaking like males, defying male dominance, discussing their work-life experience, adjusting both their personal as well as professional life in much more better way than their male counter parts and have risen more than the old stale feminism. This shows that these women Diaspora novelist are truly feminist than other feminist writers.

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