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## Issues in Postcolonial Indian English Literature

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## Immigrant Feminine Experience in Indian English Fiction

**Ms. Deepanjali Karbhari Borse,**

S. P. H. Arts, Com and Sci Mahila Mahavidyalaya,  
Malegaon Camp, Malegaon, Nashik.

Migration is an act of moving from one place to another. A person who migrates for some period is called as a tourist. But when people migrate to other places with an intention to live permanently is immigration. Wikipedia defines the term immigration as,

Immigration is the introduction of new people into a habitat or population. It is a biological concept and is important in population ecology, differentiated from emigration and migration (websource).

The reasons for migration may be social, economical, political, and educational or something else. However displacement or dislocation always directs to identity crises. Immigration is one of the important aspects of literature because of its global experience. Diasporic literature achieved importance in universal literature in a backdrop of post-colonial context developing with post-colonial literature inspired by the vast spread of migration and immigration. It focuses mainly on themes like discrimination, cultural shock, difficulties in adjustment, assimilation, orientalism, identity crisis, alienation, displacement, depression, dilemma, hybridity and generation gap.

Now a day, migration and immigration has become a well-known phenomenon among Indians. Many people are aware of cultural diversity and migration as a result of globalization and technical development. Two types of Indian immigrations are portrayed in Indian English literature: Indians who immigrated to the countries like Mauritius, Fiji and Surinam as labourers 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. The writers of Diasporic Indian English literature can be divided into two categories: first generation immigrants and second generation immigrants. First generation immigrant writers are the representative of immigrants who have lived their considerable period of time in their motherland and now trying to adapt into new contexts after immigration while second generation immigrant writers represent the descendants of first generation immigrants. Raja Rao, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Bharti Mukharjee, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Jhumpa Lahiri are some of the prominent writers of diasporic Indian English literature.

It is believed that immigrant female Indian writers portray Indian Immigrants in fiction more subtly. Ashalata kulkarni and Latha Rengachari mentioned in an article, Debating Expatriate Woman's Writing as,

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

Thus it is evident that immigrant female writers in Diasporic Indian English fiction plays significant role with the portrayal of feminine experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora.





Since the beginning of the feminist movement in 1960s in the West, much has been written on women like their oppression, subordination and marginalization. The female writers of 21<sup>st</sup> century have gone beyond the fight for inequality. They prefer to write about the aspirations of women to be free and independent. The migrated people have given birth to hybrid culture. Many of the female Indian immigrant writers have written on the immigration from feminine standpoint. They realized the differences between Indian culture and the culture of their newly adopted country as well as their status in both cultures.

Kamala Markandaya is considered as the first immigrant Indian writer. She was born in Maysore and immigrated to England. Her novels are more meditative of feminine sensibility in modern India. In *The Nowhere Man* (1972), the protagonist of the novel is oppressed by the discrimination even after living about thirty years in England.

Anita Desai, born in Dehradun and immigrated to England and America is another prominent immigrant female writer. She portrays the immigrants who are in search of their identity in another land in her novel, *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971). Aspects of discrimination, the viewpoint of young immigrants, east-west cultural dichotomies, disappointment and isolation faced by immigrants in post colonial context are elaborated in the novel.

Bharati Mukharjee, born in 1940 in Kolkata and later immigrated to America depicts the immature, dependent female protagonist wisely uplifts herself to be an independent, brave woman after the conflicts she face in an unfamiliar context in her novel *Jasmin* (1989). She reinvents herself by killing her old self. She says, There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams (Mukharjee 25). In comparison to this novel, Mukharjee portrays the transformation of modest, conventional Indian wife to the murderer of her husband in her novel, *Wife* (1975). Her fantasies about a high standard of life in America shattered after the immigration and she became the victim of mental trauma which leads her to commit the murder of her husband.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni born in Kolkata immigrated to America depicts the story of a graduate student, newly arrived in America who considers America as a land of illusion but has to face harsh realities when she is assaulted on wide Chicago streets in a short story, *Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs*. In *Doors*, Preeti is the character who falls in love with western idea of privacy after moving to America. In a short story, *Clothes*, Sumita, the narrator's husband dies and she has to decide whether to stay in America or to go back to India. Her award winning novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) portrays an Indian girl who helps other immigrants to solve their problems with the magic of her spices. Divakaruni represents the realistic picture of the immigrants from the feminine perspective.

Meena Alexander born in Allahabad and later immigrated to Sudan and America, describes the immigrant life, identity crisis, racial prejudice, marriages in her novel *Manhattan Music* (1997). Sunetra Gupta born in Kolkata and immigrated to England portrays the story of a female protagonist who immigrates to England after falling in love with a British man and later realizes the true nature of her husband in *Memories of Rain* (1992). *A Sin of Colour* (1998) also portrays the dilemma and isolation faced by Indian immigrants amidst the complexities of a new context.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation Indian American who born in London. Her award winning novel, *The Namesake* (2004) depicts the aspects like the generation gap between first and second generation immigrants, conflicts of east and west beliefs, cultural displacement, loss



of identity, nostalgia, alienation and despair. Her short stories present a significant picture of the immigrants who go through the harsh journey of becoming American. Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai, born in Chandigarh and immigrated to England and America portrays the life struggles of Indian immigrants, aspects of globalization, terrorism, multi-cultural societies and racial intolerance in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006).

One can say that feminine immigrant experiences in Indian English literature is an important genre depicting the harsh realities and offers emotional security to the immigrants. Cultural conflicts, quest for identity, the problem of immigrants, impact of industrialization, consequent social and economic changes are the common themes that presents the dilemma of modern women facing in recent times. Being the representative of Indian immigrants, these writers successfully addresses the readers the troubled status of the suffered women. Their keen observations of the life of Indian women and their inner psyche portray their plight and exploitation. Diasporic Indian English fiction keeps their writers linked with India and the whole world.

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