
**Diasporic Literary Worlds of Three Authors: Bharati Mukherjee,
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri**

Subrata Kumar Das

*Ph.D Research Scholar, UGC-Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora, University of
Hyderabad, Telengana, India.*

E-Mail: subrata.hcu@gmail.com

I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees [...]. Also the gathering of the people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status – the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man.

(Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation": 291)

The three Indian Bengali diasporic female writers living in the United States are Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni from the first generation of Indian diaspora and Jhumpa Lahiri from the second generation. A comparative discussion among these three writers is attempted in this article to understand their outlooks in the foreign land and how they portray the Bengali diasporic culture in their writings. There is a generational difference between the first and the second generation diaspora. These three writers selected do not belong to the same diasporic generation. Hence there are some gaps of their 'belongingness' as diaspora and their diasporic world views and their writings.

For the first generation diaspora, migration creates alienation, nostalgia for the past and rootlessness at the place of migration as he/she still clings to the cultural beliefs, practices, and norms of the homeland. In this connection Makarand Paranjape argues that these experiences "cling to the old identity and a resistance to making a transition" (61). This displacement or dislocation, experienced by the first generation expatriates is described by Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) as living "in-between" spaces (2). This displacement, dislocation and rootlessness also give rise to the notion of "double consciousness" (W.E.B. Du Bois's term) and "unhomeliness" (Heidegger's term) which are the major features of diasporic situation. Lois Tyson analyses these two concepts aptly:

Double consciousness and unhomeliness are the two features of postcolonial diasporas. 'Double consciousness' or unstable sense of the self is the result of forced migration colonialism frequently caused. In the diaspora this feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither, rather than to both of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives is referred to by Homi Bhabha and others as 'unhomeliness'. To be 'unhomed' is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home at even in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak. (421)

But for the second generation diaspora or the children of the first generation, the country of their birth is not similar to the country of their origin. This fact makes the difference in the

development of identity of these children. These children are tossed between cultures and societies, one of the host cultures and another of the home cultures of their parents. Thus they develop a sense of 'inbetweenness' that results out of their belonging to two different cultures and societies and which also results either in the loss of identity and alienation or results in hybridity which means adoption of both elements of home and host culture in foreign land. Hybridity and "new ethnicities" are common among youth (Hall, 1991). Vertovec in "Three Meanings of Diaspora" argues that the second generation diasporas tend to be more exposed to "the cross-currents cultural of different fields" (290). This identity is like a plural identity. This is explained by Somdutta Mandal as "[t]his issue on the one hand, develops the tension between the desire for assimilation and the need for ethnic identity in the younger generation, on the other hand, it creates a conflict between generations, between mothers and fathers who want to maintain cultural ethnicity and the children who want freedom to be more American" (12). These children live in "third space": a hybrid location of antagonism, perpetual tension, and pregnant chaos (Bhabha, 1994: 218).

Thus, there is a distinction between the first generation diasporic people and the second generation. While there is the desire for assimilation or transculturation among the second generation diasporic people, this is lacking among the first generation diasporic people. The first generation nostalgically and reminiscently pines for their mythic 'homeland'. So, perhaps the first generation diasporic people may be considered as expatriates and the second generation as immigrants. The following section discusses details of differences between these two states and being: expatriation and immigration.

Bharati Mukherjee:

I came to a profound conclusion. **I was no longer Indian in mind or spirit.** The weight of tradition, even the multifarious tyrannies of a loving family, was no longer tolerable to me... It became clear to me-another door opening-that I was an immigrant writer in the tradition of other, older (European) immigrant group. **(Emphasis added)**

(Mukherjee in "On Being an American Writer": May 22, 2008)

Bharati Mukherjee is a first generation Indian diasporic writer living in the United States. She is a novelist, short-story and non-fiction writer. Born in 1940 in Calcutta and then married a Canadian fellow student Clark Blaise at the University of Iowa in 1963, she stayed in Canada from 1966 to 1980. She became a naturalized Canadian, got Canadian citizenship and lived in Toronto and then in Montreal and held teaching positions at McGill University and Concordia University. She migrated to the US in 1980 with her family and became a US citizen in 1988.

The general themes of Bharati Mukherjee's writings are: feeling of transition from expatriation to immigration, violence, reincarnation, melting process for new pioneers, subaltern/gender consciousness/feminine mystique, depiction of upper class *brahmanism*, transition from acculturation to self-acculturation, the recurrent idea of 'unhousement' and 'rehousement' (these two terms were used by Clark Blaise in his book *Resident Alien*) projection of multinational characters, sometimes based on mythology and last but not the least-the Bengali sensibilities in diasporic world.

The issue of her migration to the United States in 1980 from Canada is also reflected in her writings especially in her collection of essays *Darkness* (1985) which carries the distinct feeling of transition from expatriation to immigration. There is small difference between

expatriation and immigration. Expatriation differs from immigration in its concept of assimilation. An expatriate will always carry with him his country. A note of alienation does exist in the expatriate sensibility. George Steiner considers the expatriate writer as "the contemporary everyman" (10-11).

In Commonwealth literature the phrase "the expatriate sensibility" is considered to be a legitimate literary term. Uma Parameswaram and Alastair Niven use the phrase to explain the expatriate belongings of the Commonwealth writers. Christine Gomez's essay "The On-Going Quest of Bharati Mukherjee from Expatriation to Immigration" explains expatriate sensibility in the following way:

Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings, an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. **The expatriate builds a cocoon around herself/himself as a refugee from cultural dilemmas and from experienced hostility or unfriendliness in the new country (emphasis added).** (72)

The difference between expatriates and immigrants is that immigrants commit themselves to becoming a part of their country of residence, whereas expatriates see themselves and are perceived, as living in a foreign land. An immigrant attempts at assimilation with foreign lands. An expatriate writing focuses on the native country that has been left behind, while immigration writing emphasises the country into which one has entered as a migrant. An expatriate dwells on his/her 'ex' status of the past, while an immigrant celebrates his/her present in the new country.

When Bharati Mukherjee was lived in Canada, she experienced anti-Indian attitude and the government's implied racial bias against the Indians and other discriminations against the 'invisible minority' living in Canada. She felt that she didn't get recognition for her writings as she expected; while her husband Clark Blaise being a Canadian got it easily. In Canada, she experienced herself as a psychological expatriate. The protagonists Tara and Dimple of her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) and *Wife* (1975) respectively, written in Canada are also expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. An expatriate experiences traits of being ill at ease both in the native culture and in the alien one. M. Shivaramakrishna writes about Tara and Dimple that the "retention of their identity as Indian is in constant tension with the need for its renunciation if they have to acquire a new identity as immigrants" (74). For Jasbir Jain, "Mukherjee's novels are representative of the expatriate sensibility" (12). She considers V.S. Naipaul as an expatriate writer. After publication of her first two novels, Bharati Mukherjee saw him as her model. Even in her *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977), she says:

In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of Naipaul; it is he who has written most movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and exile, of 'third world art' and exile among the former colonizers; the tolerant incomprehensible of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a *desh*. (287)

Thus at that time, identifying herself with V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee too saw herself as an expatriate writer in the light of her first two novels.

After arrival in the United States, Bharati Mukherjee started looking forward. She rejected her earlier stance of expatriate and saw herself as an immigrant. She herself says in *Darkness* (1985) that “[i]f you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait-surrendering little bits of a reluctant self ever-retreating past-you’ll never belong, anywhere” (2). Her transition from an expatriate to an immigrant is like transition from the “aloofness of expatriation” (3) to the “exuberation of immigration” (3). Sushma Tandon in the Conclusion of her book *Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction: A Perspective* (2004) argues in the following way:

[S]he (Mukherjee) saw in immigration an opportunity to redefine herself as an artist in an immigrant tradition, and not as an aloof and alienated expatriate writer, concerned only with the subversive potential of life on the margin. (167)

Thus, it is an opportunity to her to represent her experiences and at the same time lend her voice to her belief that it signified a release from constructive social and cultural restraints back home. So, she is a writer who assimilated herself into the American ethos.

The “melting pot” was the compelling metaphor of the American Dream. This “melting pot” image of the age of industrialism was first used by French born essayist St. Jean de Crevecoeur in 1765 where he said, “Here in America individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men” (59). For the “melting pot” theorists, an immigrant can only hope to survive if he/she leaves behind all his/her prejudices and manner and receives new ones from the new government he/she obeys. Thus Bharati Mukherjee tried to dissolve into this “melting pot” after moving to the United States. In the United States she considered herself as an immigrant. This is also reflected in her writings. While earlier she considered V.S. Naipaul as her model, now she considers Bernard Malamud as her model. In an interview given to Alison B. Carb, she confesses that “[l]ike Malamud, I write about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture” (650). This perception is reflected in her all later works, especially in *Jasmine* (1989). While her collection of short stories *Darkness* (1985) portrays the transitional world from expatriation to immigration, *Jasmine* depicts the whole corpus of immigrant literature: assimilating, transcultural, transnational, forward-looking approaches by immigrant writers. This novel depicts the protagonist’s attempts at assimilation with the American ethos. It is like an odyssey from unhousement to rehousement in the US.

After the publication of *Jasmine* in 1989 Bharati Mukherjee in an interview with Ameena Meer confesses that “[i]t was writing in that book that I transformed myself from being an expatriate to realizing I’m an immigrant...my roots are here. There is no going back” (26). The protagonist of this eponymous novel who hails from Punjab takes her life into her own hands and makes herself an American, very much like her creator. Her life story parallels the making of an American mind. In the same interview, Bharati Mukherjee further added that “I totally considered myself an American writer... I am the first among Asian immigrants writing to be making this distinction between expatriate and immigrant writing.... I am writing about an American group who are undergoing many transformations within themselves” (26-27). In the *New York Times Book Review* she defiantly announces to her American readers: “I am one of you.” This strong and positive assertion of her being an American citizen is an effort to establish herself as an American writer.

Though Bharati Mukherjee belongs to the first generation expatriate writers, she is not like the first generation expatriate writers. The belongingness to ‘inbetweeness’, the notion of ambivalence of hybrid identity in diasporic culture isn’t found either in her personal outlook or in her writings. She takes the diasporic situation in a positive way. We can’t place her in a

hybrid world where lots of ambivalent notes related to belongingness and identity are present. She should be placed among transnationalists, transculturists and assimilationists who take diasporic experiences in an assimilating ways and who dissolve into the American “melting pot” easily.

Bharati Mukherjee is not only a famous immigrant writer who accepts the diasporic world in a forward-looking ways and establishes herself as a true role model for the second generation diasporic writers, but is also a radical feminist whose work is replete with crusades against the male-dominated society. She adopts the first person point of view and her protagonists are females who take different incarnations over males’ amelioration against females in the societal phenomenon.

Violation is the ‘leitmotif’ in her fiction and she thinks that the psychic violence is necessary for the transformation of characters. This psychic violence is always against male characters. The protagonist of the novel *Wife* (1975) Dimple’s frenzied killing of her husband is the result of her notion that if circumstances require such drastic acts to win freedom, they may be restored to. Mukherjee also gives an archetypal quality to her female protagonists to bring out the essential feminine traits in them. In the novel *Jasmine* she portrays Jasmine as *Kali*, the Goddess of Destruction. In Hindu mythology *Kali* is an incarnation of *Durga*, the Goddess of *Shakti* (strength). The image here is more relevant to the strength of women like Jasmine who has embarked on a perilous journey to the New World to fulfil her husband’s dream.

Though Bharati Mukherjee declares repeatedly as ‘I am one of you’ to the American readers, and that ‘my roots are here (in America), there is no going back’, the note of nostalgia towards her homeland India does not escape completely from her writings. We can find in her works the Indian themes and very defining Bengali sensibilities. The protagonists Tara and Dimple of her first two novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife* respectively are from Bengali *brahmin* families. The protagonists Leela and Vinita of the short stories *Hindu* and *Visitors* respectively from her first collection of short stories *Darkness* (1985) are also from Bengali *brahmin* families. Mukherjee is herself from a *brahmin* family and most of her protagonists are also from the same high caste and well-to-do families. This also shows the lineage of her origin in Bengali Hindu *brahmin* family. So ethnicity, identity and original belongingness do not escape her. Maya Sanyal, a *brahmin* protagonist of the short story *The Tenant* from the stories collection *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) hails from Bengal. In *Tiger’s Daughter* the whole milieu is based on Bengal. After getting married to Clark Blaise and then returning to Calcutta both jointly composed *Days and Nights in Calcutta* which is a great manifesto of her Bengali Cultural sensibilities

(<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/essays/nonfiction/days_and_nights_in_calcutta.html>).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni:

Like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is also first generation diasporic writer living in the United States. She is an award-winning author, poet, and teacher of creative writing, children and young adults’ fiction writer, book reviewers, columnist and social activist. Her work has been published in over 50 magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, and her writing has been included in over 50 anthologies. Her books have been translated into 29 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese. Some themes in her works include South Asian diasporic experience, particularly, those of women immigrants, history, myth, magic realism, diversity etc. Divakaruni's works are largely set in

India and the United States, and often focus on the experiences of South Asian immigrants. She writes for children as well as adults and has published novels in multiple genres, including realistic fiction, historic fiction, magic realism, and fantasy

(<<http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/about/background>>).

Much of Divakaruni's writing centres on the lives of immigrant women. She says in an interview:

Women in particular respond to my work because I'm writing about them - women in love, in difficulties, women in relationships," [...] "I want people to relate to my characters, to feel their joy and pain, because it will be harder to [be] prejudiced when they meet them in real life

(<<http://diverseeducation.com/article/8312/>>).

Divakaruni's interest in women began after she left India, at which point she reevaluated the treatment of women there. At Berkeley, she volunteered at a women's centre and became interested in helping battered women. She then started/joined "Maitri", a free, confidential, referral non-profit organization that primarily helps families from South Asia facing domestic violence, emotional abuse, cultural alienation, and human trafficking. She is one of its founders and continues to serve on the advisory board with a group of friends, which eventually led her to write *Arranged Marriage* (1995), a work that includes stories about the abuse and courage of immigrant women. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni tells stories about immigrant brides who are both liberated and trapped by cultural changes and who are struggling to carve out an identity of their own. Divakaruni deals with a variety of issues in the book, including racism, interracial relationships, economic disparity, abortion, and divorce.

She is also a staunch feminist. She is influenced by Mahasweta Devi. In an interview, given to the *Atlantic Monthly* online, she says:

Mahasweta Devi -- an Indian feminist writer -- has been a wonderful role model for me. She wrote about women's issues long before it became fashionable or political to do so -- when it was really dangerous -- and she suffered a lot for it. I look up to her enormously. She's in her seventies and still writing"

(<<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/factfict/ff9804.htm.interview>>).

Her women characters represent vivid aspects of diasporic life like the marginalised, the rebellious, the docile and traditional, modern and supernatural. The young diasporic characters like Jayanthi in *Silver Pavements and Golden Roof*, Geeta, Hameeda and Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Sudha and Anju in *Sister of My Heart* (1999), Uma and Malathi in *One Amazing Thing* (2010) represent the second generation who find the true identity in the United States by assimilation and with their forward-looking ways in alien land. Tradition and modernity is also a part of her female characters. Though many characters of her works are from Indian Hindu mythology and traditional Bengali society, but in foreign lands, they are portrayed as modern ones. Her novel *The Palace of Illusions: A Novel* (2008) tells the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of a woman living in a patriarchal world. Speaking about Divakaruni's gender portrayals K.S. Dhanam argues:

Divakaruni's books are directed mainly to women of all races and faiths who share a common female experience. All her heroines must find themselves

within the contrasting boundaries of their cultures and religion...she also contrasts the lives and perceptions of the first generation immigrants with of their children born and raised in foreign land. And inevitably, it includes the Indian American experience of grappling with two identities. She has her finger accurately on the diasporic pulse, fusing eastern values with western ethos. Her writing course with her identification is with a brave new world forging to life. Her sensitivity to contemporary voices, today's issues are threaded through with an ongoing search for identity beyond anthropology, beyond sociology and beyond academia. (62)

She says that the stories are inspired by her imagination and the experiences of others. *The Mistress of Spices* is unique in that it is written with a blend of prose and poetry. The book has a very mystical quality to it, and as Divakaruni puts it: "I wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic in my attempt to create a modern fable"

(<<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0597/divakaruni/essay.html>>).

Realism, fantasy and Indian myths comeingle in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's rapturous prose. Many of her writings are influenced by magic realism and Salman Rushdie. She blends a magical power with natural objects such as spices, conches and mirrors. After the publication of her first novel *The Mistress of Spices*, She writes in her essay "Dissolving Boundaries" that in that novel, she makes an "attempt to create a modern fable"

(<<http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0597/divakaruni/essay.html> >)

to bridge the division between contemporary American realism and the transformative power of myth from her heritage. Her famous trilogy *The Brotherhood of the Conch* (2003-09) combines a synthesis of ethical and ecological concerns embedded in myth and magic. They combine 'reality' and 'supernatural' adventures in the manner of ancient Hindu myths and legends.

Though her writings and activities are devoted to the amelioration of women's lives in this 21st century globalised world, few critics have commented on her being a feminist. Samrat Upadhyay, for example, in his essay "*Arranged Marriage: Between Third World & First*" argues that Divakaruni in *Arranged Marriage* "feeds the exoticized fantasies of Westerners" and "fails to explore the women's complex psychologies in their journeys from a 'Third World' to a 'First World'"(np). Growing up from Bengal and living there till the age of nineteen, Divakaruni had Bengali cultural acquaintances, ethical values and Hindu myths and traditional systems. Bengali cultures sparkle throughout her tales. The strong moral and ethical values imposed by her own middle class Bengali upbringing often became the foci against which she juxtaposes the situation of the New World. She inserts many folktales in her stories she remembered from her childhood in Bengal, such as the sleeping city under the ocean and the speaking serpents, but transformed to fit into the New World. In an interview given to Soumi Basu from *The Medha Reviews* about her attributes of magical power to natural objects, she says, "I think this is an influence of the folk tales I was told when growing up in Bengal. Out folk tales are full of magic- the objects and animals in folk tales are at once natural and magical. I wanted to bring that element into my books, which do draw upon folk tales material"

(<<http://www.medhajournal.com/index.php/en/medha-face-of-the-month-776/573-chitra-banerjee-divakaruni>>). This leads a note of amalgamation of tradition with modernity

in her stories. Her many works, including novels and short stories, like *Sister of My Heart*, *The Names of Stars in Bengal*, *Stories in Arranged Marriage*, *The Vine of Desire* (2002) are replete with Bengali sensibilities, cultural specific words and Bengali culinary stuffs.

An obvious question among the readers is whether she can be called an expatriate or an immigrant in the United States. This is the reply through my Facebook chatting with Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni responded to the question as: "Do I consider myself an immigrant or expatriate? An interesting question. My attitude is more inclusive-**I feel both American and Indian. I feel I have 2 homes and 2 cultures to call my own. Both have enriched my life and writing.** I set my books in both worlds. Personally, I love being in Houston, and I love being in Kolkata. Just in different ways" [emphasis added],

(<<http://www.facebook.com/chitradivakaruni>>). She further added: "[A]t this point in my life I feel I am in the middle, between Bharati and Jhumpa, equally an immigrant and an expatriate"

(<http://www.facebook.com/chitradivakaruni/posts/10151356982140106?notif_t=feed_comment>).

Thus, Divakaruni writings are mixed with traditional and modern elements. She is personally "inbetween" (2) expatriate and immigrant states in her diasporic American life. Though the characters in her writings are generally drawn from the Hindu mythology and they lack the complete assimilative, amalgamative, transcultural and transnational spirits with the hegemonic cultural ethos of the United States like the characters of Bharati Mukherjee's works, nevertheless she tends to modernise her stories with the elements drawn from the globalised and multicultural American life. Perhaps, either Divakaruni tries to suit her stories in host cultures and to attract her host cultures' readers, or this may be a result of her metamorphosis from a traditional Bengali woman to one to be modernised in keeping in her mind the globalised and multicultural ethos of the US.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

In fact, **it is still very hard to think of myself as an American.** For migrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children. On the other hand, the problem for the children of immigrants, those with strong ties to their country of their origin, is that they feel neither one thing nor the other. The feeling that these were no single place to which I fully belonged bothered me growing up. It bothers me less now" (**emphasis added**). (187-88)

(Jhumpa Lahiri in an interview with Brati Biswas, 2002).

Jhumpa Lahiri is the second generation Indian diasporic writer who speaks of the aesthetics of identity formation and the gradual process of negotiating two cultures. Her characters represent the points of view of the second generation Indian Americans but don't lose sight of the subtleties of generational differences in the cross-cultural trans-national space. In a conversation with Mary A. Dempsey, she reveals that many authors inspired her, notably Virginia Woolf. The interesting thing is that despite being a woman writer she often chooses to writes from the first person male point of view. Though the main theme of her writings is diasporic sensibility, specifically expatriate sensibility, the man-woman relationship in a familial space is a recurrent motif in almost all her writings.

Generally we find forward-looking approaches, assimilating tendency to the new world among the second generation diasporic writers. Although Lahiri belongs to the second generation diasporic writer, she is a different kind of writer from this theoretical point of views of diasporic literary tradition. She is like the first generation diasporic writers who always pine for her/his homeland, goes back to her ethnic background nostalgically. She does not even label herself as an immigrant writer, but prefers to consider herself an expatriate writer. Her first generation diasporic characters confirm this pervasive sense of loss and longing, displacement and nostalgia. Though the author was born in London and grew up in Rhode Island, United States, she celebrates her marriage with Bengali customs and continues to write about both the countries and their cultures, thereby expressing the emotions that disturb all expatriate writers. Brati Biswas quotes some Lahiri's confessions during an interview from internet conversation: "I began writing fiction seriously; my first attempt...was always **set in Calcutta**... I learnt to observe things as an outsider, and yet I also knew that as different as Calcutta is from Rhode Island, **I belong there in some fundamental way (emphasis added)**..." (187).

This shows that though she stays in the United States and visits Calcutta, she always feels a sense of belonging to Calcutta. This places her among expatriate writers. In this context Suman Bala describes her as "an expatriate Indian writer ... (who) stands in the same categories as that of V.S. Naipaul, whom Bharati Mukherjee calls an Indian expatriate writer" (11). In "'Misnaming' and 'Renaming': The Power of Names of Makers of Identity in *The Namesake*". Sireesha Telugu argues this point in the following way:

The book opens with Ashima Ganguly, as she attempts to recreate the taste of her favourite Indian snack as an imagery of the sensual familiarities of Bengali to Cambridge. This is also a restoration and combination of both the cultures with a mixture of Rice Krispies, Planters Peanuts, and chopped red onions with a mixture of salt, lemon juice and pepper. This signifies Ashima as an expatriate more than an immigrant trying to reconstruct the ex-status of her past. (30)

Ashima Ganguli seems to be the mouthpiece or the alter ego of the novelist Jhumpa Lahiri.

Lahiri makes her texts, basically *The Namesake* a culture hyper-text that deals with the Bengali culture, idealism and liberal attitudes to foreign influence. The novel narrates the saga of the Ganguli family in Calcutta and Boston. The Ganguli family is educated, cultural and elite Calcuttans who love to read Russian and English literatures. Her latest novel *The Lowland* (2013) sets in the Naxalite movement in the late 1960s Calcutta. Calcutta plays a significant role in Lahiri's imagination. To Vibhuti Patel's question on what role Calcutta plays in her imagination, Lahiri says:

...A significant yet marginal role. I spent much time in Calcutta as a child-idle but rich time-often at home with my grandmother. I read books; I began to write and to record things. It enabled me to experience solitude-ironically, because there were so many people, I could seal myself off psychologically. **It was a place where I began to think imaginatively. Calcutta nourished my mind, my eye as a writer, my interest in seeing things from different points of view (emphasis added).** There's a legacy and tradition there that we just don't have here. The ink hasn't dried yet on our lives here [**emphasis added**], (< http://www.sawnet.org/books/writing/patel_lahiri.html >).

We can find Bengali culinary stuff in almost all her stories. Foods and dresses are fundamentally cultural specific. These items are rigorously used significant metaphors in the diasporic literature since they are regarded as a crucial part of one's identity. In the short stories, *When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine* and *Mrs. Sen's* in the collection *Interpreters of Maladies* (1999), the Bengali food items are blended in the texture of these two stories. In *Mrs. Sen's*, Bengali fish becomes a 'leitmotif.'

A Comparative Discussion on Mukherjee, Divakaruni and Lahiri:

Unlike Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri is not preoccupied with gender discrimination. She writes about human predicament and the crisis of identity in the alienated land of the United States; though marginality, alienation and nostalgia are the three chief features in her writings. She gives emphasis not on her feminine sensibility but on the dilemma of choice and commitment to cultural moorings in familial spaces. Her gender portrayals generally belong to second generation of Indian diaspora. The younger women characters like Shobha in *The Temporal Matters*, Moushumi in *The Namesake*, Sandha in *Only Goodness*, Bela in *The Lowland* are independent, educated women who know what they should do and what they should want to do. They represent the new women of new generations in New World. These assertive gender portrayals show an inclination towards assimilation and acceptance of their own existences in the foreign lands.

Ashima in *The Namesake* who is the first generation diasporic character is self-reliant and assertive. At the end of *The Lowland* Gauri Mitra also assimilates with California's cosmopolitan culture and shows her total self-reliance. Tasneem Farida in her paper "Portrayal of Femininity in Contemporary English-language Films by South Asian Diasporic Female Filmmakers" labels Ashima as almost feminist. But I think this assessment cannot be properly justified since Ashima is assertive and self-reliant only at the end of the novel, at beginning she is a bundle of emotions, sensibilities and fickle-minded expatriate in the United States.

These three diasporic women writers Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri have written variously on the lives of men and women. These vivid portrayals of gender, ranging from old generation to new one represents the various situations in the alien land in the United States. They portray the predicament, the joys and sorrows, and compromising situations of women's lives. The main issue remains that the search for identity of Indian women in diasporic situations should be achieved. Being women writers they view gender from a women's point of view and thus extend the boundaries of human experience from different perspectives and dimensions.

Though in Lahiri's *The Namesake* Gogol is the male leading figure of the novel whose attempts of choosing and changing his names brings the title of novel, but it is the female Ashima Ganguli who is the protagonist of the novel since the main diasporic writings' corpus like nostalgia, expatriate situations, women predicament in familial spaces and living "inbetween" (2) of two cultures and two countries are presented only through her character. I think we can draw parallel between Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) where there are similarities between the two leading female figures. Ashima, the leading figure of *The Namesake* undergoes existential crisis, compromising situations in her own familial spaces which are also vividly depicted by Woolf through her female character Mrs. Dalloway in the novel. We also know from interview with Lahiri that she is influenced by Virginia Woolf (<www.chipublib.org>).

Though she gives some 'space' to women characters in *The Lowland*, Lahiri fails to depict the women's problems in the ways Elaine Showalter charged Virginal Woolf of being incapable of depicting the pathetic pictures of women's compromising situations in familial spaces. On the other hand, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is quite successful in this context, though she is not as radical as Bharati Mukherjee for the amelioration of women's causes. Though a male can say that Mukherjee's novels are nothing but crusades against "phallogocentric" society [where the privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning or social relations can be found], but I think Mukherjee's women perform all these crusades mainly to create their own spaces, not only in patriarchal world, but also in the new First World so as to assimilate with that world. So Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subalterns' voices are projected dexterously through Mukherjee and Divakaruni.

As discussed earlier about the expatriates and immigrants, it can be said that while Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the expatriate group in the United States, Bharati Mukherjee belongs to the transcultural and transnational immigrant one. In the case of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, she is neither in expatriate group not in immigrant one, but can be placed "inbetween" (2) them.

The Bengali diasporic culture is depicted well by these three writers. In Mukherjee's writings, we can find multinational characters, ranging not only from Bengal but also from Bangladesh, Lebanon, Pakistan, China, Italy, Afghanistan, Philippines, Trinidad and some other countries. In the case of Divakaruni's works characters are drawn sometimes from different countries especially in her novel *One Amazing Thing* (2010). In this novel we can find African-American, Indian, Caucasian, Chinese and other nationalities. Jhumpa Lahiri's writings are mainly based on Boston, Bengal and other parts of India. The characters from the short stories like *A Real Darwan*, *Mrs. Sen's* in short-story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) are from Bengal and the backgrounds of the short-stories *Sexy*, *The Blessed House* are Boston and its surrounding areas. The title story *Interpreter of Maladies*' background is Odessa's The Sun Temple.

Thus, this article explore the diasporic worlds in the works of these three authors, their accepting diasporic worlds either as expatriate world or as immigrant one. Besides, I explore not only the Bengali diasporic culture/sensibilities that are picturised in their works, but also the gender consciousness they show in their writings.

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