



## PSYCHE OF THE DIASPORIC SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN - AN ANALYSIS THROUGH CHITRA AND JHUMPA'S REAL LIFE AND FICTION

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### ABSTRACT



The paper attempts to study psychic aspect of the Diasporic woman by analysing the characters in the short stories collection of Chitra's *Arranged Marriage* and Jhumpa's *Unaccustomed Earth*. Both are the Diasporic Indian writers, who are well known in the field of writing. The present study will throw light on the psychology of the diasporic women. It will help us to analyse and understand the diasporic traits and ideologies of Indian woman in present day world.

**Keywords:** *Diasporic Writing, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arranged Marriage, Jhumpa Lahiri, Unaccustomed Earth*

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## INTRODUCTION

As a south Asian Nation, India stands alone for its cultural depth and diversity. The Indian women are no less in caliber than the women of other countries. They are well known among various nations, whether its about Intelligence or Beauty, they always have good position. This makes them, 'beauty with brains'. Whether, She is Aiswarya Rai Bachan or Sushmita Sen, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi or Late Ms. Kalpana Chawala, and many other legendary women who not only present their caliber in the Political, Economical or Beauty Pageant's all over the world but at the same time uplifted their nations as well. Diasporic Indian women are the women who were immigrated to another country. They have the do or die psyche, which we can compare through the many short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Devakaruni, the well known awardees of the Pulitzer Prize and American Booker Prize. Both of them are away from India but their writing and characters are mostly drawn from Indian sub-continent. In their unconscious mind still there is the influence of India and Indian culture, and these psychic snapshots reflect in their writings.

## DIASPORA LITERATURE: AT A GLANCE

In today's World Literature Diaspora literature assumes a great importance due to its psycho-socio-economic and political dimensions. The literature captures the trans-nationality and intercultural relations, the exchange of ideas and activism through the proper understanding the dynamics of diasporic experiences. Diasporas are conditioned by dual challenges of "nativity" and "foreignness" and their writings are testimony to this 'in-betweeness' or 'nowhereness'. Safran identifies six features of the diaspora: *dispersal, collective memory, alienation, longing for the homeland, a belief in its restoration and the act of self-defining with the homeland*. In modern diaspora, we may not find all these characteristics but some new phenomena such as relocation, assimilation, reconciliation and so on. The second generation diaspora literature focuses on the 'third space', "Cultural Diasporas"( Cohen, 2) which is the space of negotiating two disparate cultures. Then there is the question of identity, which is 'hybrid' identity. It combines pluralities and multi-layeredness. There are

various identity groups among the diaspora depending upon the causes of migration and their responses to alien countries (29-76). Identity issue shouts to be the much debatable topic in the context of diaspora literature. Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" suggests that we think of identity "as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). In the diasporic experience then, "boundaries of the self" (Alexandru, 1) are as fluid as ever and this is when the postcolonial concepts of "hybridity", "liminality" come to the foreground. Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) subverts the long-held binary way of thinking about cultural identity in terms of the yawning gap between Self/Other and proposes a hybrid version of identity according to which the Self is present in the Other and vice versa. Diasporic literature is certainly a useful resource for studying the psychology of the migrants. It speaks of diasporic experiences that the diaspora undergoes resulting from geographical displacement, alien customs, the problems of adjustment, longing for the homeland, the burden of beliefs, myths and heritage. Theodor Adorno rightly remarks,

"Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself. His language is expropriated, and the historical dimension sapped. The isolation is made worse by the formation of closed and politically controlled groups, mistrustful of their members, hostile to these branded different" (33).

Diasporic literature can well be studied from Socio-Cultural point of view. Location and home allow for ample space and abundance of language. The feeling of dislocation and alienation create both positive and negative possibilities. In Culture and Imperialism, Said forcefully articulates the exclusions that were created in society by the formation of 'Third World' nation/states:

It is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and



imperial conflicts. As the struggle for independence produced new states and new boundaries, it also produced homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order... And in so far as these people exist between the old and the new, between the old empire and the new state, their condition articulates the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions in the overlapping territories shown on the cultural map of imperialism (402).

Language, culture and history are the three major constituents of diasporic memory. In post-colonial globalized context cultural identities are fluid and heterogeneous. In other words, national- cultural identity is subject to change from within. For Bhabha, culture is always already, in a sense, diasporized. He writes:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the 'voyage out' of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation -- migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation - - makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification (172).

#### **LIFE OF CHITRALEKHA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI: AT A GLANCE**

Chitra was born on 1956 in (Calcutta) Kolkata, India. She Completed her B.A. in 1976, from the University of Calcutta. That same year, she went to the United States, where she received a master's degree. In 1985, she received PhD in English from Berkley, the University of California. She is an Indian – American author, poet, and Professor of Writing at the Creative Writing Program at University of

Houston. Her Collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* won an American booker Prize in 1995 and two of her novels *Mistress of Spices* and *The Sister of My Heart* adapted into films. 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 for adults. She now lives in Texas and teaches there at the nationally ranked University of Houston Creative Writing Program.

#### **PSYCHE DEPICTION OF DIASPORIC SOUTH ASIAN WOMAN THROUGH THE CHARACTERS OF CHITRA'S ARRANGED MARRIAGE**

Like Chitra is a working women with hardworking and philanthropic attitude in real life, so is her protagonist, Meera Bose. She is an immigrated working woman, who tries her level best to balance her personal and professional life. The storyteller presents her,

"A BEAUTIFUL apartment in the foothills with a view of the Golden Gate Bridge, an interesting job at the bank with colleagues I mostly liked, and, of course, my boyfriend Richard." (Divakaruni 95)

She is working in the office and later on helped the abandoned child without thinking that she may have problem without a legal advice. The lines below shows her philanthropic and emotional behaviour .

In another story Clothes, we can observe the never say die attitude of the Protagonist, where after losing her husband in an accident, she tries to move on in another's land. She didn't try to come back to her own home again.

"I straighten my shoulders and stand taller, take a deep breath. Air fills me—the same air that traveled through Somesh's lungs a little while ago. The thought is like an unexpected, intimate gift.

I tilt my chin, readying myself for the arguments of the coming weeks, the remonstrations. In the mirror a woman holds my gaze, her eyes apprehensive yet steady. She wears a blouse and skirt the color of almonds." (Divakaruni 95)

Diasporic Indian women are no less Indian In heart but they have open – minded thinking also. The circumstances and the hard work help them to make



their own identity, and bolster their free and open thinking, which leads them to make their own decision and choices. This can be seen in the protagonist of *The word Love* who has a live in relation with her boy friend, Rex and the same can be observed by the life of the protagonist Meera Bose in the story *Perfect life*

“Richard and I are back together, and last month when I finally wrote to my mother about him, she surprised me by being far less upset than I’d feared”. Maybe she figured that even a foreign husband—a firangi—is better than no husband at all. At any rate, she’s planning to attend our wedding, which is to be this June, followed by a honeymoon in the south of France.”(Divakaruni 95)

#### **LIFE OF JHUMPA LAHIRI: AT A GLANCE**

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London on July 11, 1967. She is the daughter of Indian immigrants. They were from the state of West Bengal, India. Her family moved to the United States when she was two years old. Lahiri grew up at Rhode Island in Kingston, where her father Amar Lahiri works at University of Rhode Island, as a librarian. He is the basis for the protagonist in the closing and last story in her short story- collection, *Interpreter of Maladies, The Third and Final Continent*. Lahiri's mother wanted her children to grow up knowing their heritage, which was Bengali, and her family often visited relatives in Calcutta (Kolkata). She is an Indian American author. Lahiri's debut collection of short story, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and her first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was adapted into the popular film of the same name. Jhumpa Lahiri is a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, appointed by U.S. President Barack Obama. Her book *The Lowland*, published in 2013, was a nominee for the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction. Lahiri is currently a Professor of creative writing at Princeton University.

#### **PSYCHE DEPICTION OF DIASPORIC SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN THROUGH THE CHARACTERS OF JHUMPA'S UNACUSTOMED EARTH**

The world that Lahiri portrays in almost all her fiction is set in motion against the cultural

tension, anxiety and resultant dialogues that take place when two very different sections of the world – First and Third – in general and Indians and Americans in particular intersect due to a large-scale transnational migration – itself an after-effect of colonialism and globalization respectively( Bahmanpour 44).

In the Jhumpa's short stories collection *Unaccustomed Earth*, We can see the Character of Ruma from the Title story 'Unaccustomed Earth'. Where she could able to balance her life as a Daughter, a wife and a Mother. Even, She left her legal carrier for her Child's upbringing.

“In the New York , after Akash was born, She'd Negotiated a part-time schedule at her law firm, spending Thursdays and Fridays at home in Park slope, and this had seemed like the perfect balance” ( Lahiri 2009)

In the story Hell and Heaven . We can observe the behaviour of typical Indian woman, Usha's Mother when she tried to scold her daughter Usha for telephonic calls or marrying an American man,

“I was thirteen, the thought of marriage irrelevant to my life. Still, her Words upset me me and I felt her grip on me tighten” (Lahiri 2009)

A diasporic Indian woman knows when and how she needs to manage her family responsibility. Like every other Indian woman, the diasporic women are also liable to their family responsibility first. At the same time they are open – minded and educated women. Thus from the above description of Diasporic Indian Women, We can really find that they are no less Indian from their mindset. They know and Experienced India. Their values are Indian but on the other hand they are open-minded and know how to tackle the real life across their own nation. They know how to balance their self in a new land amidst new identities. They are like seeds who have their real roots in India. Whether it is Jhumpa Lahiri or Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni ; Anita Desai or Bharti Mukherjee , all displayed a tint of their own self in some of their characters , which really reflect true Indian Diasporic woman.

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