Diasporic Feminism and Identity Crisis in the Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri

Research Scholar

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Abstract:

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most prominent Indo-American diasporic writer. She has written many novels that convey the feministic attributes of Indo origin expatriates. She explores the sense of double consciousness of the migrants in many of her works. Since, she herself is a product of immigration and multiculturalism, she portrays the characters both in the native and alien culture. Her imaginations co-mingle with her native and the alien in her works, and there lies a sense of being lost in her foreign land. Deeply felt by the importance of family relationship and attachment with the relatives in the country home, Jhumpa Lahiri has experienced the trauma of failing to find her identity in her new land where she could never have a sense of belonging. In her different works like: “The Interpreter of Maladies” she expresses her sense of segregation in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic group. She feels it difficult to fit into it. Though these displaced realities and self-imposed exile are in many ways a calamity, this existence acts as stimulus and enables Jhumpa Lahiri to express her feelings towards adjusting in a mixed culture. As a writer of indigenous Indian race, she represents the feministic attributes of Indian Diaspora.

Keywords: Expatriate, Indigenous, Diversity, Supra-racial, Culture, Diaspora, Feministic Approach, Patriarchal, Multi-culturalism, Globalization, Cultural Fusion.
Introduction:

Jhumpa Lahiri is an American author known for her short stories, novels and essays in English and more recently in Italian. She was born on 11 July 1967 in London to Bengali parents. Her published her debut The Interpreter of Maladies in the year 1999, winning her the Pulitzer Prize. She followed up again in 2003 with her first novel, The Namesake, then returned to short stories Unaccustomed Earth which became the best seller in New York.

Her female characters are more liberal in approach toward life who try to seek a meaning for their purpose in life.

The idea of feminism first came into view after the publication of A Vindication of the Right of Women by Wollstonecraft in the year 1792. She advocates the social and moral equalities of the sexes. The women of Russia demanded equal right to vote and they gained suffrage in the Soviet Union in 1917 followed by March 8 becoming a national holiday there. The same revolt to rights happened in America after Socialist Party of America organised a Women’s Day on 28th February 1909 in New York. In 1910 International Socialists’ Women’s Conference suggested a Women’s Day be held annually. Finally in 1975 the United Nations adopted it. Thereafter 8th March is celebrated as Women’s Day. Its significance is for civil awareness, a women’s and girls day, an anti-sexism day and also an anti-discrimination day for women. Its to celebrate a women’s achievements throughout history and across nations. This day is also known as United Nation Day for Women’s Rights and International Peace Day.

Feminism is a socio-political movement of ideologies that share a common goal to define, establish and achieve political, economical, personal and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those of men as they are same in every aspect of life except biological function. There are four types of feminism which are liberal, socialist, cultural and racial feminism.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the third wave feminism that continue to address the financial, social, cultural inequalities and include renewed campaigning for greater influence of women in politics and media. In reaction to political activism, feminist have also have to maintain focus on women’s reproductive rights, such as right to abortion and also making education their birth right.

Discussion:

"(Jhumpa Lahiri in an interview with Francesca Pellas questions that:-"

"There was a woman who wanted to be another person": This is the opening line of The Exchange, a short story you wrote in Italian and then included in your book In alter parole. Its also the beginning of your own metamorphosis into another writer. What pushes someone towards transfiguration?

Answer: Jhumpa Lahiri - A sense of frustration, of dissatisfaction. I used to look for an identity that could be sharp, acceptable, mine. But, now the idea of a precise identity seems a trap and I prefer an overabundant one: the Italian one, the Brooklyn one, the Indian one. Identity is a completely fluid thing, and metamorphosis has this concept in it. Ovid, too, speaks about this fluidity, and reading Ovid always helps me….”

Interview with Francesca Pellas – Aug 31, 2017

“What I am Trying to Leave Behind?” An Interview with Jhumpa Lahiri)"

Diasporic literature is a vast concept that includes literary works written by authors outside their native country, but these works are associated with their native culture and background. These diasporic writers always relate their home lands in their works. They express a sense of loss and alienation which emerged as a result of migration and expatriation. They deal with the sense of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, quest for identity (double identity). It also addresses to amalgamation or dis-integration.
of culture. Firstly, the experience nostalgia for the home land left behind mingle with fear in a strange land. Secondly, they are busy adjusting to the new environment. Then they begin to shape their diasporic existence by involving themselves in ethnic-cultural issues giving way to participating in a larger world of political adjustment and national issues.

Jhumpa Lahiri in her work INTERPRETER OF MALADIES travels through her ethnic experience as an Indian woman across the world. She explores the complex cultural encounter and shifts along with emotional imbalance of relationship between parents and children, lovers, siblings, husband and wife and in trying to find out a way to identity crisis. Beholding a diasporic observation, she explores the multicultural hybrid society which is in her periphery both from the external and internal depth seeking to find her own native identity mingled with the new identity in the adopted country. She also dwells on acculturation and contra-acculturation which is experienced by the second-generation Indian Americans. They embrace the new lands socio cultural values, at the same time being nostalgic about their Indian culture and sensibilities, experiencing, alienation, frustration, depression, displacement, rootlessness and other demerits of a mixed culture. Surviving in a new land makes them suffer from moral and emotional issues. In today’s world of Globalization, the world has become a small space, giving rise to a new world of social and cultural pattern. Globalization is a challenge to the native culture of an individual which give them a reason to value their own ethnic race and to preserve its own originality. These preserved cultures are a pleasure to an expatriate to know that at least there is something that connects her with her roots and originality giving her a sense of a valid being. Lahiri’s feminist approach is different from other diasporic writers. She represents characters who are not economically exploited but who try to settle in a foreign land psychologically. Her female characters are quite independent and not exploited by economy or patriarchy. Her characters face cultural dilemma, and psychological trauma of a women is attributed to Indian patriarchal notion of marriage. Their individuality is snatched by them by neglecting their emotional value. She often portrays patriarchal marginalization. The female protagonist in her novels are in constant search for meaning and value in life. Jhumpa traces a women’s journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from rejecting to accepting foreign culture, from an indigenous tribe to an hybrid one. The feminine consciousness is present in all her literary work which are the new liberated ones from their own native race and place. She depicts the liberated women characters not a rebellious or frustrated one. Her female heroines are full of hope and faith for a constructive future. The cultural encounter shaped the new hybrid diasporic women is all about her women characters.

“(As a young boy Goggle doesn’t mind his name. He recognises pieces of himself in road science: GO LEFT, GO RIGHT, GO SLOW----------

The Namesake(TNS, page no 66-67)”

“(The final stop on the field trip a short distance from the poets house ----------

Gogol is old enough to know there is no Ganguli there.

(TNS, page No 68-69)”

Jhumpa Lahiri’s major works are The Namesake, Unaccustomed Earth, The Lowlands, The Interpreter of Maladies.

Postcolonial feminism is a relatively novel wing of postcolonial feminine scholarship. Postcolonial feminism or ‘third world feminism’ emerged in response to Western mainstream feminism. Western feminism has never been heedful to the differences pertaining to class, race, feelings, and settings of women of once colonized territories. Postcolonial feminism rejects Western feminism on the ground of its utter ‘eurocentrism’. Hence, it is fallacious to hope postcolonial females to be valued, appreciated and justified by the Western hands. Of course, the long Western tendency to homogenize and universalize women and their experiences led to the emergence of ‘postcolonial feminism’. Postcolonial feminism is a hopeful discourse it seeks peaceful solutions for all world marginalized women. Postcolonial feminists imagine a world in which differences are celebrated and enjoyed. Postcolonial feminists work for social, culture, economic and religious freedoms for women.
The term post-colonial simply refers to the period immediately after a nation has attained independence from colonial powers. This would include countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States which were originally British colonies and even England after the normal conquest. The term is often restricted to the literatures of Asian, African and south American nations that have attained independence from European colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The common themes of it are race difference, class differences, cultural oppression, assimilation (the blending of cultures occurring at the intersection of colonizer and colonized), Diaspora (colonial citizen who have migrated to foreign land), Alterity (the definition of the colonized as other than the dominant colonizing culture, with theme of orientalism of exoticism, subaltern (the sub ordination of native population in a way that deprives them of both power and voice).

As with any literary movement i.e. so focused on the relationship between the individual and their social order in the development of the identity of both, they are many things in post-colonial literature. Theme resides in the construction of individual identity much of the literature that comes out of post colonialism is very concerned with being able to access the full effect of the role that social orders play in how individuals perceived themselves and their world. The work of post-colonial literature is how indigenous and external societies clash with one another often times with the result left upon the psyche of the individual. Within this arena the effect of race ethnicity becomes examined. Jean Rhys’s 1966 novel Wide Saragasso Sea is an example of post-colonial literature. V. S Naipaul’s, The Mimic Men is a novel of an Indian expatriate living in the Caribbean island.

Conclusions:

We can conclude that post colonialism address itself to the historical, political, cultural and textual ramification of the colonial encounter between the west and non-west dating from the 16th century to present day. It considers how this encounter shaped all those who were party to it: the colonizer as well as the colonized. The studies of post-colonial culture texts and politics are interested in responses to colonial oppression which were oppositional and took part in the protest later. Post colonialism is a critical theoretical approach in literary and cultural studies, but it also, as importantly, designates a politics of transformational resistance to unjust and unequal forms of political and cultural authority which extents back across the 20th century and beyond. In day to day academic discourse the so called post-colonial approach is commonly associated with names such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. It is important to note the legacy of anti-colonial nationalist thinkers and theorist like Mohandas Gandhi and Frantz Fanon are important in shaping post-colonial concept of opposition and self-determination. The two very different traditional of post-colonial thinking the theoretical post-structuralist and the practical political are linked. Post colonialism questions critically the colonial authority its epistemologies and forms of violence it claims to superiority. Mohandas pioneered a repetitive feminine activity such as spinning as a mode of resistance to economic imperialism despite cherishing and essentially traditional idle of the faithful of the maternal women, he iconoclastically called for the dismantling of gender inequalities, politicised the use of everyday domestic commodity such as salt and encouraged women to abandon staying at home in order to come out and protest against imperialism non-violently. Gandhi gave another important commonality linking feminism and post colonialism. To trace the three main historical and cultural genealogies of contemporarily post-colonial critical practice. The first is the shaping force of anti-colonial and non-western national liberation struggle championed by both radical and reformist nationalist and by Marxist revolutionaries. Secondly, there is the deconstructive or interrogative impact in particular French, post structuralist thinker Derrida, Foucault and Lancan. They shaped the influential post-colonial theories of critics like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivsk, Homi Bhabha, Gyan Prakash, Leela Gandhi and others. Thirdly, is the influence of form giving concepts derived from so called post-colonial or third world literature since the 1950’s, and of the critical frameworks initially designated common wealth through which they have been read. The political and cultural reforms proposed anti-colonial movement in countries such India, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana and Kenya and in Caribbean therefore formed the fountain head of what we now called post colonialism.
Diasporic writing or expatriate literature is a theory and practice of the work of the exile who have experience unsettlement at the existential, political and meta physical level with their experience they have unsettled the philosophical and aesthetic system. Modern, social and economic conditions initiated by globalization have made migration a common and frequent phenomenon. The migrants living outside face cultural clashes between east and west, parents and children, identity issue like double identity, alienation of elder generation man and women are the major themes.

Reference:

Primary Materials


Secondary Materials

- [www.lithub.com](http://www.lithub.com)

