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Theme of Diaspora in Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat* and Bharathi Mukherjee's *Jasmine*

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Abstract:

Every Diaspora movement holds a historical significance, as it carries within itself the kernel of the nation's history. Diaspora is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. There is an element of creativity present in the diasporic writings and this creation stands as a compensation for the many losses suffered. The present paper makes an attempt to throw a light on theme of diaspora used by the diasporic writers Bapsi Sidhwa and Bharathi Mukherjee in their novels. Sidhwa wrote novels and short stories which delineate her evolution from alienation to adoption and assimilation. Bharathi Mukherjee an Indian born American writer wrote novels which depict the issues of her own cultural location in Kolkata in India, her displacement or alienation from her land of origin to Canada where she faced racial minority and invisible as a writer and her re-location or assimilation to USA. Her novels depict the issues of her own cultural location in Kolkata in India, her displacement or alienation from her land of origin to Canada where she faced racial minority and invisible as a writer and her re-location or assimilation to USA. The character Feroza in the novel *An American Brat* resembles with that of Jyothi in Bharathi Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*. The confusion of gender boundaries and the historical implications of cross-cultural phenomena by the characters are also highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: Alienation, Cross-cultural, Diaspora, displacement, Self-realization

The term "Diaspora" is used to refer either to singular person or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture. In the beginning, the term was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. A large number of Indians migrated to Far East and South East Asia to spread Buddhism during the ancient times. The migration was a history of misery, deprivation and sorrow during the colonial period. In this century the migration was mainly due to the industrialized and developed economies. Indian Diaspora is a generic term to describe the people who migrated from territories of the republic of India.¹

Basically Diaspora is an experience of dislocation and physical displacement from the motherland and it raises socio-cultural and psychosomatic identity questions which have led to a hybrid culture and a new process of cultural assimilation. A mixed cultural milieu opens up new vistas of communication and dialogue in this cosmopolitan world. As a result, Diaspora

reciprocation has become one of the recurrent themes in post-colonial world literature. The Writers of Indian Diaspora, as William Safran observes, “Continue to relate personally or vicariously, to the homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship”.²

New While literary studies of diaspora concentrate on the problems and predicament of the diasporic community, the problems faced by the women affected by these geographical shifts remain comparatively unexplored. Diasporic literature requires analysis in terms of specific ethnicity and gender its new

South Asian American women writers such as Bharathi Mukherjee and Bapsi Sidhwa have focused on the cross-cultural tensions that arise when crossing national borders. Bapsi Sidhwa is Pakistan’s leading diasporic writer. She has produced novels in English that reflect her personal experience of the Indian subcontinent’s Partition, abuse against women, immigration to the US, and membership in the Parsi/Zoroastrian community. Born on 11 August, 1938 in Karachi, in what is now Pakistan, and migrating shortly thereafter to Lahore, Bapsi Sidhwa witnessed the Partition of the Indian subcontinent as a young child in 1947. Her works have now been translated into Russian, French, and German.

Bharathi Mukherjee a diasporic writer was born in Kolkata and she travelled with her parents to Europe after Independence. She received her B.A. from the University of Calcutta in 1959 as a student of Loreto college and subsequently completed her M.A. from the University of Baroda in 1961. She also studied in University of Iowa. She is an investigative pioneer—of innovate terrains, practices and literatures co-existent with her discovery of new worlds. She wrote novels and short stories which delineate her evolution from alienation to adoption and assimilation. Her novels depict the issues of her own cultural location in Kolkata in India, her displacement or alienation from her land of origin to Canada where she faced racial minority and invisible as a writer and her re-location or assimilation to USA. Her female characters, which have autobiographical projections of her experience as an expatriate she represents her novels the contemporary woman’s struggle to define herself and attain self realization especially in cross-cultural crisis.

Sidhwa’s fourth novel, *An American Brat* focuses on the cultural shocks experienced by the immigrants in the settled society, their sense of alienation and estrangement.² The novel deals with the transformation of the protagonist Feroza which unveils her experiences. Feroza, a Pakistani girl, belonging to the Parsee community, shifted to the United States by her family to make her modern in approach and outlook. Furthermore, the experience of Diaspora can be seen both as empowering, as well as disempowering for the women of color in the novel. The locations often demand contrasting codes of conduct resulting in often hybrid and conflictual tendencies among the individuals in Diaspora. Feroza begins to assimilate the independence of mind and spirit and sturdy self-confidence offered by the New World, which is alien to her Third World experience and sheltered upbringing. Under the influence of her American roommate Jo, Feroza completely adapts an American life style. She acts, walks and dresses like American girl. The shy and conservative Feroza turns into a confident and self-assertive girl. Feroza begins to assimilate the independence of mind and spirit and sturdy self-confidence offered by the New World, which is alien to her Third World experience and sheltered upbringing. Feroza feels David is perfect for her and their love is eternal, but as time

passes she finds a change in their relationship. It enables her to think about her life seriously and to decide about her future with confidence. But though Feroza believes that underneath the religious and cultural differences, she and David are alike, her mother does not think so. When Feroza discloses her intention of marrying David, Zareen rushes to America to prevent this unsuitable marriage. She brings money to buy off David. She tries to explain to Feroza that by marrying David she would cut herself off from her family and religion. She would never be allowed to enter the Parsi places of worship, never be allowed to attend the funeral rites of her mother or father. Feroza speaks of love. Zareen says that Love comes after marriage. She regrets having sent Feroza to America: "I should never have let you go so far away. Look what it's done to you—you've become an American brat!"³ (279)

In depicting the Americanization of Feroza, Sidhwa contrasts the confined atmosphere of girl's lives in the subcontinent with the freedom they enjoy in the states:

Feroza had grown up, like most girls in the Subcontinent, believing that everything she expected of life would be hers after marriage. The denial of even her most insignificant wish was followed by comments like: "You'll reign like a queen in your husband's house. You can do as you wish once you're married." (219)

Feroza Ginwalla becomes, what her mother, horrified at the change in her daughter, calls, "an American brat," the culture and politics of Pakistan and the joys and sorrows of being a Parsi woman remain Sidhwa's concomitant concerns.

Bharathi Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is about the transformation experienced by Jyothi who turns into Jasmine first and finally Jane. Jyothi lives with her husband Prakash who aims to go to the US for his higher education. But he is killed accidentally in a riot then his wife Jyothi decides to make his last dream come true by travelling to the US. Later when she visits the US, her experience with the new land describes the discrimination faced by women in the US. She prefers to live like an American there and accepts the transformation she faces there. "She had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you".⁴ In spite of the discriminations and suffering that Jane faces in the new land; she accepts it as hers and creates a new identity. Her novel reflects cultural diaspora-isation what Stuart Hall calls marks of "the beginning of the desire for the survival in the community of adoption"⁵

Bharathi Mukherjee's *Jasmine* the narrative focuses on the complexities of Diasporas in the sensitive mind of the protagonist, Jyothi. The novel focuses on how cultural displacement or dislocation cause new identities but of course, through a rigorous path. She is drawn to the West since it captures her imagination. But the dichotomy between the "fantasy" and the real disturbs her. Both Jyothi and Feroza display ignorance of the speech rhythms of American English leading to some embarrassing moments. Mukherjee depicts a fixed American culture that negates individual identity in favor of communal identities located in foreign culture. In turn, it limits the liberty and success of its mythological promises.

Though these novelists belong to different social background and cultures yet we find immigrant approach, cultural clash and assimilation. A comparative study of the immigrant experience by the characters Feroza and Jasmine in the novels *An American Brat* and *Jasmine* portrays self actualization through cultural assimilation. The characters Jasmine and Feroza

undergo the transitional dilemma and are constantly engaged in a frantic search for identity or roots in an alien land till they forego their past roots and get assimilated to the culture of the adopted land. Diaspora is therefore, a scattering of the seed in the wind, the fruits of which are a new creation and a fight to survive. Diaspora is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. There is an element of creativity present in the Diaspora writings and this creation stands as a compensation for the many losses suffered.

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