

CONTEMPORARY DIASPORIC SHORT FICTION OF INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS: A STUDY



Summary

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy
in
ENGLISH

Supervisor

Prof. Vinod Kumar Singh

Research Scholar

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Enrolment No. Ph.D-ENG./2015-16/04

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SUMMARY

The present thesis is an attempt to study and analyse four selected short fictional works of Indian diasporic writers from the specific angle of gender discrimination and identity crisis in an alien land. The female characters in the selected works have to face dispersal, exile, dislocation from their homeland which results in their alienation and estrangement. Diaspora writers are deeply attached to their homeland so they are caught between the two worlds at physical and psychological level. Due to this double marginalization, they feel the problem in belonging to either location. This condition creates homelessness as well as alienation in them with the host country. But a close study of the select short fiction shows that women come across racial discrimination, exploitation, marginalization and suffer from an acute sense of identity crisis. All diasporic writers share the trauma of displacement as a common history in their writings. Although living in the West, Diaspora writers cannot disown their identity and attachment for tradition. For this very reason the characters of these writers reflect the plight of violence, abuse, humiliation and racial discrimination in an alien land. Many works have been written on this specific theme by numerous diasporic writers.

The main objective of the proposed work is to explore the intercultural position and the notion of home for women in patriarchal society along with the diasporic elements i.e., search for identity and belongingness in the select short story collections of the four prominent Indian writers in English- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin. These writers use different themes realistically in their short stories as dispersal, exile,

nostalgia, expatriation, transition, migration, gender prejudice, male domination, divorce, love marriages, and the question of children etc.

The present study also finds out the raw and lived experiences of Indian women immigrants in diverse settings of dislocation. It also depicts the notion of home in respect of gender discrimination portrayed in select Indian English diasporic short fictions especially. It reviews gender prejudice and estrangement of women prevalent in the home as well as host society. The present piece of research is a humble attempt to have a critical view of some of the diasporic facets of the select Indian English diasporic women writers. One short story collection of each author constitutes four chapters of the thesis for the above analysis. The stories represent the characters' psychological disorder in cross cultural diasporic conditions of an alien land. Again, the selection of these women writers assists a considerable study of female point of view which is exclusively different from the male's perspective of looking at home and diaspora. What makes this thesis unique is its analysis through the status of women and the concept of home in distant land in the select short story collections.

For analysing the four selected short story collections of the female writers of the Indian diaspora, the literature of the Indian diaspora requires a little bit background and domain assumptions. The word diaspora refers to the displaced communities who have been uprooted or dislocated either by force or self-willed. They have to create new social, political and cultural dimensions of existence. At present, diaspora is signified as an umbrella term which is labelled to all expatriates, refugees, exiles and immigrants who are influenced by multiple cultures, languages and experiences of the geographical dislocation as well as relocation. They have to face racial discrimination and varied problems while settling in the foreign land. Due

to the displacement, cross-cultural experience, racial injustice, and attachment for native soil, people suffer from the 'Trisanku' Myth which means they belong nowhere. So they are sustained by the memories of their homeland but this creates communication problem, anger, hatred and cultural disbelief in them.

At present Indian English short fiction is embellished with a range of women writers who have made their names on global level by winning top international literary awards for their works. Indian immigrant women writers perfectly express their innovative ideas in their writings and try to provide firmness, frankness, confidence and liberation to their women characters. In their stories the female characters assert their identity as well as their right rather than to play the role of traditional women. There are some acclaimed women short story writers of Indian origin who have produced an atmosphere of Indian setting and surroundings in their excellent diasporic short stories, such as Bharati Mukherjee, Mena Abdullah, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sahgal, Meera Syal, Anita Rau Badami, Suniti Namjoshi, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Uma Parameswaran, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Dina Mehta, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt, Gauri Deshpande, Shona Ramaya, Ginu Kamani, Meher Pestonji, Susan Visvanathan Anjana Appachana, Indira Ganesan, Sujata Massey and few others. They have given strong identity to their women characters which made them outstanding and significant.

In the genre of South Asian Diasporic Literature Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has secured a credible place by her diasporic culpability. She is a well-known immigrant writer of America who belongs to the category of first-generation Indian immigrants in the United States. She has migrated to America with the belongings of her native land after her marriage after spending a part of her life in India. She has revealed the difficulties of second-generation immigrants regarding cultural conflict

and identity crisis who are unable to form cultural identity in an alien land and feel sometimes dispossessed. It is only because they are very much influenced by the ethnicity of their parents' native soil as well as strongly deep-rooted in the American standard of living. As a result, Divakaruni hopes for the common inclusive identity which is far away from any prerogative and by which they can find the way for their cultural legacy between the home and host country. In her stories she depicts alienation and identity crisis that results from the contradiction amid the horrors of Indian marriages to the liberal mind-set of the United States. She offers motivation, self-determination, new significance and confidence to her female characters so that they can assess their life according to their own in cross-cultural milieu.

Divakaruni explores new lives of Indian-born women living in America along with the depiction of marriage and man-woman relationships in the diasporic setting. In her famous short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995) Divakaruni presents realistic viewpoint of life where her female protagonists try to develop their selfhood against their weaknesses along with doubts and fears of the society. She also portrays the existence of an immigrant generation in two cultures which results in the motifs of exclusion and solitude. The stories are desolately packed with the grim title and are related with Indian marriages which are the root of any culture. Through the stories of this collection Divakaruni represents the experiences and difficult circumstances of the Indian immigrant women with balanced perspective of life. Being an immigrant in USA, she gives voice in juxtaposing the cultural differences between East and West through the female point of view. All the stories present a negotiation between tradition and modernity of the Indian American community with different cultures. The observation of each story is unique and fresh in its perspective as it explicates the lives of Indian arranged marriages during the changing times.

Anjana Appachana is also a renowned author of Indian origin who lives in the United States. Her female characters are both strong and weak but they do not raise their voice against the injustice of patriarchy. Appachana acquired a new specific voice among Indian Fiction women writers in English after writing her first volume of famous short story collection *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991). The stories from this volume have been anthologized many times in India and the United States. This debut work was first published in England by Virago in 1991 in United States by Rutgers University Press in 1992 and was reissued in India by Penguin in 2006. The stories of this short fiction not only deal with the problems of women in changing circumstances of the time but also portray the inner turmoil and difficulties of the common man. These stories are set in the early eighties which portray the desolation, convention, caste system and gender privileges in traditional India. It also deals with the injustice of patriarchy towards women in changing circumstances of the time. But at the same time, she provides the strength and confidence to her female characters.

Anjana Appachana depicts the dilemma of modern Indian women who are entangled in a conflict between traditional position of a woman and the modified contemporary society in various perspectives. She tells about the characters' lives in an organized way all along with their failures and triumphs but neither their achievements nor their failures are clear. In some way or other the characters of her stories either deal with the rules and regulations fearlessly or eventually give in to them despairingly. Most of her stories have one point in common that it all present the information by the writer to the characters but by no means ruled by the author's feminism. Anjana equally presents the discontentment of relationships not only in women's lives but even in men's lives also in her writings.

Suniti Namjoshi is an Indian-Canadian-English writer who belongs to the category of younger generation Indian immigrant women writers. She stands out for her use of fantasy and surrealism. She finds motivation and attributes from India for writing her textual themes in various strategies like Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala or Shashi Deshpande. Her writings contain a combination of sarcasm with touching humour and do not touch the level of social realism that is why Suniti doesn't find any problem in presenting the exact situation of India like other writers. In her works she speaks against the dominant ideology of the society for giving equal rights to the marginalized and subaltern. Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* (1981) is a rewriting of fairy tales which present a new vision of women in which they get strength to construct their self-identity. Namjoshi speaks against the dominant ideology of the society for giving equal rights to the marginalized and subaltern.

Namjoshi is mainly a typical feminist writer who criticizes the male supremacy in the society. The quality of her works has made her a renowned writer throughout the literary world and her writings also show Indian diaspora. Through her women characters Namjoshi reflects contemporary experiences and the mistreated facets of female condition and position. In almost all the fables Suniti's women characters are able to take decisions for their lives in the midst of tensions and problems for varying their stereotype images and way of life. For Suniti, fable is a suitable means of writing to explore her ideas regarding the status and rights of women, their relationship with men and traditional dominant ideology of the society towards them. In *Feminist Fables*, she actively illustrates not only the feminist movement but also gay liberation movements. She makes an effort to investigate those points by which she can offer equivalent importance and humane values to women like men in a patriarchal society.

Shauna Singh Baldwin is an Indian-Canadian writer who doesn't feel much attachment to India. Being related with non-immigrant generation the writer portrays some kind of detachment in her writings. Moreover, she feels comfortable with the cultural conflict between host and home country, so she celebrates her hybridity and ethnicity in the countries of adoption. She also describes the struggle of men and women of two generations after keeping a reasonable distance towards the past. In her short story collection *English Lessons and Other Stories* (1994) she represents the move between the composite structure of family within the rich and powerful formation of ancient Indian tradition. Baldwin works to share Indian culture with the world through this collection of stories. More importantly, this text endeavours to give voice to the varied experiences of Indian women.

Baldwin represents hostility and estrangement of the foreign culture which results in everyday dilemmas of women with a strong sense of immigration. She provides courage and compassion to her women characters even in the most paradoxical places. Her stories portray diasporic sensibility through a mosaic of characters in the landscape of Canada, America and also in India. In *English Lessons and Other Stories*, Baldwin has explored a range of themes along with many feministic issues such as dislodgment, adaptation, isolation, unsuccessful relations, complications of marriage, quest for identity, sexual exploitation, the problems of relocation and disenchantment etc. and all these are related with the experiences of women in some way or other. These stories powerfully raise many questions related to the sufferings of immigrant women in following their culture, customs and traditions in the foreign land.

Therefore, the overall survey of the chosen short fictions depicts the picture of mystification in acquiring cultural identity and assimilation in socio-cultural and

psychological migration. And all these writers use many themes realistically in their short stories as dispersal, exile, nostalgia, expatriation, transition, migration, gender prejudice, male domination, divorce, love marriages, and the question of children etc. Besides, the characters swing between two identities, two cultures and even two mindsets within the society which results into societal instability and disorder.

IMPORTANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

The short story is a short work of prose fiction which has a unique position in the modern era. It is an excellent form of literature which perfectly reveals the theme and technique along with the philosophy of life and the cultural and traditional aspects in a limited sense. The short story presents the moral message and sensible thoughts to the society by using smallest number of words and a main theme. Earlier it was a neglected form of literature but in contemporary period many writers are adopting this genre for expressing their ideas. It is the most established form of literature which became very popular in recent decades after the rise of the periodicals in the nineteenth century. In the starting of nineteenth century the short story was developed as a literary form, especially in the shape of the ghost story as well as the horror story. People feel connected with the short stories as it takes less time in reading and it easily presents human experience in comparison with other literary forms. The short story has travelled a long journey and totally appeared in a new form after independence.

Though the Indian English short story has got its refined structure and technique from the western models, its form obtained its own path during the social changes of India at that time. Besides, the short story has developed as a significant literary form after the 1950s in the hands of Indian writers, as Premchand,

Rabindranath Tagore and Haribhau Apte. But the real beginning of this genre was made by the masters of Indian English short stories, as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. Due to their significant contribution, the short story reached on new heights and got an outstanding innovative shape and a mode of expression. This art of writing was also adopted by some modern brilliant writers of Indian English literature. They played a major role in the growth of the short story by presenting different issues related with the time. So in present time the short story has wrecked new grounds both in theme and technique and has become very famous due to the efforts of the writers. The contemporary short story writers apparently visualised their culture and mode of life and place it within the flux of time due to their broad vision on various issues. Moreover, the women writers also adopt several changes of the modern age in their short fictions for giving strength to their female characters.

In Indian English Literature the diasporic short fiction has emerged as a new and important genre. The short stories by the Diasporic Indian women writers are the typical example of diasporic short fiction. They have presented alienation, homelessness, cultural dissimilarity, dislocation, identity crisis in their stories in relation to their characters. This study will be helpful for the students, researchers and readers to enhance their understanding of diaspora from different angles. And it will also be useful in English literature for knowing about writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research work will be aspired at attaining the following objectives:

- 1 The foremost objective is to provide an outline of the social and cultural background of diasporic short fiction along with its history.

- 2 Another objective is to observe the select short stories from the collections of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage* (1995), Anjana Appachana's *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991), Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* (1981) and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *English Lessons and Other Stories* (1994).
- 3 Another notable objective is to trace the impact of diaspora on the psyche of characters in the short fictions of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin.
- 4 Since the concepts of diaspora are isolation, displacement, homesickness, migration, dispersal, identity crises etc., therefore another objective is to search all these in the select stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin.
- 5 Another objective is to access the personal and social experiences of the protagonists that give rise to the theme in the short story collections selected for this study.
- 6 Finally, the ultimate objective of the proposed work is to enrich the forthcoming researchers in the concerned areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to complete the objectives of proposed research work, the following resource material and research methodology will be employed:

- 1 The essential information will be achieved from primary sources i.e. select short story collections written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin.

- 2 Descriptive qualitative analysis i.e., exploratory study will be used as a method to analyse the characters, situations and themes of the select short stories.
- 3 For reaching the result accessible secondary sources, like critical books on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi and Shauna Singh Baldwin, views and articles in the scholarly journals, anthologies, newspapers, magazines, interviews, theses and internet sources etc. will be used. Different libraries will also be contacted for the same purpose.
- 4 The help will be taken from the 8th edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper* throughout the research work to categorize it logically.

The thesis aims to study the fresh insights of these contemporary Indian women diaspora writers writing in English. All the authors who are selected for the research work come from different parts of the country and they have varied tastes, temperaments, backgrounds and viewpoints but what unites them is that they share common interests regarding diasporic situations and the use of English as their mode of expression. Moreover, all of them are successful women writers of certain thematic concerns about women that bring four authors in the proposed research together. In order to keep a steady focus on the underlying thrust of the present thesis a simple but coherent scheme of chapter-division has been followed, which consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Chapter 3 Anjana Appachana

Chapter 4 Suniti Namjoshi

Chapter 5 Shauna Singh Baldwin

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The first chapter of the research work is introductory and expository in its presentation. This chapter deals with the significance and development of the short story chronologically from antiquity to recent ones in literature and some of the diasporic short story writers along with the diasporic elements and feminist ideology. The introduction provides an overview of the history of short fiction and the methodology followed while carrying out the study.

The second chapter explicitly deals with the life sketch of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and her literary career as a skilled diasporic short story writer. To show the colonial binaries of East versus West, cultural conflict and lives of immigrant Asian women the researcher has taken some selected short stories in this chapter from the writer's famous short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995). This chapter maps out various cultural and feministic phases in the lives of immigrant women. The chapter also dwells upon the efforts of displaced female characters in breaking the shackles of the conformist society and reconstructing their past with the help of their memory.

The third chapter exhibits the life sketch of Anjana Appachana and her access with short stories. This chapter takes a thorough account of the immigrant experiences of the protagonists of Appachana's famous short story collection *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991) to point out the problems of women in traditional India. The effect of the social order on the life style of women and their courage to speak about

their rights and liberty are also listed in the chapter. It also explains the bold attempts of women in coming out of the limitations of the society and their reaction to it.

The fourth chapter identifies Suniti Namjoshi as an innovative poet, myth-maker, fabulist and a major practitioner of the short story. It also outlines the life, the credo and the oeuvre of the writer along with her short story collection *Feminist Fables* (1981). This chapter also illustrates her likings for child fiction. Like the previous chapters, this chapter also gives contexts of the male dominated society, their injustice and conservative thinking towards women. It also touches upon cultural identity, inequality, rights of the subaltern as well as marginalised, racial discrimination, issues of gender in her short story collection.

The fifth chapter explicates the literary career of Shauna Singh Baldwin as an eminent short story writer. It brings into light the intricacies of family life and journey of Indian women from the secure ground of family to the wasteland of office and university. It also tries to unravel the theme of cultural tension and displacement in the lives of immigrant women. For this purpose, some short stories have been taken from her renowned short story collection *English Lessons and Other Stories* (1994).

The last chapter of the thesis sums up the findings and implications of the proposed research work. It includes the convergence of the four Indian diasporic writers exclusively in their linguistic appropriation for framing a new Indian society with a typical Indian sensibility. It is an attempt to express the problems and predicaments of women effectively. The concluding chapter of the research work is a brief review of all the preceding chapters. It reinstates the awareness and emancipation of women in breaking the monotony of their inherent quest for establishing their self-identity and strategies.

The present study tries to cover all the facets of diaspora with reference to female characters who have to face relocation at various levels. The writers represent the importance of 'belongingness' in the lives of their female characters. Due to this they feel discrimination in their family as well as in the society which can also be seen in their behaviour and consciousness. They are not able to dwell in an alien land because they have to select between two identities, two traditions and even two mindsets which belong to both- their own country and the foreign land. So they create split personality in the host society after getting influenced by the cultural variation and social unsteadiness. It happens because there is a conflict between two cultures in their consciousness all the time and it results in a serious controversy regarding cultural identity and adjustment. But along with the dilemma of women in the cross-cultural encounters, the writers have also depicted patriarchal discourses in their lives.

This thesis interrogates the secondary position of women in Indian society. All the authors who are selected for this research work attempt to uncover the narrow mindedness of the patriarchal society against women by raising varied issues of difference in the case of race, class and gender. They represent various aspects of Indian-Diaspora, particularly diaspora of longing or dark side of diaspora in their works *Arranged Marriage*, *Incantations and Other Stories*, *Feminist Fables*, *English Lessons and Other Stories* respectively. The aforesaid four migrant writers investigate the effect of diaspora on the lives of their characters, especially on women characters who make every effort to speak out their otherness and like this they rise above the problems of excessive cultural values.

Of the four short story collections analysed in the preceding chapters Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*, Anjana Appachana's *Incantations and Other Stories*, Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables*, Shauna Singh Baldwin's *English*

Lessons and Other Stories are set in India America and Canada. These short story collections examine the causes of female exploitation and subjugation in Indian social system. All the writers of this study present a picture of prejudice, alienated attitude and Trishanku myth through their diasporic fictional women characters in the western world. These are Indian diasporic women writers in English but their situation is not much different from many other writers of the Indian diaspora who have been settled in Canada and Australia. It is not feasible for them to assimilate completely in the strange nation but in the hope of fulfilling their dreams they adopt it and when it doesn't meet with their expectations, they feel deceived. So the present study offers different diasporic status, realities and cultures in India, America and Canada especially in the lives of female characters which are portrayed in the four short story collections under discussion in the present investigation.

To conclude, the proposed research work is primarily concerned with the women's images, roles, and experiences in response to cultural forces and social changes in varied diasporic situations. All these issues are reflected in the lives of the female protagonists represented by the selected authors. This study explores successfully an analysis of four writers in order to examine the problems of migration, relocation and changing identities from a vantage point of distance gained by insider's view of their own community and an outsider's view from the host country. It also explores the problems of female immigrants and their decision which helps them to face the world boldly by breaking all the obstacles.

Further research can be undertaken on diasporic experiences, patriarchal discourses and the predicament of women in the cross-cultural encounters and bring into focus the writings of other major Indian English diasporic women writers of different generations in a parallel study. The study can also be extended to a

comparative framework between male and female writers of the diaspora. Such research analysis will provide much valuable insight about the lives of women in contemporary multicultural societies. Thus, this study will expand all the facets of diaspora as portrayed in diasporic Indian English short fiction especially with reference to female characters. Finally, the present doctoral investigation will enrich the forthcoming researchers in the concerned areas and appeal all learners to a great extent.