

Psychodynamics of Dislocation of Women in the Fiction of Indian Women Diaspora

Shashikant Mhalunkar

P. G. Dept. of English, B.N.N. College, Bhiwandi, Dist. Thane (Maharashtra), India

Abstract

The Diaspora communities, especially the women writers chronicle their experiences of being dislocated through their narratives. The notion of being placed away from the homeland and the home culture haunt the mental set-up of these writers. They, therefore, chronicle their personal experiences which are at times, their lived experiences, through their short stories and novels. No doubt, male writers like V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie have portrayed the dichotomy of the cultures and locations through their writings; but the female members of Diaspora community articulate the psychological predicaments of their protagonists at micro level.

Indian women are carriers of Indian culture and ethnicity through an array of cultural markers they carry. Due to the geographical displacement they face the problem of dislocation prominently. This dislocation is primarily related to the psychological shift from the culture and the ethnicity of their homeland. On the one hand they preserve Indian culture in the host nation and at the same time they are forced to assimilate with the culture of the host country. The present paper attempts to showcase the psychodynamics of dislocation in the fiction of some select Indian women Diaspora writers who through their narratives articulate the pangs and dilemmas of the female protagonists that are dislocated from their home country. The female subjects in the host nation experience loss, identity crisis and psychological trauma. Some of them explore their own 'self' and their femininities in the new found land.

KEYWORD: Psychology, psychodynamics, dislocation, culture, trauma

There needs no ghost come from the grave

To tell us this. (*Hamlet* I. v. 131-2)

Diaspora Studies has shown variant tenets of human behavior and the changing patterns in human psychology due to the shift in geographical location, migration, change in culture and ethnicity. Indian Diaspora is presently considered to be the NRIs which are the high income groups scattered across the globe from India. Right from the pre-colonial times, Indians have been migrating and trans-locating to the variant parts in western countries in search of better jobs, security, education and health. Indian Diaspora community, especially, the women face greater crisis and trauma due to the dislocation. The writings of women Diaspora writers exhibit ample instances of trauma of dislocation. Diaspora narratives primarily deal with the spatial markers.

Outer space represents the ultimate frontier but the most critical challenge confronts now is the inner space which primarily deals with the psychology of human beings. The conflicts within the mind, the psychological stress and trauma are evident in the literary

documents of the contemporary writers. The female writers especially who experience identity crisis due to the shift in location, and ultimately a shift from their home culture, articulate the inner conflict in their writings. According to the psychological theory by Sigmund Freud the exploration of repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties and internal conflicts in order to free psychic energy for mature love and work. However, Wikipedia traces the theory of psychological therapy as:

The method of psychological therapy originated by Sigmund Freud in which free association, dream interpretation, and analysis of resistance and transference free association, are used to explore repressed or unconscious impulses, anxieties, and internal conflicts, in order to free psychic energy mature love and work. (Wikipedia: web)

Further, while touching upon the psychodynamics of dislocation in the women Diaspora fiction one needs to trace the concept of psychodynamics which is also known as dynamic psychology. The words psychodynamic and psychoanalytic are often confused. In its broadest sense, it is an approach to psychology that emphasizes systematic study of the psychological forces that underlie human behavior, feelings, and emotions and how they might relate to early experiences. Freud's theories were psychoanalytic, whereas the term 'psychodynamic' refers to both his theories and those of his followers. Freud's psychoanalysis is both a theory and a therapy. The present paper attempts to evaluate the behavior, feelings, emotions and experiences of the Diaspora subjects in the narratives of the Diaspora women writers.

In India, men are free from the cultural and social norms whereas women find themselves tied to the socio-cultural rigidities. Apart from the biological restrains, women are also caged by the cultural yokes. The parochial compulsions amulet them for centuries together from which they free themselves. Further, these cultural taboos become comfort zones for Indian women gradually. Women are the carriers, protectors and preservers of culture and cultural heritage. In the parochial society, man is free from any rigidities and compulsions of culture and cultural markers. It is woman who is being amuleted by man. The cultural markers like *mangalsutra*, the vermilion in the parted hair, the *bindi*, *tinklets* around the ankles, the *saris* and the *bangles* prove to be the cultural markers of women. These markers also make women aware that they are women and are an inseparable part of a culture. Further, these markers also make women as social constructs.

Women are natural story-tellers who explore their own myth of womanhood, femininity, gender, memory and inner space to fulfil their creative instincts. The women writers explore and explicate the psychodynamics and their immediate milieu to shape, stimulate and reshape their subjects. Further, the stream of consciousness technique offers them an opportunity to chronicle their secrets, worries, trauma, agonies, emotions, imaginations and their musings.

Vijay Mishra considers migration as a 'primal wound' as he connects it to "Samudrallangan" or the enforced expatriation like "Kala Pani". Migration from the home country is not a happy notion as it is connected with Kala Pani for the Indian psyche. It is often considered as a deep-seated psychological wound.

Indian women Diaspora have a first-hand experience of being dislocated from their comfort zone-the homeland and home culture. The Indian Women Novelists- Ruth PraverJhabvala, Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Indira Ganeshan, JhumpaLahiri, Kiran Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Anita Rau Badami, Anjana Appachana, Meena Alexander and Kavita Daswaniare engaged in articulating their personal pangs of being dislocated in the alien land through their narratives. In their writings, it seems, narration becomes a strategy of catharsis to unburden the psychological trauma that they experience in the strange locations. Their narratives explicate their memories of the psychological wounds. The subjects in their fiction confront an array of problems and trauma due to dislocation. Also, the diasporic writings do not represent the complete picture of the loss as the writers cannot narrate the past exactly as memories become a selective strategy of every writer. Thus the narratives of these Indian female Diaspora chronicle partly the melancholy of their characters. Vijay Mishra rightly states:

The therapy of self-representation is denied to diasporic peoples, a state of melancholy sets in precisely because the past cannot be constructively interpreted, the primal loss (of the homeland, a 'lack as an a priori, ontological condition of psychic life'⁵) cannot be replaced by the 'new object of love'(Freud 1984a: 252). But does the subject want to replace the object (and hence cure himself/herself of the trauma)?(Vijay Mishra: 2007:30)

Homeland caters a comfort zone to its subjects where they have a unique identity in their home culture. The language, food, religion and culture and ethnicity provide security to the people. Locational shift fractures the formed and framed identities of the subjects who move from their home country. The Diaspora community does not feel comfortable with their fractured identities in the host country. Vijay Mishra in his lecture, "The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora," talks about the collective nature of diasporic psycho-moral dilemma, "Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passports. Diasporas are people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen, but perhaps not press the hyphen too far for fear that this would lead to massive communal schizophrenia." [Mishra: 5] He also argues that "the necessity of understanding a diaspora's agony, its trauma, its pain of adjustment (before people were unceremoniously ripped apart from their mother's wombs) with reference to other pasts and other narratives becomes decisive." [Mishra: 10] Further, he points to the psychological malady of diasporic subject and says, "you begin to produce the schizophrenic social and psychological formations of diasporas. A diasporic double consciousness" [Mishra: 13] Mishra also identifies the primal wound of dislocation in terms of memories and trauma: "For after all,... diasporas remind nation-states in particular about their own pasts, about their own earlier migration patterns, about their traumatic moments, about their memories, their own repressed pain and wounds, about their own prior and prioritized enjoyment of the nation. [Mishra: 19]

Diasporic narratives showcase the collective memories of migration undertaken by each writer at different times and spaces. They chronicle the symptoms of trauma, identity crisis and longing for the homeland because of the dislocation. Here, fiction serves as a means to negotiate and heal this wound of dislocation and fragmented identity. Diasporas, therefore, recreate their own fantasy structures in fiction of homeland even as

they live elsewhere. They engage with themes such as homeland myth, insecurity and memory as trauma in women writers of Indian Diaspora. They are never free from the notion of homeland. Indians are more connected with homeland and home culture. Belonging to a specific geographical space, community and caste are the core and inseparable part of Indian Diaspora narratives. V. S. Naipaul in his essay pinpoints the psychological connectivity of an Indian with these aspects. He explicates, “where do you come from?” ‘It is the Indian question . . . [of] people who think in terms of the village, the district, the province, the community, the caste,” (Naipaul: 1972: 43).

Further, the impact of globalization and post globalization have changed the human life so much so that people are uprooted from their families, nations and cultures. The cosmopolitan life has become so artificial that everyone appears to be a stranger. The modern generation, especially the Diaspora community is a ‘lost generation’—the one which has lost its identity, culture, ethnicity, nationality, language and food. Psychologically this community represents uprootedness as they neither belong their homeland nor to the host nation. E. J. Hobsbawm captures this hyphenated status of the Diaspora community, “Wherever we live in an urbanized society, we encounter strangers: uprooted men and women who remind us of the fragility or the drying up of our own families’ roots”’. (Hobsbawm:1992: 173)

In the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri the characters are reminded of this deep-seated psychological wound. Her characters are also seen engaged in searching for a solution for this psychological malady. Marianne Hirsch uses the term ‘post-memory’ to indicate the memory of collective traumatic events transmitted to those who have no direct experience of its source. This notion too can be applied in the context of Diaspora writing and one can see how Lahiri’s characters undergo a journey from the state of primal wound, to post-memory and finally, effecting collective catharsis of being in exile. In the short “Mr. Pirzada Comes to Dine” in her collection from *Interpreter of Maladies*, the narrator Laila, a member of Indian Diaspora shares the trauma of Mr. Pirzada who has left for East Pakistan to trace and meet his family. Even after the departure of Mr. Pirzadashe is worried about him and his family because she has been witnessing the war on television alongwith her family. The psychological connectivity of the narrator with Mr. Pirzada is evident as Laila meticulously observes the map. She explicates:

Every now and then I studied the map above my father’s desk and pictured Mr. Pirzada on that small patch of yellow, perspiring heavily, I imagined, in one of his suits, searching for his family. Of course, the map was outdated by then. (Lahiri: 1999: 41)

Lahiri’s debut novel *The Namesake* deals more with the issues of identity crisis and shift in locations. The Gangulis, in the novel, are a mobile family who shift from location to location and in doing so the face identity crisis. The male character Gogol undergoes a number of issues related to his identity. Similarly, the female characters like AshimaGanguli and Gogol’s wife MoushumiMajoomdar experience trauma of dislocation. The shift location is, in a way, a shift in culture and identity. AshimaGanguli has undergone a change in her identity and in her perspective. Lahiriobserves no much change in Ashima’s external appearance. Here, Ashima is the member of first generation

migrants who sticks to the culture very strongly, “She has learned to do things on her own, and though she still wears saris, still puts her long hair in a bun, she is not the same Ashima who had once lived in Calcutta. She will return to India with an American passport. (Lahiri: 2003: 276)

Subsequently, Moushumi Majoomdar, the member of second generation migrants embraces the culture of the host nation. The free atmosphere in the host land facilitates her to explore her femininity. She dislocates herself from every location in order to discover her own ‘self’. Thus, for Moushumi a change in location is a change in partner and gradually a change in sexual pleasure. Along with different locations she explores different males. On the one hand, Moushumi’s this act seems to be a rebel against the India ethnicity and culture; on the other hand, she is attempting to explore her identity and femininity in accordance to variant locations and men in the host nation. Jhumpa Lahiri enunciates:

With no hesitation, she had allowed men to seduce her in cafes, in parks, while she gazed at paintings in museums. She gave herself openly, completely, not caring about the consequences. (...) She allowed the men to buy her drinks, dinners, later to take her in taxis to their apartments, in neighborhoods she had not yet discovered on her own (...) There were days she slept with one man after lunch, another with dinner. (Lahiri: 2003: 239)

Further, in her *The Lowland* Lahiri presents another rebel female, Gouri who is basically an activist in the Naxalite Movement. She marries Udayan, an active Naxalite. Even before marriage she dares to have a live-in relationship with him. After their marriage, she prefers to remain isolated in Udayan’s familial space. Gradually, she pushes herself to alienation as Udayan is encountered by the police in front of her. She seems to be an invisible human being. Lahiri captures, “Always at the end of a queue, in the shadow of others, she believed she was not significant enough to cast a shadow of her own. Around men she’d felt invisible”. (Lahiri: 2013: 60) Further, as a pregnant widow, she remarries Subhash, Udayan’s brother and flies to America. In this new location she studies Philosophy and completes her graduation. She distances herself after Bela’s birth and goes to California for Ph. D. programme. After her Ph. D. she accepts the job of a professor and cuts herself off from her husband and daughter. Gouri remains alienated from her husband and also from her daughter, Bela. Here, she distances herself from the Indian cultural ties and relationships. Even she goes to the extent of enjoying lesbian relationships with her research student, Lorna. This indicates the psychodynamics of Gouri in cutting loose from the set ties of Indian culture, ethnicity and parochial normative behavior. Even the daughter of Gouri and Udayan rebels against the normative society. Through her letters to Subhash she narrates the hardships she undertakes in the host nation. The life of Bela in the American continent is full of hardships. She attempts to explore her identity in the domain of men. Jhumpa Lahiri narrates:

She told him she lived in close quarters, often not paid in wages but simply by the food and shelter that were provided. She’d lived with groups who pooled their income. She’d lived for a few months in Montana, in a tent.

She found odd jobs when she needed to, spraying orchards, doing landscape work. She lived without insurance, without need for her future. Without a fixed address. (Lahiri: 2013: 222)

Through Bela and Gauri, the writer unfolds the sufferings of the women refugees and also touches upon the refugee Diaspora in international space. Both the mother and the daughter assimilate with the host nation and its cultural nuances. Though they showcase nomadism in their acts of migration and visiting multiple locations, they are, in a way, exploring their femininities in the alien land. Also, they exhibit heredity of rebelling against the hegemonic cryptograph wherever they go like Udayan.

Similar views are echoed by another female writer of Diaspora community, Anjana Appachana through her narratives. In her debut short story collection, *Incantations and Other Stories* she chronicles the trauma of many characters. In her short story, “Bahu” Appachana showcases the sufferings of a newlywed girl who finds no love from her in-laws. She finds herself in the third space—the veranda which is neither her mother’s home nor her husband’s home. The narrator in the short story narrates her sufferings as, “I opened the front door and stepped out on to the veranda. Alone at last...I sat on the steps and began to weep. I was tired of timing my tears.(Appachana: 1991: 16) The newlywed bride finds herself in the strange home of her in-laws where she is embarrassed by the new people and new relationships. Also, she is put into new set of rules. Here she loses her identity and discovers herself into a new land with strange people. Appachana narrates, “It was all so strange, so bewildering. All those new people, new relationships; sudden, unexpected do’s and don’ts.” (Appachana: 1991: 25)

Further, Appachana chronicles that culinary practices provide a comfort zone for women. In kitchen, therefore, women share their sorrows and memories with each other. They tell and many a times retell the same stories to the other women in order to unburden themselves. Thus, kitchen becomes a site for collective catharsis and rehabilitation. The narration of the past and memories become the strategy of expressing the trauma and also a way for rehabilitation. In her novel, *Listening Now* (1998) Appachana employs the strategy of telling and listening to unburden the trauma, sorrows and sufferings of women. Appachana compares them with the witches of Macbeth:

Inside kitchens sharing their familial lives; telling and retelling the same old stories, stories rendered hot and smouldering with repetition. Within these walls creating their food; living their lives. Here, like Macbeth’s witches; stirring and examining; hissing and chanting, prophesying and sighing. (Appachana:1998: 27)

Diaspora location has always been a sight of worries and sufferings for Indian women who are dislocated from their home culture and home country. Even the past and memories of the past, at times, do not heal the trauma of dislocation. The loss of home nation becomes pathology for them. Further, the suffering of the females in the host country is never reciprocated by their male counterparts. Angelika in her scholarly article rightly comments:

Unincorporated suffering or unbound affect turns a person's history into pathology . . . and implies an uncompleted process that awaits belated completion before it can be incorporated into the self....the subject remains in a melancholic state, not able to detach from what is lost and experienced as traumatic, and hence not able to interpret the past constructively. (Angelika: 1998: 118)

In *Manhattan Music* Meena Alexander's female protagonists represent varied experiences of trauma and suffering due to dislocation. The central characters like Sandhya Rosenblum and Draupadi Dinkin experience the trauma of being placed in the alien land. They always miss their home nation, home culture and food. Also, the location in the host country is never permanent. The Diaspora community move on from place to place. This mobility and sojourn of the female characters push them to nomadism. Migration, shift in location and transnationalism become a restless passage for Sandhya Rosenblum. She is obsessed with her nomad identity so much that she reads a neon sign as nomad due to her nomadic status which is deeply rooted in her psychology. Appachana observes:

She jumped the initials on the neon sign together—NAMAD. A vowel shift and it could make sense, NOMAD, a creature of restless passage. She thought of herons in the paddy fields of Kerala, wings outstretched, circling water, marking out the emptiness of the sky. (Alexander: 1997: 11)

Draupadi as an artist on the stage uses the medium of drama powerfully to express the agonies of transnationalism, migration and multiculturalism. The piece of performance which she designs and describes to all her Diaspora friends surprises them. "Sandhya sat utterly still as Draupadi spoke of the piece she had conceived: a mixed-media installation about Columbus, a man who had an imaginary India in his heart." (Alexander: 1997: 50) Here, Draupadi projects the sojourn of Columbus who had an imaginary India in his mind which, in a way, is similar to the migratory status of Draupadi. Like Columbus, she too is in search of India and finally lands into the minority community of India in America. She anticipates the migratory flight of Columbus with her own migration and efforts as a Diaspora subject. She sings:

Back against the kitchen stove, Draupadi sings:
Christopher Columbus, your soul's my battle field.
See! Great Garuda has rainbow-colored wings!
(Alexander: 1997: 51)

Kavita Daswani is yet another Diaspora female writer whose narratives epitomize the psychodynamics of dislocation of young females from India to America and France. Her female protagonists are either unmarried or newlywed, who are trying to accommodate in the alien land. They strive for their career and identity as human beings rather than mere females who succumb to the parochial dominion. In her novel, *For Matrimonial Purposes*, Daswani showcases how the parents of a marriageable girl want to get rid of their daughter by marrying her off somehow. They are not bothered about the boy and his status. Their prime concern is their daughter's marriage. Anju, the protagonist in the novel comments upon the problem of arranging marriage of a spinster. She comments, "And because of some weird cultural osmosis that I had unwittingly succumbed to, I felt

they weren't right for me either...But most of the men I had met were gay, or white, and usually both." (Daswani: 2004: 20)

Gradually, Anju wants to make her career in America. Her parents also allow her to pursue her passion as does not get a proper match. In America, she lives a life of down and out. The strangeness and the wildness of the host country disturb her. She has to balance between the strange behavior of her parents and the culture of the host nation. Anju chronicles, "But I rode the subway, ate cheaply and lived the life of any other twenty-something just starting out in this strange, wild city, while thousands of miles away from my parents fretted and fussed and fumed." (Daswani: 2004: 136) Here, Anju experiences the dislocatedness both in the homeland and in the host country. Psychologically she is much disturbed.

In her another novel, *The Village Bride of Beverly Hills* Kavita Daswani enunciates the stranded condition of Priya, a newlywed Indian female who is staying with Sanjeev, her husband and her in-laws. She is working in the world of glamour interviewing an array of renowned Hollywood stars and celebrities. In office she has to adopt the culture of the host country and on the way back home she changes her dress at the gym and enters her home as a traditional Indian woman. Her mother in-law dominates her in the familial space. She is expected to be a submissive typical Indian "bahu". Daswani captures:

"Priyaaa!" she called out, in that singsong voice of hers. "Idirao! Roti banao!" She was instructing me to roll out the dough for the chapattis, which would be the first of many tasks tonight I wondered if she would still expect me to do all this if she knew that I was the new fifty-five-thousand-dollar earner and movie-star interviewer at a magazine. (Daswani: 2004: 124).

America is country of migrants where people from all over the world gather together for variant purposes. It is a dense metropolis population which has an array of crisis. Meena Alexander, a renowned novelist and poet and a member of Indian Diaspora states in her interview the difficulties of Indian women in American continent. These are the problems faced probably by the protagonists of Kavita Daswani who are the working women. Alexander opines:

The questions of identity that face me as an Indian woman, living and working in New York City, a dense, compacted, racist metropolis, where immigrants from all over the world have poured in, are inseparable from an intimate violence that has entered my probing into the bonds that link inner and outer realms, self and world. (Interview of Meena Alexander: web)

In *Salaam Paris* (2007) Kavita Daswani projects the trauma of a Muslim girl, Tanaya Shaha who is a resident of Mahim, Bombay. Being born in a Muslim family she is taught by her family members that a girl must accept the secondary roles in the man-dominated society. The orthodox Muslim culture nurtures the females to succumb to the parochial superiority. Tanaya's mother says, "settle your mind on the only role you have in this world: pretty and quiet wife and a devoted mother. Remember that, and you will always be happy". (Daswani: 2007: 29) But Tanaya is rebel at heart. She is fascinated by the

world of modelling and glamour. Her fetish for the same is evident when she spends her pocket money on secretly buying the magazines and reading them. Further, under the subterfuge of seeing a boy in Paris, who has proposed for arranged marriage, she flies to Paris alone. In Paris, she refuses to see the boy, and, on the contrary, she prefers to work and stay with single girls who want to make their career in Paris. Lonely and isolated in the foreign land, she desires to return to her homeland. Her longing for the homeland is evident in the following narration, "I had no home, no job, no money. In Mahim nana had given me an allowance every week ... There at least I belonged to someone. Here, now on this cool Paris night ... all I wanted to do was to go back home." (Daswani: 2007: 269)

The female protagonists in the fiction of the Indian women Diaspora project the itineraries of their lives in the host country. The psychological trauma of these protagonists is, at times, the experiences of the writers. Hence, these psychological upheavals are autobiographical to certain extent. Homeland, thus, proves to be a comfort zone and the host nation, an alien land where the protagonists feel dislocated. Culture and identities get distracted due to this dislocatedness. Indian females in the female Diaspora narratives showcase instances of psychological dislocation and loss in the host country.

Works Cited:

1. Alexander, Meena. *Manhattan Music* San Francisco, California: Mercury House Incorporated, 1997. Print.
2. Alexander, Meena. *Nampally Road*. San Francisco, California: Mercury House Incorporated, 1991. Print.
3. Appachana .Anjana. *Incantation and Other Stories*.Print.
4. Appachana, Anjana. *Listening Now*. Print.
5. Daswani, Kavita. *For Matrimonial Purposes*. New York: 2006. Print.
6. *Daswani, Kavita. Salaam Paris*. New Delhi: 2007. Print.
7. Daswani, Kavita. *The Village Bride of Beverly Hills*. New York: 2004. Print.
8. <http://meenaalexander.com/manhattan-music-2/> web.
9. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company,1999. Print.
10. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Lowland*. London: Flamingo, 2013. Print.
11. Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. London: Flamingo, 2003. Print.
12. Mishra, Binod and Paul Dhanasekaran, (Ed.) *Inventing Ties and Bonds in English: Diasporic Literary Consciousness*. Delhi: Authors Press, 2008. Print.
13. Mishra, Sudesh. "From Sugar to Masala: Writing by the Indian Diaspora." in

An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English. Ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, 2003; reprinted Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008. Print.

14. Mishra, Vijay. *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora Theorizing the diasporic imaginary*, Routledge, New York, 2007. Print.
15. Narang, Harish. "Foreword." *Mapping Migrations: Perspectives on Diasporic Fiction*. Ed. Charu Sharma. New Delhi: Book Plus, 2006. Print.
16. Parameswaram, Uma. "Home is Where Your Feet Are, and May You be There too!" *Writers of Indian Diaspora: Theory and Practice*. Ed. Jasbir Jain. Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 1998. Print.
17. R. Radhakrishnan. "Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora". in Jana Evans Braziel & Anita Mannur. *Theorizing Diaspora*. London: Blackwell, 2003, Print.
18. Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Vintage Books, 2010. Print.