



**Saga of Inner and Outer Racial Turmoil of Migrants in the Vein of
Postcolonial Studies in the Selected Works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kamala
Markandaya**

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Abstract

The present paper is an effort to understand the conflict of racial prejudice before the first as well as the second generation of Indian Diaspora with special reference to *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri and *The Nowhere Man* by Kamala Markandaya. This paper explores the sufferings and pains of Indian migrants to the different nations of the world. The Indian diasporic writers have explored the psychological insights of migrants in their works. This study is about racial turmoil of migrants' identity in post colonial context as reflected in the works of the selected writers. The primary data in this study is *The Namesake* novel and *The Nowhere Man* novel and the secondary data source is other material related to these novels. Jhumpa Lahiri and Kamala Markandaya's characters are aliens, rootless, outsiders from society and prone to racial prejudice. The search for identity, racism, sense of belongingness, nostalgia for nativity, aimless wandering, search for assimilation and alienation are the common-place themes in modern diasporic fiction.

Keywords-: Diaspora, assimilation, racism, identity, culture, alienation, nostalgia, belongingness

Introduction

This research paper focuses the pains of migrated Indians in England and America. As a person migrates from his own native land to somewhere else in the world, he has to face the struggles such as culture and race conflict, identity clashes, loneliness and alienation etc. It explores torturous experience emerging from the trauma of migration and cultural clashes.



Migrants are culturally and socially estranged from their nativity as they are dislocated from their own country India. The immigrants choose to migrate to the land of opportunities in order to create bright future. But this migration is not as easy as it seems to be because in reality, survival in foreign lands becomes difficult and comes with hard struggle. The immigrants always show yearnings for native places and feel alienated in between the borders of two geographical territories.

Indian diasporic writers are famous for making significant contribution to the world literature. All literary personalities from India have provided the world with a massive flourishing of immigrant literature. They have expressed divergent themes to explore the lives of migrants in foreign lands. Migration to foreign countries brings sum good factors for people but there is emotional crisis of self and nationality as it causes culture clash, identity crisis, racism and alienation. Migration is mostly an economic activity that leads to many problems in the ways of migrants. Alienated individuals have been portrayed by many diasporic writers. The characters of the novels are described as outsiders. Indo- English fiction of modern century is filled with the figure of outsider as a protagonist owing to historical and social cultural reasons. Man's rootlessness and the consequential alienation and anxiety are the main things in the vision of predicament of modern man in contemporary Indo- English fiction.

There are many writers who are cultural hybrids like Jhumpa Lahiri, Alice Walker, Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee and many more writers are exploring up issues like identity crisis, racial prejudice, hegemonic power discourses in the fiction that they are writing in present time. They explore in every direction of the world but always remain attached culturally to their origin. These writers take their native country (India), wherever they go. The search for identity, racism, sense of belongingness, nostalgia for nativity, aimless wandering, search for assimilation and alienation are the common-place themes in modern diasporic fiction. The present paper explores the concerns of Jhumpa Lahiri and Kamala Markandaya about racial prejudice faced by immigrants in alien countries in postcolonial context. Both these writers have expressed an evocative and deeply felt portrayal of Indian diaspora, their family life, the difficult process of trying to assimilate into new culture and to keep alive their own cultural connections, complexity of relationships, belongingness,



identity crisis and the racial discrimination felt by immigrants in foreign countries. The selected writers not only the immigrants who leave somewhere called home to make new home in the United States but also the endless process of coming and going that creates familial cultural, linguistic and economic ties across national border. Their characters live in between, straddling two worlds, making their identity transnational.

The process of migration is not the current phenomenon. People have been migrating to various parts of the world since ages. Most of the people have migrated to the other nations from 1830s to 1930s. Colonialism means a group of people were transformed from the one part of the world to another part of the world may be as captive workers and therefore became the colonizers. They might have treated as slaves. Post-colonialism is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. In the post-colonial phase the migration of the people was totally different from as those of the migration in the ancient and colonial periods. The skilled and educated people of middle class were the post-colonial migrants. They seek availability of opportunity abroad. It led to a kind of professional migration which attracted the unemployed youth of colonial nations. The process of migration has diverse socio-cultural influences upon both the places where migrants have moved and the place from they have come. The movement of people across borders has resulted in adding complex social, cultural, and emotional dimensions to the seemingly simple economic consequences of migration. People have to face many difficulties during the process of settling in foreign lands. Feelings of nostalgia and otherness break them internally while living in alien countries. In this regard Ella Shohat presents her view as:

The “post-colonial” implies a narrative of progression in which colonialism remains the central point of reference in a march of time neatly arranged from the pre to the “post”, but which leaves ambiguous its relation to new form of colonialism, i.e. neo-colonialism. (Shohat 107)

This migration of the people has taken the attention of the scholars from different disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Postcolonial writers have also got attracted by the migration of people. The settlement of migrants in foreign land forms Diasporic community which becomes the point of interest of many post-colonial writers.



Homi K Bhabha claims that the culture consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions presents a split in the identity of the colonized. Postcolonial writers invoke the notion of diaspora and exile to denote the experience of the displaced immigrants from their motherland due to the effects of colonization and imperialism. Leela Gandhi's explanation of post colonialism in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* is indicative in this perspective representing diaspora:

Postcolonialism is generally concerned with the idea of cultural dislocation contained within this term. While 'diaspora' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'migration', it is generally invoked as a theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism. (Gandhi 131)

Here Leela Gandhi is contextualizing postcolonial theory and providing helpful definition of diaspora, identity and dislocation. She has explained the condition of diaspora after colonialism. Leela Gandhi's book is distinctive for its concern with the historical and cultural contexts for postcolonial theory. It shows the possibilities for postcolonial theory as a model for living with and knowing cultural difference peacefully.

Kamala Markandaya is an outstanding Indian- English diasporic novelist. She has contributed remarkably to provide Indian- English novel an immense height. She is a very simple and noble hearted human being. Markandaya's depiction of Indian culture, sensibility, festivals, poor domestic women, psychology of immigrants, rustic and rural presentations are very appealing as she has given a life like picture in her novels. Her life span can be divided into two phases- pre- independence and post- independence or colonial or post- colonial. She has observed the scenario of colonial times as well as postcolonial so she is very much capable of describing the picture of society of both the periods. Indian people comprise various aspects of Indian sensibility; cultural consciousness, rituals, way of living and thinking. Kamala Markandaya has beautifully portrayed these sensibilities for her readers to make them acquainted with a number of myths and facts of Indian culture.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972) is her seventh novel which depicts a London convulsed by fear and bitterness. Unlike her other novels, which were set mainly in India, *The Nowhere Man* is set in England where Markandaya herself had been living since



1984. It is a story of tragic experience of alienation, centered on racism by an elderly Brahmin Srinivas, who has lived in London. Srinivas reflects on his relationship to Britain in the novel that bravely fought with the racism and oppressiveness of the British Empire in India in his youth. Markandaya weaves the reality of racial politics as a lived experience, themes of nostalgia, alienation, community conquest, belongingness, and love and culture clash are depicted through the story of Srinivas. The novelist describes that generations are divided by gaps and, private and political rebellions ripped the families apart.

Kamala Markandaya brilliantly explores the traumatic life of Indian immigrants through her novel *The Nowhere Man*. In this novel she depicts the East- West collision basically on racial prejudice. The novel is a moving elegy on racism of England which develops unchecked and undiminished. The novel is a poignant illustration of courage and traumatic mental stage of characters that have to live in England even after worse treatment of English people. It depicts a life of an Indian immigrant who settles in London, suffers a lot and who's rootlessness is at last brought home to him by the display of naked racism in the English community that has shattered him for over fifty years. The story of the novel is a complex web of incidents. It is woven on the fabric of human relationships among the characters belonging to two distinct cultures and races. It is the story of discrimination faced by Brown Indians in the hands of White Englishmen. The writer has depicted that the consuming fire of hatred destroys the hated in the fire of racism. The novelist depicts racial misunderstanding; a human conflict tears the individuals. The novel expresses the idea that races cannot absorb themselves nor can the culture assimilate.

The Nowhere Man is a Kamala Markandaya's novel based on the theme of the racial discrimination in a country one has come to live and adopt. It expresses Kamala Markandaya's deep concern for migrants who are suffering from pangs of dislocation and its subsequent results. It is a story of an Indian emigrant in a foreign country experiencing yearnings for home along with its memories and remembrance of the times spent at native land and experience of hostility and unfriendliness in the new country where he has come to assimilate and looks for a better life for his family. Felt tormented at facing rejection in the host country, the new comer often clings to his ethnic identity. The condition of migrants become miserable as they find themselves between two terrains- living without belonging in



one and belonging without living in the other. In this way they become a different kind of specie of social formation. *The Nowhere Man* expresses the dilemma and conflicting situation of a displaced individual.

The Nowhere Man tells the tragic life of an elderly Indian Brahmin Srinivas. He has lived half a century in England even after that he is compelled to live a life of an outsider. Even in India Srinivas and his wife Vasantha were not treated in amicable manner as they were forced to leave India due to racism. After leaving India they settled down in England. Vasantha is nostalgic lady who feels alienated in the host country, she feels tormented and isolated at the thought of being an outcast in England. Srinivas and his wife Vasantha have a dream to live together with their two sons. But their dream of living together with them is shattered when their son Laxman marries Pat, an English woman and started living with her. At this point of life, they are forced to consider themselves 'nowhere men'. Srinivas consider himself an alien despite his stay for fifty years in England and despite his sons lost their lives for the host country. *The Nowhere Man* is a fable of human isolation. It expresses the plights of exile and the rootlessness caused by change of society and alienation in the foreign.

The Nowhere Man expresses the characters' diasporic present in Britain with their previous past in colonial native India. It shows how their diasporic experience is affected by the past memories of colonial India. Srinivas' memories allow us to visit and revisit the sartorial relations between Indians and Britain over more than past thirty years. Srinivas is bewildered as 'to where he belongs'. He has lived in an alien country (England) for thirty years and yet become a restless, rootless man disposed of India and discarded by England. He represents many individuals who for some reason leave their own roots and fails to get assimilated in alien soil.

The Nowhere Man depicts the dilemma of Srinivas and his family who suffered a lot in the hands of host country. Srinivas is a 'nowhere man' who after spending half of his life in England and sacrificed a son to the war, is teased by racist hoodlums to go back to his own country and not even accepted by a country where he has spent half of his life. He represents many individuals of his type who suffered by racial prejudice, that makes their identity invisible as they belong to 'nowhere'. Identity of diaspora is composed of various factors



such as multiculturalism, social setups, racism, alienation, otherness and hybrid identities.

Edmund Fuller remarks in this regard:

Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problems ... a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence. (Fuller 3)

The Britishers are agitated against blacks. They show the posters carrying message “BLACKS GO HOME”. Srinivas is a victim of racial discrimination. He is made not to think of England as his country, “The British won’t allow it”. Srinivas realizes the truth of his reality.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003) is providing a depiction of the two worlds of East and West together. In 2003, the Pulitzer prize-winning author has written about two-generations of a Bengali – American family in Massachusetts struggle between new and old, assimilation and cultural preservation, striving toward the future and longing for the past. It is the story of three main characters Ashoke Ganguli, Ashima Ganguli and their son Gogol (Nikhil) Ganguli about their changing identities and assimilation in America. It represents a very broad spectrum of life of second-generation migrants through the feelings of protagonist, Gogol. This is a story of guilt and liberation, Lahiri speaks about the universal struggle to extricate people from the past, family and obligation and the curse of history. Lahiri speaks that name is everything; names are the symbols of identity.

The novel beautifully conveys the emigrant’s disorientation, nostalgia, and yearning for tastes, smells, rituals and customs left behind. She shows in her writings how immigrants are making efforts to preserve their home culture in new homes. Ashoke and his wife Ashima Ganguli try to preserve their roots in America. They live in America and by this time they feel that they are neither Indian nor American. As Ashoke says, “He was born twice in India and then a third time in America” (Lahiri 2). He has firm ties with India and its cultural values so he cooperates with his wife to preserve Indian belongings inside the house and keeping their Indian network of friends in America. Their wait for Indian name for new born is also a symbol of attachment to the roots.



The Namesake is a reflection of the impact of cultural, economic and political environment of alien country, in which children of migrants suffer the most. The second generation of immigrant is the victims of the racial prejudice and accommodation and assimilation in new country. Jhumpa Lahiri is very much critical of the social reality of early twenty first century in the United States of America. She states that the children of immigrants do not deserve to be the victim of race, culture, color and all social set up. They are not to be treated on racial discrimination. She describes the changes of that a person goes through when being transplanted into a different culture. The type of racial prejudice faced by the characters in the novel is labeled symbolic, racial resentment, color-blind. The effect of this on the immigrants is that they have to overcome the mentality and ideology of The United States and the society in which they are surviving, that is failing to recognize them as the citizens of America like them able to have the basic rights to which they are formally entitled as Americans.

In the present novel, Jhumpa Lahiri has expressed her self-lived experience of immigrants problems faced in alien country. She has explained that the culture of the United States is primarily western for the new comers coming there to live, so the problems like identity clashes, cultural mixing and racial prejudice have to be faced by them. Here, in this novel, Gogol as the protagonist of the novel is portrayed as the victim of racial prejudice. The native Americans make fun of his strange name, and he feels that he has different name, different identity and culture and consequently he has to change his name to Nikhil. Later on he is called Nick by his schoolmates and friends. He does not like his name given by his father as it's not a common name in America. Even Ashoke has explained the reason that why he is given that name. He has explained that Nikolai Gogol was his favorite author. He didn't tell Gogol about a train accident and he believed that his favorite author has once saved his life. Even after that his rebellion for strange name can be seen. Changing his name is his step towards changing his identity and his separation from tradition and culture of his parents which he does not like. He changes his name officially at court, with this change he becomes the different person but also cuts him off from his cultural past, and his family. There is no past, no cultural obligations to be identified with the new name. Still, his family and friends call him Gogol. He feels like an actor who plays two different roles, "At times he feels as he's



cast himself in a play, acting the part of twins, indistinguishable to the naked eye yet fundamentally different” (Lahiri 105). He thinks that after this he can claim a new world and personal identity for himself in a place where everybody would recognize him as Nikhil. Gogol, on the other hand is right at his place for changing his name as he has felt himself the victim of racism in the hands of Americans.

As it is described in *The Namesake*, America has its own unique cultural and social characteristics. America is an ethically and racially diverse country and it is the result of large-scale migration from many ethically and racially different countries. The migrants feel different from mainstream society. In this novel, Gogol, the protagonist of the novel is the main victim of racial prejudice who does not like to be treated differently. To avoid this humiliation, based on caste Gogol hides his identity. He feels himself alienated from society which is fully Americanized and from the Indian society as he is not able to cope with that. This becomes a major problem for his assimilation. Gogol and his sister consider themselves as ‘Americans’ but Americans don’t consider them theirs as their culture, physical outlook is not like Americans. The racial conflicts are more evident with the progress of the narrative of the novel. However, he has chosen to eat, dress and enjoy more to be American but his parents want him to carry Indian culture and tradition. His problem as an Indian in America is not the same as his parents. They link themselves to the old country whereas he relates himself to the new one. He becomes one of the victims of ‘ABCD’ –“American- born confused deshi”. Gogol is the center of racial discrimination as presented in the novel. At his school, he was tormented by his schoolmates for being an Indian and for having a strange name as a result of it he starts cutting himself from his family and its culture and changed his name.

To conclude, it can be said that Kamala Markandaya and Jhumpa Lahiri have created rather significantly the authentic image of the Indian immigrants in her fictional world by taking intense efforts to reproduce Indian men and women in foreign countries and their characteristics as exactly as they act in real life situations. Lahiri does not introduce cultural assimilation as a substitute for native identity and suggests that cultural hybridity never takes the place of the immigrant’s fundamental cultural values. Markandaya also describes that the immigrants keep the uniqueness of their culture while trying to survive in Western world with



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its uniqueness. Both the writers criticize the social reality through the theme, plot and characterization of their novels. They have described that racial prejudice in foreign countries felt by immigrants can lead to confusion of identity and that makes it tough to assimilate in those countries.

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