

REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN SELECT INDIAN DIASPORIC NARRATIVES

Pooja and Aditya Raj



GRFDT
Global Research Forum on
Diaspora and Transnationalism

Representation of Indian Women in Select Indian Diasporic Narratives

Pooja and Aditya Raj

About the Author(s): Ms. Pooja is a Research Scholar and Dr. Aditya Raj is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Patna.

Email for correspondence: aditya.raj@gmail.com

We invite Students, Researchers and Faculty Members to email Stories, Reviews, Articles, Working papers and other academic notes to the editor@grfdt.org. It will provide the scholars a platform to connect with peer groups working on themes related to Diaspora and Transnationalism. Information related to seminar/conferences/events can be sent to the Editor at: editor@grfdt.com

Working Paper Series

© Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

Abstract

This paper looks at the experiences of Indian women as represented in Indian diasporic narratives. Bharati Mukherjee's "Jasmine" (1989) and Iqbal Ramoowalia's "The Death of a Passport" (2003) are the selected texts. These texts are written by Indian diasporic authors settled in North America. They are analyzed using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. In the narratives, the women voice their experience, realize their existence, and resist. The central protagonist, Jasmine and Seema, are symbols of alienated lives in silence and agony, while at the same time undergoing continuous change. Drawing from Fairclough, Butler, Freire, Vertovec, and Lather, the paper aims at studying the process by which women achieve self-expression and undergo conscientization. The analyses may suggest the way Indian women live, realize, and resist in the diaspora.

Keywords: Woman, Representation, Diaspora, Discourse Analysis, Conscientization.

INTRODUCTION

What could a woman do when she's faced with a situation in which she has no power, no choice but to surrender ... (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 192).

The above lines are drawn to explain representation of women. These, and similar, lines question the place of women in the society- where women lack voice, agency, and subjectivity. They are from literary narratives and contextualize women's surrender in the ways of our society. The selected narratives are in the form of fiction. Imagination forms the basis of fiction. Authors, while imagining, to delineate the fiction may draw from reality- directly, indirectly as well as with varying degree of actual reality. This means that fiction is based on lived experiences- although by proxy. To signpost, fictional narratives are representation of social realities. They can be significant resource to comprehend the way people live in society as well as how they are represented. Fictional narrative can be a significant, then, to gauze at our society.

Representation of social reality in narratives is a powerful medium to comprehend and discuss women's experiences. The interpersonal relation and the power structure get more pronounced with the realization of the intrapersonal marginalization of the individuals- women in this case. In this paper, the focus is on the Indian women as represented in diasporic narratives. Studies in the diasporic milieu are imperative to generate a complete picture of any nation's reality. Also, it can help make a comparison with lived and represented condition of women in India and in her diaspora. For this paper we have selected Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and Iqbal Ramoowalia's *The Death of a Passport* (2003). These texts are written by Indian diasporic authors settled in the United States of America and Canada respectively.

Bharati Mukherjee deals with the issues and problems of Indian women. She, like many of her contemporary feminist writers, upholds the cause of women. Her prominence is credited to the delineation of the cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women migrants. This makes her works distinctive unlike those of her contemporaries. Her writings have been widely studied and discussed from feminist perspective due to the wide range of issues concerning women as natives as well as migrants. All the female protagonists in her fictional writings like *The Tiger's Daughter; Wife; Leave it to me; Desirable Daughters; The Tree Bride; and Jasmine* are bold and assertive. *Jasmine*, the one chosen for the study, looks at the saga of an Indian woman, culturally groomed in the Indian rural setting and then migrating to the United States of America. She moves from Hasnapur in Punjab to New York and then to Iowa. The journey is physical as well as cultural. She transforms and metamorphoses her life and identity. This is a story of adaptation encompassing a woman's suffering, a series of her making and unmaking.

Iqbal Singh Ramoowalia is an Indian born Canadian writer. He was born in Punjab and moved to Canada in 1975. He is involved in teaching and writing. He has written several poems and is accredited with the novel *Death of a Passport* published in 2003. The striking feature is the woman centred narration. The narration from a woman's perspective and bringing in the "self" is rare from a male writer. The story brings forth the conditions and pain of an illegal Indian woman immigrant through Seema.

There are multitudes of narratives which go unheard of. Through representations we aim at looking at such and similar stories. They may be linked to women of common origin as well as different nations. Raj (2007) talks of the presence of the multiple ties and interactions that link people and institutions across borders of nation-states. One such tie is the way reality and representations are linked. The discourse of the select narratives focuses on the problems due to immigration under unfavorable condition and from a woman's point of view. Her vulnerability and the fight for her rights based on equality, non-oppression, and non-exploitation is the central theme. It becomes engaging for scholars when ties of representation are viewed after they "move beyond" the geographical boundaries. Moving beyond is of great importance. It is a step forward in resisting against the age old tradition, set up patterns, norms, values and rules. It marks freedom, a zeal for independence and selfhood. Gilroy (2003) in Brazil and Manur's states that undergoing "the politics of transfiguration" diaspora necessitates strive in pursuit of the sublime, where it struggles to repeat the unrepeatable; to present the unrepresentable.

Rather than groups defined by migration across borders, they involve social relationships. Drawing from Vertovec (1997) diaspora as a social form involves the understanding of specific social relationships produced as a result of migration, and includes attempts to maintain collective identity, have myth of common origin and struggles to get accepted in the host society. As a type of consciousness, it entails a particular sense of feeling and awareness common to the migrants. Vertovec calls for recognition of the combined workings of structural, conscious and non-conscious factors in the reconstruction and reproduction of identities and socio-cultural institutions among groups outside of some place of origin.

Indian communities abroad are sizeable in number. Raj (2006) points out that the Indian diaspora is the third largest and most spread out in the world after British and the Chinese. He further states that the Indian diaspora have managed to develop distinct identities wherever they have settled. The Indian diaspora is in a state of flux. Hence, the structural, conscious and non-conscious factors affecting a diasporic woman's existence as a diasporan need to be analysed, especially when they have no choice for survival but to surrender to the given circumstances.

There might be an assumption that women in the diaspora may be less oppressed. However, study suggests otherwise. By the virtue of being a woman, an individual become vulnerable for various oppressions at home or abroad. Every moment of her existence provides an opportunity for a new lesson. Baluja (2002), for instance, writes from her research to suggest that gender role changes in the host milieu. She indicates that representation of women is looked at from the perspectives of their relationship to reproduction, sexuality, family roles, politics and cultural construction of gender. We are reminded of Butler (2007) who talks of representation that serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as subjects. It also serves as normative function of a language which either reveals or distorts what is assumed to be true about the category of women. Butler supports the thinking which considers the "pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all" (p. 2). Scholars like Baluja (2003) and DeBiaggi (2002) talk of the passive role of women in migration which gives them secondary importance in migration studies and the process of social and economic transformations. The gendered analyses of migration would also help to interpret and distinguish between culturally programmed behaviour, societal views of appropriate behavior, and actual socio-psychological difference. We will discuss the central characters journey in more detail- but first a brief introduction to the narratives.

The Selected Narratives

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) is the story of a widowed Punjabi girl in her early twenties. The story is narrated in the first person and begins with a flashback. Born as Jyoti, transformed into Jasmine by her husband Prakash, her life entails a symphony of extreme experiences in India and abroad. Prakash as a husband cared for her wife, set her to dream for herself, and made her believe in herself. But his murder changed her life. Prakash was the only male she came across in her life who had a vision for her and helped her grow as an individual. Her discourse helps to understand her pain stricken journey through multiple roles performed as a daughter, a sister, a wife, resisted as the murderer of her rapist, and aspired as a dreamer. As mentioned before, Jasmine starts her odyssey from Hasnapur, a small place in Punjab to the cities of the United States of America. The novel begins with Jasmine as Jane. She is unmarried and living with a middle aged Iowa banker. She is pregnant and carries his child. Apart from these roles, she also performs the role as a mother of a Vietnamese boy, Du, whom they had adopted. Prior to this, she stayed with the Taylors performing the role of a babysitter. Jasmine and her constantly changing names denote her struggle to adapt and acculturate. No sooner than she landed to the new land she is raped by Half-face. His half face was ruined and so gets this name. She is broken by pain and tries to commit suicide. But the dream she carries prevents her from doing so. She not just moves beyond the geographical boundaries but also re-roots herself in a new land. Her life is a quest for a new life and fulfillment of desire.

Ramoowalia's *The Death of a Passport* (2003) recounts the tribulations of a girl Seema who leaves her husband, Anmol, and six months old child, Amroz, in Canada and moves along. The first half of the story narrates her pain ridden journey with numerous transformations. She adapts to all of these. In the later half she meets Sodhi who appears as a hope to get a passport. She, being helpless, submits herself to him. She had no one back home to whom she can return and hence suffers all the pain to avoid her deportation. A woman, separated from her husband, without a passport, and marriage documents is a vulnerable being. Seema's experiences aim to reflect this. Seema is left to fend for herself and to cope with the burden of illegal immigration. There is no shortage of work opportunities for Seema, but she has no valid authorization to avail them. Her journey makes her come across such men, mostly Punjabis, who help her get a livelihood. Rajan and Sodhi are few to name. But they demand favours from her. While Rajan monitors the money she earns, Sodhi monitors her body and mind. Finally, after trying desperately to acquire a legitimate status in Canada, and Sodhi's death, she destroys the unstamped passport and moves to start a new journey in quest of another passport, which is "a blind flight without any wings" (p. 238).

Apart from looking at the position and role of a diasporan woman whose stay has been traced illegal and other who has committed murder, the narrative looks at their conscientization. The manner in which the Indian women like Seema and Jasmine manage to develop their agencies and struggle against odds tries to locate a new dimension for Indian diasporic women. This study is done using critical discourse analysis which is explained in the next section.

Approach to the study

Discourse and its production, as Foucault (1972) states, depends on power and the control, selection, organization and redistribution of power and agency of who owns it. It is a powerful form of enabling form of critique and resistance. Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to study discourse and understand social practices and the way it is produced and generated in talk and text. To refer to Dijk (2001) CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society. Discourses are shaped and formed by events as they occur and they in turn affect them as well. A change has been observed in the manner of discourse in narrative writing since a decade till present which indicates the change in power and hegemony of the people it deals with. This change as Fairclough (2010) opines may be due to forms of transgression, crossing boundaries, such as putting existing codes or elements in new combinations, or drawing upon orders of discourse or their elements in situations which conventionally preclude them in a way which gives a sense of struggle between different ways of signifying a particular domain of experience. It is particularly because of the presence of multiple discourses in a single narrative that critical discourse analysis is preferred in the analysis of the narratives sampled. Rather than merely looking at discourse structures, CDA tries to explain them in terms of social interaction and structure. The discourse underlying the select writings help to study and interrogate the human conditions and the problems and the way different social and gendered behaviours affect them.

Using CDA method and based on the theories of Vertovec and Freire the paper is divided into three themes. The first theme deals with the lived experience as social form, their stay at home, and as migrants. The second theme deals with the way they undergo conscientization (Freire 1996), that is, the way they learn to perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. The third theme of the paper is to locate the way they undergo identity negotiation. By looking at the three themes separately and in detail with illustrations from the narratives the paper aims to conduct "emancipatory research" (Lather 1986) and create awareness for diasporic lives. The women representation, through the central protagonists of the selected fictional narratives, helps to analyze the process of emancipation.

Reality and Representation

The women of the two selected narratives migrate under forced circumstances but somehow affected by their marriages. The strong roots in their native culture and the movement beyond the borders bring in a new social relation in picture and hence a transition is felt. To quote Vertovec (1997) the social relations are "cemented by ties to history and geography" (p. 279) and hence it becomes important to delve into past and look at it and the way it grooms their becoming. Drawing from Vertovec (1997) the "triadic relationship" (p. 5) appears true for Jasmine where an ongoing dialogue goes on between her being, the new land, and the memories of her homeland. The flashback helps to gain a comprehensive picture of their status at home and abroad. While in the case of Jasmine the past is reflected at length, it is not so with Seema. She misses her home but not much detail has been provided by Ramoowalia. By analyzing the experience they gain, we aim to look at the way they internalize the gender roles. Butler (2007) makes us understand this role internalization through her concept of "performativity."

One, the birth of a girl is despised in society and so is it delineated in Mukherjee's novel. Her birth is supposed to be because of her mother's past sin. Mukherjee (1989, p. 39) writes "My mother's past must have been heavy with wrongs. I was the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children." Two, after her birth, a woman is made to learn the rules of society. In the family or in the community at large, she keeps performing the learnt rules of becoming a good woman.

It was a world where women "had to finish eating, cleaning up, sewing, and reading, before nightfall. Oil for clay lamps was expensive and not always available.
(Mukherjee, 1989, p. 44)

These women were like mere lamps of clay and lacked the fuel to light them up. She experienced a similar pattern of upbringing as most of the Indian girls are accustomed to. Jasmine is good in studies and her good school grades were high but even then she was discouraged to study further. As Butler (2007) asserts gender, as a social construction, becomes the primal cause in the way women are assigned their roles. Their identities get affected during performing these roles. Since the assigned roles are of subjugating nature they make women the "Other" (Beauvoir, 2009) in society. This making of a woman, to quote Beauvoir, starts since her birth and continues all through her life.

The making of a woman and her "othering" is further accentuated by her comparison to that of animal imagery like "cattle" as Jasmine is referred to by her brother. Dehumanization, to quote Freire (1996, p. 26) "marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also those who have stolen it." Gradually it leads to violence and a struggle against the whole process, which Jasmine's mother is seen to initiate by sending her daughter to school. The discourse, as articulated by Jasmine's father, dislocated girls from the advantage of getting such benefits. Freire calls such impositions laid by the oppressors as "prescription" (p. 28) which was not just implemented in words or actions but also as how a person dressed and conducted her/himself. For instance, after Jasmine is accustomed to her American clothes which "disguised" (Mukherjee, p. 145) her widowhood, she is given plain saris and salwar-kameez by Nirmala at the Indian Professor's house.

... a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude. If not, it appeared I was competing with Nirmala (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 145).

Dress and appearance played another significant role in the making of a woman. Besides being a connection between the host and homeland it also reflects the way women were prescribed to perform according to the choice of the oppressors. Nirmala's false generosity garbs the oppressor's violence and lovelessness which Jasmine struggles with her act of love "opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressor" (Freire, 1996, p. 27). Similarly, Seema with her status of an illegal immigrant has no choice but agrees to Rajan's "prescription" of his handling her earned income. It does not merely impose the choices but transforms the consciousness of the oppressed thereby affecting the thoughts and behaviour and making them appear inanimate.

Seema appears just like any other inanimate object kept in the house at the start. Irigaray (1985) states such objects/commodities can never gain the right to speak and participate in self consciousness. The readers find her sighing, sobbing and as non living as any other item of the house she belonged to. She is not just "other" to the patriarchal force but also remains "other" to her own self. Seema lives an alienated life and longs for her voice and agency.

'Seema, you're like an ant in this elephantine house,' ... realizing that she was only another item, an unwanted presence, in that lavishly furnished, two-storey detached ... (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 1).

Ramoowalia uses the imagery of an ant and elephant to refer to two contradictory ideas. On the one hand, she hints at the insignificance of her "ant" like structure in an "elephantine" house where hardly anyone cares of her presence, on the other hand she indicates at the destructive power of an ant which can be fatal to an elephant. Her whispers are the indications of her realization of her being oppressed. Her longing for an existence of her own is whispered mostly low in tone and signifies her low resistance. Her state makes her think of the general situation of wives in India where she feels that "the husbands are maharajas" and every wife "has to be an obedient attendant, tongueless, and blind" (Ramoowalia, p. 3). Her pondering brings a parallel to the similar situation of wives in India or as diasporans.

Satchidanandan (2002) reflects that unlike the earlier diasporas of the colonial times which was due to people running away from religious and other socio-political persecutions, the migration to America in the mid and post 1970s was for the search of a better living and success. The new immigrant had a place to go back and an identity to protect. But woman as migrant "move beyond" in most of the cases after her marriage, which is more of their husband's choice or affected by circumstances rather than their own. Seema stands parallel to this. She accompanies Anmol, her husband after marriage. Jasmine moves with a personal desire to accomplish what her husband dreamt. Hence their migrations are affected by marriage and dependent on circumstances.

After migration and standing all alone for oneself Jasmine and Seema are left with no choice but to adapt to whatever the host society offers them. The inter-subjective along with the collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural values are negotiated in the emergence of the interstitial space. The common shared experience with some Indian families and illegal immigrants reflect at the vulnerable conditions. Undergoing harsh realities, as migrant women, they realize, struggle, undergo pain, but to emerge strong. Apart from this, they prototypes numerous such diasporic women who remain silent about the humiliation they undergo. This silent suffering is in order to save relationships, marriages, and families from breaking down. But they can gain agency only when they break the cage of silence.

Concealing is feeling and, in many cases, being secure (Ramoowalia, 2001, p. 51).

Seema, through these lines, tries to justify silence. Being silent does not imply lack of any feeling or life. Rather they opt this to avoid insecurity. Silences for women, like Seema and Jasmine, is not just a garb to hide their internal turmoil but also keep other relations unaffected. To illustrate, Seema's silence of Veena's (her friend) husband molesting her saved the relationship between them. She could have complained the police about the priest attempted rape but lacking a legal document would have caused problems for her. Similarly, Jasmine, after being raped and lacking legal sanctions, is left with no secured measure to get justice but to murder the man. They have the fire overpowered by fear. It is the fear which they are unable to quit.

Women are unfortunately more vulnerable... Targets of gruesome gazes, ready to swallow them alive... My mother used to say that women are like lamps made of flour: outside, crows prey on them, and inside, mice devour them ... (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 57).

Vulnerability adds to this fear. Delineating this on Freire's (1996, p. 29) ideas "the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom." Moreover, experiences as a diasporan far away from one's homeland and all alone creates a sense of alienation and pain. Freire (1996) talks of the victim's acceptance of the subjugation to the oppressors as the reason of their silence and the oppression they undergo. In order to surmount this oppression, one needs to recognize the causes and discover the yearning to be free. This is seen in varying degrees in case of the women characters. *Seema's* voice is heard for the first time when she talks to Rajan, the person who employed the illegal immigrants in his warehouse in Canada and helped *Seema* to get a shelter. She says,

... How long will I live in this miserable condition, hiding and running away from my own shadow! ... What's my reality? Who am I? (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 97)

Her raging voice is indicative of her conscience which demanded her to be herself and independent. *'You don't have a choice when you have no roots and no status,' she told herself* (ibid, p. 50).

Both the women question the patriarchal control. *Jasmine* and *Seema* do not get overruled by the masculine forces around rather possess their voice, agencies and subjectivities. *Jasmine* voices her thoughts more strongly than *Seema* in whom this transformation is seen at a very late stage. *Jasmine* maintains her individuality and is evident through the conversations she carries in her house. She is bold and assertive and controls the house like a mother. At Taylor's house or Bud's she has a power and is not under the control of any male unlike her stay at Hasnapur. Both the men, Bud and Taylor, want to marry her. They initiate their stay alone in a foreign unknown land in a half deserted way and as illegal immigrants. The illegal are as unwanted as the "garbage sacks" (Mukherjee, p. 109). They get to find jobs for themselves but the income was very low compared to the hard work they put in.

Ramoowalia portrays *Seema* in the company of Indian (Punjabi) men rather than foreigners, except Patricia. *Seema* starts to work in Rajan's warehouse and finds herself among many such workers like her. *Seema* due to the fear of being caught by the Police runs away and starts working at Patricia's restaurant. At all the places she lacks control over her earnings. Gradually she becomes aware of the dark dungeon she was trapped in. The awareness of the conditions one is trapped in and the desire to locate one's subjectivity and agency is a step towards conscientization. The way it is achieved by the two protagonists is discussed in the following section.

Conscientization

The change and realization of self can be achieved only when one resists against the oppression to acknowledge one's essence which Lather (1986) also refers as "catalytic validity." By studying the oppressive realities one steps ahead for emancipatory research. The resistance from the two protagonists increases in intensity as the novel progresses. Resistance is felt when one wants a space for her/himself. The oppression, be it any form, alienation due to gender or race or migration makes one devoid of the respect and is commonly observed in case of diasporic literature. The resistance made by these protagonists, to refer Freire (1996), is a step ahead to break the "culture of silence", whereby these marginalized and exploited women realize their oppression and act to gain freedom from it. It is at this point these women challenge the dominant roles prescribed upon them and undo their gender. Butler (2004, p. 1) opines that gender is not just a kind of doing but also "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraints." In order to be recognised as socially viable beings men and women "do gender." "But if the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that "undo" the person by conferring recognition, or "undo" the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (Butler, 2004, p. 2). It is here that social power comes into play and the process of victimization begins. Resistance is a way to challenge the oppression and undo such prescriptions which act as their catalyst.

I buttoned up the jacket and sat by the fire... I was walking death. Death incarnate ... (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 119).

Every word of the above lines indicates the strength *Jasmine* has collected to resist. The "fire" image used indicates the vigour and rage inside her after she was robbed of her chastity. She is raped but is not broken. The murder of the "half face," the person, who rapes *Jasmine*, marks the beginning of her realization and germinates the seeds of resistance which makes her a strong woman unlike *Seema* who suffered till almost she had no other way left for herself. She executed the whole plan with great caution and the murder, rather than claiming her victim, purifies her of the pain and guilt which she did not commit. She dies as far as her honor, love, respect and security are concerned. The life is nothing but an existence without any hope. The "ruin" *Jasmine* undergoes affected her similarly and so she tries firstly to cleanse her body with the hot water and soap and then attempts a suicide.

The balance of the defilement was 'my (her) death'. The bathroom appears to her as a spot "that permitted a kind of purity" in "a place like a madhouse or a prison, where the most hideous crime took place (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 117).

Her self-will is apparent from her thoughts arising after the deed was done. She is not the stereotyped weak woman dependent on anyone. She is the one who does not let things happen to her rather has her own subjectivity. The strong woman has been portrayed in the form of Goddess Kali. *Jasmine* has been portrayed in such an exaggerated way symbolically hinting at the intensity of the heat of anger and violence in her heart and mind.

I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. I wanted that moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out (Mukherjee, 1989, p. 118).

The two women have different ways to life and their representation reflects that. *Seema* is relatively not as resistant as *Jasmine*. The way *Jasmine* was brought up and the treatment she got made her a strong woman, while in case of *Seema* hardly anything is informed of her early days in India. Breaking marriage, leaving a family and a small child behind, and encountering two molestations shatters her down.

Crying at home for hours, before gliding into sleep, at the loss of something inseparable from her being, receded gradually... It was not easy to absolutely overcome the feeling that something integral has been plucked out of her (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 85).

But slowly she regains her composure. She emerges as an individual when she left her home behind. In the Gurudwara, when she resisted to the molestation done by the priest, her strength is reflected. Left without a passport, she finds a temporary solace at Rajan's warehouse, Patricia's restaurant, or with Sodhi. But, none of the places she is more than a mechanized being. Getting up at a fixed time, following the schedule the superior has assigned. *Seema* occupies the position of a slave earning for Rajan, helping Patricia, and giving sexual satisfaction to Sodhi. Her voice is seldom for herself and similarly showcases her subjectivity. *Seema* as an individual is heard only when we approach the end of the novel. She is compared to a wingless goose that flies in spite of bleeding beak and wings. Her "illegal" residency is the fear she broods over every time.

But I don't think any strength is left in me ... to endure being trampled along any longer ... and rolled around like an unclaimed ball of rags (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 181).

The broken discourse of *Seema* with frequent pauses shows her internal conflict and broken self. She questions her being, and the futility of her life. It was Sodhi who initiates in her the strength to accumulate the lost selfhood and face the new world just like Prakash for *Jasmine*. The act of packing her belongings and moving ahead for a new life in the quest of a passport, her new identity is her challenge to the deportation that awaits her. She does not go back to any of the people she has left behind and this is a gesture to her growing sense of independence which she inculcated after several experiences in Canada. She turns confident at the end when there is no other way left for her, no new fear. "... I can't let myself die a perennial death" (Ramoowalia, 181).

The desire of living life to the fullest, having one's own identity and getting their lost voice marks their emergence, which Beauvoir (2009, p. 767) calls, "The free woman is just being born." These women challenge the society, the fear of surrender and oppression is discarded and they appear as "new woman." Their existence in the diaspora, as Vertovec propounds, reflects at the fluidity in the identities and the way it gets negotiated which the next section deals with.

Identity Negotiation

Butler (2007) talks of identity as free floating, as not connected to an essence but instead to performance. These women, all alone in different society among strangers were "no threat but in need" (Mukherjee, p. 131) and thus targeted as pity sights of exploitation. This idea helps to get a picture of the way the identities of these women suffer, adapt, change, and get negotiated throughout their lives. Be it Rajan's workshop, Patricia's restaurant or Lillian Gordon's house these transformations are seen represented explicitly and begins with their changing names.

As Jasmine recalls to herself, "I am sure that I have been reborn several times..." (p. 126)

"And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us had held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms" (127).

Their identities change with each changing name. Although their names change and they adapt to the host milieu but their subjectivities, choices and desires remain the same. Seema to Reeta to Susan and Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazz are the examples which show the way in which the change of the names denote the change of the person and the whole mentality and emotional attachments. Change of names instills series of transformations in their persona and character. The change in their attire and attitudes marks the birth of new woman, women self dependent and strong to the host milieu. They appear strong women, although broken, and isolated but the names make them feel one with the host society and their people. But in the struggle, a woman loses the part of her existence and is never compensated for the loss. The migration metamorphosed them with the combined workings of structural, conscious and non-conscious factors in the reconstruction and reproduction of identities and socio-cultural institutions in the diaspora as opined by Vertovec (1997). They were "featherless butterfly" (Ramoowalia, p. 3), "a featherless goose" (p. 202). But the inner strength enabled them to soar high in adversities. They never submitted themselves to anyone to gain privileges. A broken marriage, abandoned child, and illegal identity shattered Seema but her strength is quite explicit in her monologues,

Look at me: I'm flying without wings and feathers with a grinning beak. Look at my bleeding heart and mangled soul, but I'm still flying (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 202).

The society around is symbolized by the voice which demands the woman to please the devil and survive when the situation demands her to surrender. The state is symbolic of a woman who is helpless and without any support to perform; she is expected to surrender yet dwells a will to live. The narratives focus on the stronger sides of women and their existence through the representation of characters like Seema and Jasmine. They create their lives in the new hostile environment, independent, strong and determined.

Passport is an important manifestation of one's identity, especially if residing as a diasporan. The two protagonists migrate due to circumstances and their movement abroad does not have legal sanctity. Passport is another major cause for her identity negotiation. Seema agrees to marry Sodhi in spite of not loving him just to avoid her deportation. The sudden death of Sodhi makes her question who was she married to, the person or his passport? Her identity swings back and forth and she finds passport as equal to a person who owns it. The death of Sodhi was the loss of her getting a legal sanctity to stay in Canada. The open ended novel makes us question the state Seema was left after Sodhi left her. She asks herself,

Who had I married? Him or this passport? Who was he? Was he a human being or just a thin bunch of papers bound together with a landed stamp in it?" "What will you do now?" (Ramoowalia, 2003, p. 237- 238)

In retrospect

These narratives, as of Seema and Jasmine, epitomize the tale of thousands of such women who have no choice left in the journey of their lives but to succumb to the circumstances, and the way they gain their existence and subjectivities marks their triumph. They are always in conflict both with the external powerful forces and internal self. As Mohanty (2006) states behind the making of a woman are present some complex interactions some like social status, class, culture, and gender and such have been continuously affecting these two characters. Their alienated lives in the host land undergo gradual transformation where they gain self-apprehension as a tool to break the silence and gain agency. The paper by attempting to study the representation of these women directs at Lather's (1986) call for the search of a collective turmoil by looking the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminacy of human experiences. The concrete lived conditions from an insider's perspective helped to delineate the top to bottom as well as bottom to top discourse where we comprehended the way power operates and resistance happens. Although the two novels do not end on a similar note, while Jasmine gets her happiness, Seema moves on for a new journey, for a passport to sustain her stay in Canada. Seema's escape from the previous situation marks the continuation of the turmoil. Although she is turned a stronger persona than what she was at the beginning but ends with the same agony of the protagonist it began with. They are epitomes of strong women, not to be corpsed in gender dichotomies, but appear as individuals to bring in change and awareness. The representation of these women's lived experiences epitomizes the existential realism of their diasporic identity and their conscientization. It triggers, for future research, interrogations like "Is their cultural mooring one of the reasons behind their pain in diaspora?"

REFERENCES

- Baluja, Kaari P. (2003). *Gender Roles at Home and Abroad: The Adaptation of Bangladeshi Immigrants*. LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC: New York.
- Brazil, Jana E. & Mannur, A. (2003) *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Wiley Blackwell: Cornwall.
- Beauvoir, Simon D. (2009). *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books: London.
- Butler, Judith (2004). *Undoing Gender*. Routledge: New York.
- Butler, Judith (2007). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge: New York.
- DeBiaggi, Sylvia Duarte Dantas. (2002). *Changing Gender Roles: Brazilian Immigrant Families in the US*. LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC: New York.
- Dewey, John (1998). *Experience and Education: The 60th Anniversary Edition*. Kappa Delta Pi: West Lafayette Indiana.
- Fairclough, Norman (1989). *Language and Power*. Longman: London.
- Fairclough, Norman (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. Second Edition*. Pearson Education: Harlow. UK
- Foucault, Michel (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on language*. Trans. Smith. Pantheon Books: New York.
- Freire, Paulo (1996), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Books: New Delhi.
- Irigaray, Luce (1977, trans. 1985). *This Sex Which is Not One*. Cornell University Press: New York.
- Lather, Patti (1986). *Research as Praxis*. Harvard Educational Review. Vol 56. No. 3: Cambridge.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (2003). *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press: Durham & London.
- Mukherjee, Bharati (1989). *Jasmine*. Grove Press: New York.
- Raj, Aditya (2006). "Globalization from Below and the Global Indian Diaspora" (98-116) IN *Sociology of Globalization: Perspectives from India* edited by S. Somayaji and G. Somayaji. Rawat Publishers: New Delhi & Jaipur.
- Raj, Aditya (2007). *Ethnographic Study of the Creation and Usage of Diasporic Capital for Education and Identity Construction of Indian Diasporic Youth in Montreal*. PhD Dissertation. McGill University: Montreal, Canada.
- Ramoowalia, Iqbal (2003). *The Death of a Passport*. Ajanta Book International: New Delhi.
- Satchidanandan, K. (2002). The Third Space: Interrogating the Diasporic Paradigm. *India International Centre Quarterly*. Vol. 29 (2): Monsoon.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2003). 18 Critical discourse analysis. In Schiffirin, Deborah, Tannen, Deborah and Hamilton, Haidi ed. *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.: Cornwall.
- Vertovec, Steven (1997). *Three Meanings of Diaspora, Exemplified Among South Asian Religions*. *Diaspora* 6 (3).



Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) is a consortium of researchers and policy makers drawn from national and international universities, institutes and organizations. GRFDT is presently based in India and is shaping as the largest such group focusing specifically on the issues related to diaspora and transnationalism.

The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engage them in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.

International Editorial Board

Research Paper Series

Dr. Els van Dongen, Assistant Professor, Nanyang Technological university, Singapore

Dr. Ankur Datta, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, South Asian University, New Delhi

Dr. Ned Bertz, Assistant Professor of History, University of Hawaii

Dr. Nayeem Sultana, Associate Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dr. Veena Sharma, Independent Scholar on Diaspora, New Delhi

Dr. Raj Bourdouille, Migration and Development Researcher, Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Toronto, Canada

Dr. Nandini C. Sen, Associate Professor. Cluster Innovation Centre, University of Delhi, New Delhi

Dr. Evans Stephen Osabuohien, Dept. of Economics and Development Studies, Covenant University, Nigeria

Prof. Vinesh Hookoomsing, University of Mauritius, Mauritius

Dr. Anjali Sahay, Associate Professor, International Relations and Political Science at Gannon University, Pennsylvania, USA

Prof. Guofu LIU, School of Law, Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing

Dr. Kumar Mahabir, The University of Trinidad and Tobago, Corinth Teachers College, UTT

Dr. Smita Tiwari, Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi

Dr. M. Mahalingam, Research Fellow, Centre For Policy Analysis, New



GRFDT

Global Research Forum on
Diaspora and Transnationalism

Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

A-45A, Upper Ground Floor, Indira Enclave,
Neb Sarai, New Delhi, Pin No: 110068

Website: www.grfdt.org

Email: convenor@grfdt.com, editor@grfdt.com