Abstract

This doctoral thesis captures the cross-cultural experiences of dislocated women and the possible condition of belonging simultaneously – psychologically and experientially – in the maze of cultural plurality. But what makes this dissertation unique is its analysis through Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogism’. By utilizing Bakhtin’s concept, the present research project aims to study women’s intercultural positionality in the immediate and current scenario of post modern situations in the selected works of Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri; and provides an overview of the changing cultural norms and altering controversies of women’s identity.

The issues of identity and cultural clashes have already been vastly explored. Therefore, the present approach extends the scope of debate on identity to encompass the larger dimension of dialogue between cultures. Appropriating Bakhtin’s idea of dialogism, as a term capable of non-categorization, it has been used in the present project with reference to cultural encounter. The purpose of this research work is to acquaint the reader with key concepts of Bakhtin such as – dialogism, heteroglossia, polyphony and carnivalesque, and to specify the implications of these notions in the cross-cultural scenario.

Issues regarding cultural encounter, identity formation, difference and assimilation, not only form a part of diasporic literature and postcolonial studies, but they implicate postmodernist approach as well.
Hence, the present study approaches these issues from the perspective of diaspora studies, postcolonial and postmodernist theory. Since the issue of cultural encounter is to be analysed specifically from the perspective of women’s identity, the approach to this issue via feminist literary theory is but natural. This thesis, therefore, unveils the cross-cultural focus of postmodernist or poststructuralist feminism.

Three of the diasporic female authors, whose works are analysed in this thesis, belong to a Bengali background and all of them have experienced a cultural drift over three nations – Anita Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri over India, England and America, and Bharati Mukherjee over India, Canada and America. A survey is made, in this dissertation, of the identity issues of these three cross-cultural authors and the displaced female characters in their works. Through Bakhtinian dialogics, diasporic literature, postcolonial studies, postmodern and poststructuralist feminism, and cultural theory, emphasis is laid on the impact of cultural displacement on women leading to their dual marginalisation – one culture based and the other gender based.

Globalisation, leading to a new social and cultural pattern, has largely influenced every new work that is being produced by the diasporic writers. This thesis intends to foreground this newness of women’s identity caught in the dichotomies of acculturation and dissociation. This dissertation reveals the different aspects of diasporic experiences and how these experiences further diverge into preservation and
appropriation under the sway of globalization, which is a challenge to cultures, to marginalized communities and their identities.

The conclusive chapter reveals the main thrust of the present study that globalization has contradictory influences on the migrants – preservative for the expatriates and appropriative for the immigrants (both the first and the second generation). But what implies in today’s global cultural space is the existence and sustenance of plural identities because preservation of cultures and identities in their undiluted state becomes impossible under the influence of globalization.