Abstract

Literary creation is the endeavour of a creative writer to respond to his/her milieu. Of all literary forms, the novel is considered to be the most society-oriented genre, for, it depicts the predominant social, political, cultural and economic problems that reveal the writers’ insight into the fundamental aspects of the society of their times. The later part of 20th century is a period of great changes at all levels – social, economic and cultural- owing to many influences. In recent years with a great body of fiction written by writers of Indian origin, the writers of diaspora have emerged on the literary scene. The need to establish one’s root becomes more acute in the case of writers of diaspora. These aspects are very much so in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Though the forte of these two women writers is different in many ways, they are also similar, as both of them deal with cultural transactions and the mind of the displaced in most of their fictional writings. The aim of the researcher is to present in this thesis the similar ideas of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri and about their treatment of cultural interaction.

Worked out in six chapters, the introductory chapter tracks the major concepts of culture as propounded by T.S. Eliot, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Homi K. Bhabha, Jameson and others. Culture gets its nourishment and
life from the environment. It also defines certain key terms like acculturation, assimilation, migration, hybrid culture and so on. It is pointed out that the post-modern culture is a capitalistic culture.

A graphic description of the life and works of these writers informs us of their involvement and commitment towards their task. It is very interesting to note that both of them are living diasporic women, hailing from India, settled in abroad and married to foreigners. The review of literature given in this chapter shows the fund of knowledge already available in this area of study.

The Second Chapter titled Place and Displacement traces the migration and the experiences of the immigrants portrayed in the select novels of Bharati Mukherjee (Jasmine, The Tiger’s Daughter and Desirable Daughters). An important concern of the post-colonial literature is related to place and displacement. The concern with identifying a relationship between self and place leads to a crisis of identity. The ‘Self’ may have eroded either because of ‘dislocation’ or ‘cultural denigration’. The theme of exile is frequently concerned with place and displacement and establishing of new relationships. This chapter deals with the exile of Jasmine, Tara Cartwright, and Tara Chatterji.

The Third Chapter titled East-West Encounter analyses Bharati Mukherjee’s short story collection The Middleman and Other Stories_ (1988). Mukherjee depicts the problems of the people emigrating to America and the dream of new life which tempts them to go there. The collection of stories presents
a rich vision of the free new world that is America through a variety of American characters but who essentially hail from different countries of the world. While characters from European countries are taken to be the real Americans, those having their origins in the Third World countries are looked upon and brought into focus as immigrants who dream of realizing their destinies in America. The theme of all the eleven stories is immigration and the reciprocal effect of the immigrants.

**The Fourth Chapter** with the title *Sense of In-betweenness and Unbelonging* explores the theme of immigrants’ experience and the clash of cultures in the U.S. portrayed in Jhumpa Lahiri’s first novel, *The Namesake* (2006), in her collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and in her *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). The novel, *The Namesake* (2006) is a narrative about the assimilation of an Indian Bengali family from Calcutta, the Gangulis into America, over thirty years, the cultural dilemmas experienced by them and their America born children in different ways.

The nine stories in the debut winning short story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* sub-titled *Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond* deals with the pangs of loneliness and a sense of being an outsider felt by the second generation immigrants of Bengal, in the alien land.

Lahiri’s latest work, *Unaccustomed Earth* contains eight stories. They trace the lives of Bengalis who have moved to the United States. These stories scrutinize the fate of the second and third generations. In this collection, the
second and third generations become increasingly assimilated into American culture and are comfortable in constructing perspectives outside of their country of origin.

The Fifth Chapter titled Conflicts, Confrontations and Alliances makes a comparative study, delineating the similarities and dissimilarities in the select fictional writings of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. Cultural transaction that plays a very important role in these fictional writings is convincingly described with substantial facts from the texts and other renowned critics. The quality of cultural transactions in all its multiplicity forms the crux of the accomplishments of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri. Moreover their treatment of this aspect in their works is similar and at the same time different in many ways. Both Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri deal with the cultural transactions that occur in the lives of the immigrants.

Though Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are feminine immigrant writers, they differ considerably in their responses to the experience of immigration from India to America. Mukherjee, a first generation immigrant, has represented the journey from India to America as symbolic of the rite of passage from the constricting space of patriarchal traditions to the realm of freedom of self-assertion. She has advocated assimilation into American culture relinquishing traditional Indian roles and values. On the other hand, Jhumpa Lahiri, a second generation immigrant, has tended to highlight the difficulties that the process of
immigration entails for first generation immigrants, as well as their children raised in America.

The Sixth Chapter sums up the arguments of all the previous chapters in a nutshell and offers suggestions for future studies. An updated Bibliography is annexed at the end of the thesis.