Comparison and contrast are tools to understand and appreciate works of art and literature. They point up similarities and difference as well. They have their own value. They bring two things closer, give a new configuration and leave a broad realm for study. They are like bridges which help connect the two different realms of literature. At the same time, when seen in comparison with each other, they are better understood. Their salience comes out more clearly. For instance, Feminine sensibility stands contrary to the immigrant sensibility. If the former exposes reactions of woman to the tradition and roots of Indian culture, immigrant sensibility presents the immigrant's reactions to the new place, alienation, detachment, liberated foreign culture. The former exposes woman's psyche, the latter explores the immigrant's psyche.
Though Shashi Deshpande and Dina Mehta are dealing with the life of Indian women, and the short story writers of the Indian Diaspora i.e. Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are depicting the life of immigrants and exiles, there are many similarities to be found between the two groups. That is, though the women live in a different cultural atmosphere, and though language, customs, costumes, and food of an alien land and life-style are totally different, their feelings, thoughts, involvements, sufferings under ill-treatment are one and the same. Living in different countries, many of their protagonists hang on to the similar decisions. Their sufferings are different but the sensibility is the same. Their stream of sensibility, quest for an identity, and flow of life finally come and join the ocean of feminine perspectives.

Feminine sensibility is apprehended as following tradition. Immigrant sensibility turns towards modernity. Tradition versus modernity is much debated by many. Both acquire their own places in literature. Tradition demands that we follow its etiquette, while modernity adopts new modes of life. Tradition restricts human beings, specially women, to be
within its norms. As Kamala Das spells it out in her poem *An Introduction*,

“....Dress in saris, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook

Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in

.......Don’t sit

On walls or peep in through our lace draped windows,

Be Amy, or be Kamala, or better

Still, be Madhavikutty.........

Don’t play at schizophrenia or be a

Nympho. Don’t cry embarrassingly loud when jilted in love.......”

Patriarchy, the guardian of tradition and culture, tries to find a Sita in every woman. It suggests to her that a wife must be dutiful. And a dutiful wife ought to ignore her husband’s lapses. Shashi Deshpande, Dina Mehta and Chitra Banerjee have portrayed such characters who are unable to break through the shackles of age-old moral values.

The old lady in Deshpande’s story *My Beloved Charioteer* prefers to compromise her position as a dutiful
virtuous wife by serenading herself to what life offers. She is the woman who follows every Hindu moral code and values. She recounts her husband’s attitude to her daughter. She explains to her how her husband had lived with him as a bed-fellow. She knew that he didn’t like stringed beans and stones in his rice. He liked his tea boiling hot and his bath lukewarm. He did not like the sight of tears. She wept alone in secret when her baby sons died. He never shared her grief.

Deshpande collects untold miseries of the old lady. In India a wife’s life is completely controlled by the husband. She is abjectly dependent on him. She cannot own even her body. Because the husband is the protector; more than this – a master. The old lady used to comb her hair before her husband woke up, because she knew that he did not like to see women with loosened hair. Most of the time she went to the backyard because he hated to find stray hairs anywhere. She scarcely dared to breathe. She was so afraid of disturbing him.

This passive compliance of hers reveals her to be a timid person who does not dare to have her own voice. She herself has suppressed it. She does not dare to cross the traditional boundaries of a good wife. She accepts only what life has
given to her. She does not demand more of it. She suffers silently without protesting, complaining against the intolerable situation.

Like the old lady, Nafeesa Hafeez of Bharati Mukherjee’s story *A lady from Lucknow*, too finds disharmony in her married life. She resigns herself to a married life without harmony. She is living abroad with her husband and two children. She on the contrary refuses to surrender herself to the life in which she has lost all interest. She desires to reshape it. She is attracted towards another man-James Beamish, an immunologist with the Center for Disease Control in America. She enjoys her extra-martial affair without any qualms. She does not think much too closely about the old traditional values in the foreign land.

The stories referred to above differ from each other. The attitude of the protagonist of the former story is an epitome of feminine sensibility, while that of Nafeesa reveals the immigrant sensibility. It is the cultures which have shaped their differing sensibilities, and they in their turn dictate their attitudes. The old lady lives in India where she is rooted in Indian culture. The culture restricts her traditional way of living which is given to a Hindu wife, Whereas Nafeesa, who
lives in America, meets the new culture which is different from her native culture.

The old lady in the story *My Beloved Charioteer* is a widow. Her thoughts might match with the thoughts of Radha the widow of Deshpande’s story *The Rain*. Radha thinks that a Hindu marriage is a sacrament and it never ends. One belongs for all time and eternity to the same man. That is why the old widow remains with her husband even in an intolerable situation.

In contrast to the attitude of the old widow the immigrant Shaila, a widow who stays in Canada in Bharati Mukherjee’s story *The Management of Grief*, takes a different step. She is strong and bold in character. She has no desire to return to her former situation, unlike the former character. She expresses no desire to return to her homeland after losing her husband and her two sons, because she knows the fate of widows, back in her family very well. She knows that her grandmother had shaved her head with rusty razor blades when she was widowed at sixteen. She lived in a hut behind the main estate and took her food with the servants.
Shaila determines to stay on in Canada where she can choose a life of her own. She is an immigrant left with so many options to choose from. Even Sumita, in Chitra Banerjee's story *Clothes*, decides to stay on in California after losing her husband Somesh Sen. She is aware of the pitiful condition of a widow in India. She recollects the image of widows in white saris in India who have to bow their veiled heads and serve tea to the in-laws. They have to live like maid servants.

Desphande's old widow cannot script her own destiny while Shaila and Sumita can do so. Because an old widow is trapped in the circle of custom and tradition, whereas Shaila and Sumita who adapt themselves to modernity, are free in an alien land. Immigrants enjoy their liberty which is the option given by the totally liberal culture of a foreign land. Women like the old widow are marginalized while immigrants can easily escape the marginalization and get back into the mainstream. The story of the old widow reveals the feminine sensibility of the character. The character is dependent on her husband. She does not have her own identity. She leaves every decision of her life to the male members of the family. She does not object, and even question the dictates of
patriarchy. She suffers silently. She follows each and every order of her husband without uttering a word.

Nafeesa, Shaila and Sumita, being immigrants, seek their identity and struggle to acquire that. They are self-oriented, self-centred and self-decision-making individuals. The advanced and liberated etiquette of the foreign land, like America and other nations, hold out before them the option of an independent life style.

Though the sensibility is basically the same, in either case, the way feminine sensibility operates in an emancipated milieu and ethos is by transcending the bounds of tradition, and adjusting to a set of new values. A woman immigrant could have the same attitude of feminine sensibility, but it alters when she meets with an alien culture which is flexible.

Feminine Sensibility as long as it is not called upon to encounter an alien culture, operates within the wall which is constructed around women. The wall is built by the rules of Indian culture. It is a culture which glorifies the submissive, obedient, stereotype. She must abide by the mannerisms of her culture which defines the way of taking, acting and feeling about an area of concern to women or to woman-specific issues and differs from culture to culture and country
A woman has to fall into pattern; she must conform to the dictates and norms of patriarchy. Indian culture demands sacrifice, meekness and docility from women. She is to have no voice of her own. It is not for her to protest, much less rebel. Even when she suffers injustice, she has to keep mum, and not open her lips and speak.

When an Indian woman is placed in an alien land, say America or Canada, whose ethos and etiquettes are totally different, she plays the role of obedient and submissive wife as long as she can or must and suffers the humiliation of discrimination and racial prejudice. But thrown back on their own resources, as divorced or jilted wives, Asian women liberate themselves from the stranglehold of tradition. When they are faced with the option of choosing between settling in the alien land or returning to India, they prefer staying back and adjusting to life over there.

Bharati Mukherjee underlines the truth about immigrant situation –

“.......the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture.”

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Vinitha faces the cultural clash between India and America in the new atmosphere of U.S.A. She feels strongly impelled to put an end to her dilemma by having an extra-marital affair with a young Indian student, viz., Rajiv Khanna. It is Vinitha’s courage which drives her to take this step. And this courage has existed unsuspected within her in the liberated, free and flexible atmosphere of America. The liberal cultural etiquettes of a foreign land has given the strength to her to try to defend against herself an unenviable married life. Being an immigrant she ought to have a space where she could give colour to her colourless life.

Moreover she has no guilty conscience about having an extra-marital affair. Deshpande as well as Mukherjee shows the unpleasant, disorganized and rudderless life of the wives.

Feminine Sensibility visualizes the traditional concepts, such as duty, submission, endurance, virtue, accorded to women by the society. It restricts women to be slow, obedient and old-fashioned and have formalized gestures, and to lead the stereotypical roles as daughter, wife, mother etc. and also unprotestingly suffer injustice done to them, as also the frustration due to having no right to choose their own
lifestyle, sacrificing all likes and dislikes without asking a single question.

Both feminine and immigrant sensibilities point up the issue of alienation or outsider feeling of the women protagonists. The unfamiliar scene is what is observed by both sensibilities. Women protagonists feel ‘foreigners’ even at home and also outside. Jhumpa Lahiri shows the alienation in the new atmosphere through the protagonist Mrs. Sen in her story Mrs. Sen. She is an immigrant who lives in America but always lingers in India, her ‘home’ in her memories. She expresses her love towards her homeland and the sense of alienation in America–by remembering Indian people’s attitude. If she cries happily or unhappily she finds her neighbours running to her aid instantly, which is what she cannot expect in an alien land.

Marriage has traditionally formed the major theme of many short stories. It has almost always been explored through a womanly sensibility. Both feminine and immigrant sensibilities highlight the failed marriages, broken marriages, maladjusted marriages, the marriage without harmony and so on. Marriage is made compulsory for women by patriarchy. It is accepted that without marriage there is no meaning in a
woman’s life. Child bearing and child rearing restrict the freedom of women. A life without marriage is a social stigma and a fearsome existence.

Female protagonist Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s novel *That long silence* is fed up with familial obligations which are making her selfhood invisible.

“Mohan had always moved steadily from one moment to the next. But for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws’ home. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I had got married, I had done nothing but wait.”

It is noticed that the immigrant sensibility comes into play in the lives of the unhappy married wives who wish to come out of the circle of marriage. Women aspire for total freedom in their life. Even though their wishes expected by them are fulfilled, they are not happy. They neither express happiness nor sadness; they have become live statues with a fixed smile on their faces and do not laugh heartily. They don’t argue, quarrel or feel ashamed.

All the five women short story writers have displayed their unique abilities. Their stories provide role models who...
strive for a positive sense of feminine identity. Many of Shashi Deshpande's stories are concerned with woman's sacrifice and self-effacing personality that pleases patriarchy. They follow the image of woman as one who is totally selfhood and totally self sacrificing.

Her protagonists try to adopt a new way of life, breaking the traditional boundaries. Sometimes they find it a difficult task but they are determined to live a meaningful existence.

Both sensibilities are looking at the world from a woman's point of view, that includes an assertion of a woman's social and political rights for equality; and a negation of stereotypical sex roles, gender bias, job discriminations, compulsory heterosexuality, imposition of wifehood and motherhood, oppression and sexism. It recognizes a woman's right to independent decision-making, her competence, intelligence and her status as an equal, as an individual, as a human being, as a person capable of contributing to social and national progress and development. It is a new consciousness on the part of woman of redefining her social and cultural role; a process of self-discovery.
Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists are transformed from culturally static ones to liberated ones. She is concerned with women’s immigrant sensibility. Her female protagonists are more bold, courageous, and straightforward than the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and Dina Mehta. They are not weak, timid but full of strength; they are enthusiastic and conquering. Leaving the marginalization behind they want to be self-oriented, self-centered, and self decision making individuals. Bharati has given more attention to their dreams and desires and less attention to the existence of males. To serve this purpose she has chosen first person narration.

Her protagonists haunt their readers. Even the protagonists of Chitra Banerjee Divakarani cross the circumference of marginalization. They seek freedom from the yoke of male dominance. They want to escape into a better and more meaningful life.
References:
