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The Self-Actualization of Indian Diaspora in the Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.5.2.14

Abstract

The migration of human beings into the various countries of the world, has been in the search of betterment of chances for their literary as well as the social contributions in the present era of the diasporic world for the second and the third generation of migrants communities. It has been a journey for establishing a new identity of self-actualization of any individuality in the context of Diaspora. The term self-actualization is coined and developed as the psychological term by Abraham Maslow to describe the growth of an individual towards the fulfillment of their highest social as well as the emotional requirements. Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri are the Indian Diasporic writers of novels as well as short stories, who write about the problems of Indian Immigrants, especially with the perspectives of feminine immigrant sensibilities. Very skillfully, both of them portray the struggle of Indian women for self-actualization and establishing new identity of Indianness with the self-fascination of foreignness through their novels as well as short stories. Their feminine characters are the representations of contemporary women who strive to live their life on their owns with the portrayal of full potential and capabilities and become an individual, they want to be. Most of their writings seem autobiographical to the extent that they reflect the diasporic experiences of the migrants as they writers are. This paper aims to bring out the journey of the migration

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to self-actualization of the some portrayals of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri in their works, *Jasmine* and *The Lowlands*, respectively that leads them to fluid identities of a diasporic life. Jyoti, the protagonist of *Jasmine*, is an Indian Immigrant who faces the problems of acculturation and alienation in the United States of America while the self actualization of Gauri in *The Lowland* seems to be destroyed in the hands of destiny in self-fascination of the diasporic lowlands. Both of these protagonists try to assimilate themselves into the foreign country as well as culture but *Jasmine* of Mukherjee seems to gain an independent identity towards the end of the novel while Gauri seems to be erased her Indian identity of motherhood in the self-fascination of Americanization. The readers can find in Mukherje and Lahiri, very successful presentation of the predicaments of The Third World women with all their frustrations, longings, hopes and aspirations in an alien land of migration.

Keywords- Self-actualization, Self Realization, Migration, Expatriation, Cultural Crisis, Identity Crisis

The statement, 'Man is born free but everywhere he is bound in chains' seems very apt when the study of Indian Diaspora indicates the self actualization of the diasporic personalities as well as the diasporic characters, portrayed by the diasporic writers in their works. As, it has been reported previously, that the term Self-actualization has psychological origin and development, which aims at the maximum use of a person's ability and resources for the sake of self growth. In other words, it can be defined as the realization of one's own potentiality to be established with an achieved identity of individuality. The psychologist, Abraham Maslow has categorized the human needs across five levels in his principles of hierarchy which are made up of psychological needs, safety needs, loving relations, self-esteem and then self-actualization in a pyramid from bottom to top. All of these levels have description of the necessities of humans beings like food, shelter, warmth, security and the sense of belongingness. Maslow states that among the four basic needs the lower one, self-actualization, the highest level in the hierarchy, involves the pursuit of excellence and enjoyment of life, whichever people choose to desire for and emphasis on. Furthermore, the

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present psychological term, Self-actualization can be considered as a component of well-being and personal growth, which includes the courage to attempt for betterment and inspire more for the self-establishment. Mukherjee's *Jasmine* presents the life of a young woman Jyoti, Jase, Jasmine or Jane, in the United States of America, who changes many identities at several times in order to adapt the living standard of Americanization. In this novel of Bharati Mukherjee, one can see the transformation of identities of the protagonist of the novel with a new perspective way of diasporic life to located, dislocated and relocated of Indian Diaspora through the whole narratives of incidents. Mukherjee unlike her fellow writers portrays her protagonists as emigrants who emerge out of their shells and believe that they can do anything for their sake and belong to the alien country on their owns. Mukherjee's protagonist, Jasmine shows a kind of guiltlessness consciously, following a strategy of surviving in the foreign landscape of cultural conflicts and struggles hard in search of light, happiness and fulfillment of her desires and at last she is found attaining her self-Actualization towards the end of the novel. She transforms herself for many times and is in turn transformed by her experiences and by the perceptions of others.

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian born American novelist, brings out the women consciousness, struggle for and self-discovery of the immigrants in a multicultural country of the United States of America. Sumita Roy quotes from some social critic ideas in her paper, entitled 'Jasmine : Exile as Spiritual Quest' : "Women's spiritual quest concerns a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul...provides orientation for women's social quest and grounds it in something larger than individual or even collective achievements support(s) her when her own personal determination falters." (TFBM, 186) In her third novel *Jasmine*, Mukherjee portrays the life of Jyoti who is born as the seventh child of the family in a feudal village, Hasnapur and is considered as a curse and an undesirable child in the paternal society of Punjab. However, she is presented as a bold, confident feminine character, who never lets anyone to tease or criticize her even at her girlhood of seven years old. She always holds a high self-esteem regarding herself consciousness. This self-acceptance or self-esteem has made her able to face all the odds of her life right from the very beginning of her childhood to herself identity onwards. It is evidenced when she encounters to the Fortune teller or

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astrologer who narrates her “widowhood and exile” (J, 3), she questions many times regarding her “helpless doomed” (J, 4) and star shaped scars in her forehead as a curse in Indianness, and at last she announces to “reposition the stars” (J, 240) considering her scar in forehead as the third eye of human beings and following the tract of self-actualization. The present novel of Bharati Mukherjee, is described as an “adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through un-caulked windows.” (J, 240) The archaic mentality of Indianness is looking suffering from, in the whole life of Jasmine, which subsumes the process of going beyond as narrow and constricting mould to be a complete or perfect individual or to arrive at self realization through opting the right choice and enlightenment, implying an altered awareness and sharpened perceptions. From the very beginning of the novel, Jasmine seems to be a “permissible rebellion” (J, 47) through her potency of power, winning all her battles and establishing a strong self-identity by her own efforts which are fraught with dangers, challenges and nearly insurmountable barriers. She wants “to be a doctor and set up my (her) own clinic in a big town.” (J, 51) She is bold enough to refuse her marriage proposal for the widower because she thinks marriage as a “totally in control”. (J, 44) which may be an obstacle in the search of her self-actualization. But when her father thinks that “The girl is mad” (J, 51), she marries Prakash, a modern man in search of higher education going abroad in America, because he wants to make her “a new kind of city women” (J, 77) Her father, like the ancestry of Indian sensibility is of the views that “bright ladies are bearing bright sons, that is, nature’s design.” (J, 51) while she, like a change mentality of the modern lady, wants “to break off the past” (J, 77) transforming herself into the cultural lady of educated society. In this regard, Jasmine looks very close to her husband who is “doing better, making something more of his life than the fate intended.”(J, 85) that’s why she wants to migrate from India because she thinks “If we could just get away from India, then all fates would be cancelled.” (J, 85) Like the other diasporans, she wants to make her husband aware of her new idea “We’d start with new fates, new stars. We could say or be anything we wanted. We’d be on the other side of the earth, out of God’s sight.” (J, 85) Jasmine’s quest of learning, identity formation and structural order of the past as well as the present, sustains and enlarges her consciousness in addition to taking her out of “social order

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that had gone on untouched for thousands of years.” (J, 229) Further, it is narrated by the novelist that Jyoti like an Indian wife feels very reluctant when she is asked by Prakash to call him by his name and names her Jasmine for her transformation with her self-actualization. Mukherjee like a true Indian novelist does not leave the prophesy and narrates her story with the murder of Prakash by the riot of Khalsa Lions which compels Jasmine to reconsider her actualization but she does not allow the painful death of Prakash deter her courage of self-actualization rather she looks very determine to fulfill the remaining desires of her husband by going abroad to the American institute. When she starts for, she has dream of self actualization by committing sati in the campus of the institute but when she reaches there she finds it a crime and shows her courage to fight against the ill destiny of her widowhood. Furthermore, the readers are introduced with the ill fight of Jasmine with her fate because her beginning of self actualization in the United States of America was raped brutally by the American society of Half-face who promised her to make her reach the institute of Americanization and her self-actualization meets with the cultural shock of diaspora: “For the first time in my life I understood what evil was about. It was about not being human. Half-face was from an underworld of evil. It was a very simple, very clear perception, a moment of truth, the kind of understanding that I have heard comes at the moment of death” (J, 116) The interesting point is this that she does not only repent over her humiliation and frustration of American rape but also transforming herself into the actualization of divinity, she assumes the role of Kali and kills her evil creature in the form of ravisher, Half-Face. Now, she changes her idea of committing Sati in the university campus and carries out a symbolic Sati by burning the clothes or external appearances of her husband by adopting the rebirth of a new individuality in The United States of America. And the process of self-actualization of Jasmine begins here when incidentally she meets Mrs. Lillian Gordan, a kind Quaker Lady who assists the illegal immigrants to find a permanent relief rather than misfortunes in America. She is presented here as a guardian-angel for her who teaches Jasmine to talk, walk and dress like an American into the process of new transformation. She calls Jasmine as Jazzy, another transformation of identity which Jasmine takes up in the journey of self-Actualization by the process of more Americanization. Now, she wears T-shirt, tight cords

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and running shoes. Also Jazzy bears in herself the different culture of hybridity to sustain in a multicultural society of America. Another phase of Jasmine's self-actualization can be seen at New York where she meets professor Devinder Vadhera and finds it difficult adjust herself with the Vadhera family and once again her love for freedom makes her feel alienated and captivated. Without getting delay in her following the austerities of a widow, she decides to leave the Vadhera house and live on her own. Later, she is found, working as a caretaker for Duff, the daughter of Wylie and Taylor Hayes in Manhattan, without getting disturbed in her business for self-actualization. It has been considered as the best period of her stay in America. She is excited about her life with Taylor's family. Here, she is found enjoying her financial independence and her affectionate treatment of the family and Taylor in particular. Now, Jazzy becomes Jase. Initially, she is shocked with the illegal affairs of Wylie and her her encounter with her decision to live with another man. At this, Jase develops a bond of relationship with Taylor by accepting the present change in her own values of self-actualization. Further, she is found compromising between her self-esteem, confidence and respect in order to move towards the next hierarchy of her needs. Slowly and slowly, she finds her root in the American culture by transforming herself into the different identities of self realization and accepting the realities of life. The fourth important phase of Jasmine's life begins in Iowa, where she meets Mother Ripplemeyer who helps her in providing food and getting a job in Bud's Bank. Here, she is found to have a live-in relationship with Bud by transforming herself into a new identity of Jane. Further her refusal to marry Bud reveals the fact that she has become an American by transformation not configuration to any cultural barriers. She also decides to leave Bud when Taylor comes to take her away with him, considering Taylor's arrival as a welcome relief to her self-respect and she convinces herself telling that there is nothing wrong to leave Bud. In this way, she tells that she does not exchange between Bud and Taylor, but she is caught between the promises of America and old-world dutifulness. She does not feel guilty of her decision of leaving backward and moving forward. She becomes a woman who is ready to see ahead the best that the future holds in store for her and her life has become: "Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows" (J, 240) Her journey of self-actualization,

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acquires many more transformations for her self-identity and always she identifies that survival in an alien land is possible only by overcoming its problems not escaping from problems. Initially, she is encountered with the two cultural forces and was shuttling between identities but later she creates a new world of self actualization for herself assimilating the two cultures. She becomes self-actualized, gets motivated and gets imbibed into the society she has to live. Her desires to pursuit excellence and enjoyment in her life by aspiring many more diasporans as well as for her well-beings and her personal growth in the journey of her life proves her journey towards self-actualization. In the words of Kumar: “Jasmine’s every moment is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in her personality.” (Kumar, 118)

Like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri’s also seems to self-actualize her characters as the protagonist, Gauri in her second novel, *The Lowland 2013*, divided into eight parts and dealing with the diasporic sensibility of identity crisis and the cultural crisis of Subhash in Rhode Island, New England with his most beloved brother Udayan, engaged in the Naxalist Movement of a group of community in India. Here, one can find the story of two brothers Subhash and Udayan, belonging to Calcutta, West Bengal, India by their birth, having been very keen interested in each other but their track changed when they got admission for graduation. Udayan embraces Naxalist Movement in order to establish his own criminal identity while Subhash decided to establish his personal identity in the field of education and profession. Subhash went to Rhode Island, the part of the United States in New England, for his graduation and started his education in the sufferings of his traditional identity as an obstacle to be indulged in the foreign country and culture. When he was about to adjust with the host culture after facing a lot of diasporic problems, he was informed about Udayan’s marital life with an Indian girl, Gauri for his conjugal life. His inclination towards the native culture lured him to be lingered about yet in the search of his personal identity or self actualization or the support of the host country, Subhash was befriended with Holly and her only son Joshua who was the resulted child of her first sex with her husband, Keith but the conjugal life of Keith and Holly was not comfortable. Now, Subhash has started to seek his great expectations from Holly but she left him for her husband Keith for the sake of Joshua, her only child not herself. It was an emotional shock to him and another emotional shock was waiting for him with the news of his brother’s death. When he was

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about to complete his graduation, he was informed through a letter from his parents in Calcutta that Udayan was shot dead by the police in an encounter. Both of the news torn him by heart and created a diasporic sensibility of unbelongingness as he has neither hopes of Holly's emotional support nor he has been strong in his native land by his brother's support. Now he has felt the responsibility of Gauri, his brother's wife, to take her in his care. Being educated and responsible personality, Subhash decided to support Gauri who was pregnant and tortured at the time by his parents in the curse of widowhood which can be caused by his social consciousness or being affected by the western culture. He proposes her to get married with and she is found agree in her seek of self actualization. Now, he visits Rhode Island with her in the search of his next identity as well as future with his adopted life. When they reached America, they had to face another challenge to establish their new identity of married life. Here, one can read the psychology of Gauri who absorbs American culture of wearing jeans and avoids wearing saris, adjusting herself with the foreign sensibility of self fascination as well as self realization: "Most of the other Indian women wore saris. But in spite of her jeans and boots and belted cardigan, or perhaps because of them Gauri knew, she stood out." (TL, 206) She thinks that she does not need to be afraid in alien culture because she is able to converse in their accent but her proud is shattered when she is considered as the servant of the house even by a driver: "Her appearance and accent caused people to continue to ask her where she came from, and some to form certain assumptions. Once, invited to give a talk in San Diego, she'd been picked up by a driver the university had sent, so that she would be spared the effort of driving herself. She had greeted him at the door when he rang the bell. But the driver had not realized, when she told him good morning, that she was his passenger. He had mistaken her for the person paid to open another person's door. Tell her, whenever she's ready, he'd said." (TL, 286) In this way, one can find the self actualization of Gauri suffering with her over confidence of foreignness but no doubt she returns with her chances of better education in the care of Otto Weis. After sometime, Gauri gave birth to a female child, named as Bela from the previous pregnancy of Udayan. After its birth, Subhash wishes for one more child from him for the sake of Bela as well as his own identity in the existing world but Gauri does not agree with as she looks unsure for another child in the world ignoring her self-actualization. Now another hope of Subhash's self realization is crushed out and he again starts to seek his chances to fulfill his wishes as well as his satisfaction in Holly but their meetings have been limited to the exchange of only greetings which disappointed him for his expectations.

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Further, Gauri is found taking interest in proceeding her education for graduation in order to fascinate herself and her new identity for her self-actualization. So, she decides to leave Bela in the care of Subhash when the child was only five yet he agrees with and she started to study philosophy in the especial care of professor Otto Weiss who encourages her to get doctorate and she does it. Now, after her self-actualization with splendid education, Gauri wishes for establishing her next identity and she has no more interest to take care of Bela for which Subhash is enough in her eyes as he has given her silent emotional treatment. Meantime, Subhash heard the news that his father died but he could not visit Calcutta leaving Gauri and Bela in America because both of them are an accountability for him and the most dominant problem before him was Bela, not at the age of understanding and surviving alone at home in the absence of her parents as Gauri was alienated from them in the seek of self-realization. But the emotional attachment of the native home in Calcutta compelled him to revisit his home in India and at last he decided to visit Calcutta on the condition of his mother, Bijoli that she should not explain anything regarding Udayan to Bela, otherwise she would be distressed and disappointed. The plan was set and Subhash and Bela revisited India, leaving Gauri in America with her pretension of education engagement and started to pass their time at home but unfortunately and ironically, one day, Bela asked Subhash indicating the picture of Udayan, who is he?, consequently he has to narrate the identity of the tagged picture. He introduced the picture to Bela as her deceased uncle, hiding the reality from her. It was his another false commitment but the diasporic situation of Subhash demands it or it can be taken as his destiny that the thing he wants to conceal for the sake of identity, comes before to be revealed or falsified. All these incidents of Subhash and Gauri reveal the fact that Diaspora has to suffer from the identity crisis as well as the cultural crisis prevailed in the self-actualizing world of alienation and isolation. And no doubt the role of destiny can't be ignored in the alienation of Diaspora. After passing sometimes in Calcutta, both of them visited Rhode Island, America and found Gauri lost leaving behind a letter in the room for them indicating Subhash as the best father for the kid and her better interest in California to establish her own identity through her self-actualization for her education which can't be judged appropriately as suffering and recovering from psychological problems, Bela completed her graduation and started to live nomadic life, traveling around the United States of America with her principles of environment which indicates the truthful features of diasporic life. Gauri earned a great name and fame in her study and found a permanent job in one of the Claremont Colleges

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but lives by herself on the lesbian relationship with Lorna, a curious research scholar under her supervision, preparing her dissertation on Naxalist Movement which shows her silent interest of her destiny. Further, the readers come to know the fact that Bela visits Subhash and her teacher, Elise, who was also in her relationship, at an interval. One day, she informs Subhash that she was going to be mothered for a child whose father was unknown to her which shocked Subhash but after being relieved from such tensed mentality, he narrated the incidents of Udayan and Gauri to her which made her upset and compelled her to keep maintain her relation with Subhash at Rhode Island. After a short period of time she gave birth to a female child and named her Meghna. In her later years, Gauri was asked to divorce from Subhash legally and she agrees for and afterwards, she met Bela and Meghna but her meeting can't be assimilated with because Bela is not ready to excuse Gauri for her mistakes due to self-actualization or self-fascination which made Bela with her daughter to live in alienation and isolation. Then Gauri is found visiting Calcutta again but it was full of despair and despondency, living in alienation and isolation in her locality and at last she proceeded her steps on committing suicide which shows that self-actualization of Jhumpa Lahiri is unable to survive with while Bharati Mukherjee accepts self-actualization and survives with her struggle for establishing her self identity. In the meantime Gauri receives a letter from Bela, revealing the truth of their lives and all the three would have to live in alienation from their local society in the disrupted identifications. In this way, their final tragedy comes to an end with their perception of truth regarding their mischievous activities of diasporic identity. On the other hand, the readers are informed about Subhash who had got married with Elise for his own supports but always passed his life reminding the murder of Udayan and affection of Gauri even at the time of his death. In this way, the novel comes to an end with the note that the second generation immigrants of Lahiri try to fight for their self-actualization into the host country but the native identity always maintains a tinge of sadness which prevents them to be self-actualized for the fascination of the foreignness. To conclude it can be said that the self-actualization of Bharati Mukherjee has been successful in establishing its personal identity positively with the assimilation of personality while the self actualization of Jhumpa Lahiri seems to struggle against the willingness of nativity. The present discussion of the self actualization of Diaspora can be supported with the consideration of Peter Townsend who thinks it as : "An extra ordinary variety of psycho-social disorders, including loss of self, anxiety states, anomie, despair,

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depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, powerless, meaningless, isolation, pessimism and loss of belief or value.” (Peter, 325)

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