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**Rise and Growth of Indian Women Diasporic Writers in English:  
A Detailed Study of Their Contribution**

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**Abstract**

Diaspora means a voluntary or forced displacement of a community that shares a strong cultural, emotional or religious connection to a shared homeland while residing in foreign region. Diasporic literature highlights the literary works of those authors who migrated to another country for economic or academic benefit but their works reflect their umbilical connection to homeland, native culture, traditional values, pains of displacement. Diasporic writing captures the diverse experiences of de-territorialization and re-territorialization of the immigrants. The rise and growth of Indian women diasporic writers is a remarkable literary evolution. Moving from post-colonial themes of displacement and identity crisis to contemporary explorations of global citizenship, several women authors have transformed global literature by highlighting the immigrant experience, cultural hybridity, and the female voice in a foreign land. Emerging from a legacy of post-colonial displacement, authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anita Rao Badami, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Meena Alexander have powerfully documented themes of cultural shock, fractured identity and gender dynamics across the hyphenated immigrant experience. This research paper delves deep into the nuances of diaspora writing by Indian origin women writers who have enriched the literary canon by their creativity. Rooted in Indian cultural heritage yet shaped by Western thoughts, these writers have explored in vivid detail the experiences of immigrants, cultural dislocation, problems of assimilation, identity crisis and the tension between acclimatization in a new culture and preservation of own cultural roots.

**Keywords:** Migration, Diaspora, Identity Crisis, Immigration, Assimilation, Diasporic Writers, Acculturation, Host Culture, Native Culture, Cultural Heritage

## **Introduction**

The Greek etymology of diaspora initially restricted itself to refer to the scattering, dispersing or migration of the Jews post the Holocaust, but now the term diaspora incorporates the experiences of the immigrants from all over the world. Diaspora is actually a voluntary or involuntary movement of people from their homelands to settle in a new region that is socially, geographically and culturally different. To put it differently, diaspora may be defined as dislocation of a community from their homeland towards relocation into a foreign region or land. Having arrived in a new geographical and cultural region, the diasporic people negotiate between two cultures—the old one and the new one. Consequently, the diasporic culture is one of amalgamation of two different cultures. Diasporic writing captures the diverse experiences of de-territorialization and re-territorialization of the immigrants. Diasporic literature is all about, to quote Pramod Nayar, “a negotiation with a retreating history, past, traditions and customs” and looking forward to “a future, seeking new vistas, new chances” (188). The dual characteristic mode of diasporic literature has been marvellously captured by Salman Rushdie: What is the best thing about migrant people...? I think it is their hopefulness... And what's the worst thing? It's the emptiness of one's baggage. We've come unstuck from more than land. We've floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time” (91). Indian women writers on diaspora can be divided into three sections—1) the pioneers like Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya 2) the transnational shift writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni and 3) contemporary writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander and Sunetra Gupta. The earliest prominent voices focused heavily on the clash between Eastern traditions and Western modernization, grappling with culture shock, alienation, and nostalgia. Indian women novelists have played a vital role in exploring diasporic consciousness in their writing. It is as if these writers have rediscovered themselves when they are out of India and their writing focused on displacement and sociocultural bond with their homeland in order to cope with the ongoing process of multi-ethnic acculturation. Social identity is formed in society where we live and it is based on specific cultural genres and domains. Dasan reflected on multiculturalism and transnationalism in the view of Indian diasporic writing as: “The current Indian English novel vis-s-vis diasporic Indian writing has started embracing multiculturalism and pluralism in the midst of cross-fertilization of ideas and new forms of cultural exchanges of humanity's drift towards transnational cultural and social identity, thanks to globalization.”

### **Rise and Growth of Indian Women Writers on Diaspora**

Indian English literature, specifically women's fiction has flourished from 1980s onwards with the emergence of great women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri etc who have proven their creative excellence in multiple forms of genres such as fiction, novels, poetry, drama. These women writers incorporate out of box thinking in their work and instead of depicting victimization, marginalization, alienation of woman, they tried to present this migration journey as a step towards self-awareness. Some of these have prestigious feathers in their cap such as Kiran Desai have received Booker Prize while Jhumpa Lahiri was awarded by Pulitzer Prize. Many of the diasporic women novelists write, to use Rushdie's phrase, about their "imaginary homelands" through the lens of nostalgia. The diasporic writers are, to quote Rushdie exactly:

exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible one, imaginary homelands, India's of the mind... my India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions.

Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Anita Rau Badami, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and Suniti Namjoshi are the distinguished Indian diasporic women writers. Fictional works of these Indian women novelists explored their own theory, style, privileging multiple visions through creative and critical thinking and own perspective. Their works are based on themes such as isolation and displacement due to migration, nostalgia, search for self, controversies and complexities both in personal and social life. The diasporic women writers' work leads to self-discovery. William Safran explained six features of diaspora such as dispersal from homeland to other regions, collective memories of homeland, alienation in 'other' or 'foreign' region, nostalgia for homeland, strong desire to restore home country and self-consciousness with the homeland. Renowned Indian women diasporic writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra

Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sunetra Gupta and many more explore cultural consciousness, identity crisis in an authentic manner. To quote Makarand Paranjape, diasporic consciousness is the result of “the whole importance of all diaspora and its potential for creating a new kind of culture arises out of such a crossing of boundaries. The diaspora then must involve a cross-cultural or cross civilizational passage. It is only such a crossing that results in the unique consciousness of the diasporic.”

Kamala Markandaya published ten novels including *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1956), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffer Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), *Pleasure City* (1982). She is renowned diasporic writer and depicted post-colonial themes such as encounter in between the east and the west culture in her novels. She labelled herself as an expatriate and wrote aggressively on issues of modern Indian issues such as marriage, social discrimination and rural community. Her *Nectar in a Sieve* is the bestseller in which she represented struggle of Nathan, Rukmini and their children as the representatives of rural India who suffered due to industrialization. Her contribution through this novel is the success story of Indian English literature. Her novel *Some Inner Fury* has an autobiographical touch in which she explored love story of a woman with English man. *A Silence of Desire* highlighted on social classes in the form of middle-class Indian marriage issues. The theme of clash between faith and science is presented through Sarojini and Dandekar, a middle-class couple (Agrawal, 2014). Kamala Markandaya projected social hierarchy as a common theme in majority of her works.

Anita Desai is the versatile personality in Indian English literary world. She was shortlisted thrice for the prestigious Booker Prize and was honoured by Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for her famous work *Fire on the Mountain*. She has also received the British Guardian Prize for *The Village by the Sea*. She was the recipient of the Padma Bhushan award in 2014. Anita Desai in her works represented diasporic-feminine sensibility and psychology of women through female characters and their inner strive for an identity. Her *Baumgartner's Bombay*, *Fasting Feasting*, *The Zigzag Way* and *Bye Bye Blackbird* reveal the characteristics of diaspora fiction. In *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1971) Anita Desai nostalgically depicted alienation, expatriation, identity crisis and the character's perspective towards their 'homeland' (India) and her 'new' country (England). *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) reveals all the characteristics of diaspora fiction. She deals with the character of a migrant Austrian Jew in India.

*Fasting, Feasting* (1999) takes up theme of post-colonial fiction: the encounter of East with the West. It is reflecting cultural diversity representing specifically in between India and America.

Bharati Mukherjee is the distinguished author of Indian diaspora who created space for herself in worldwide literary world by representing Indian English literature. She depicted Indian women characters, their struggles, quest for identity, and at the end 'free bird' in new nation. Her work is the mirror of experiences of South Asian immigrants who settled in America, she presented her personal experiences as an immigrant in America through different characters. *Jasmine* (1989) is about an illegal immigrant Jasmine, a young Indian village girl. It reveals expatriation and immigration on alien land by Indian girl. Her *Leave it to Me* (1997) is a purely American and about men-women relations. *The Holder of the World* (1997) is about the search of a diamond called the 'Emperor's Tear.' She has represented cultural diversity by portraying Indian woman in her *Desirable Daughters* (2002). It is the manifesto of diaspora which deals with an identity of Asian-American. It also concentrates on the problems of migration, obsession of marriage, and lust for wealth, fame, fashion and life style addictions. She has covered many moods of immigrants like nostalgia, frustration, isolation, alienation etc. Her writing is the depiction of phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriate.

Another eminent writer of Indian diaspora is Suniti Namjoshi, living in UK. It has been observed that Indian diasporic writers have dexterously recreated the Indian mythology in their own works and Suniti Namjoshi is one of the names who used Panchtantra stories in her famous collection of fables *Feminist Fables* (1981) in which she depicted victimization, gender discrimination, isolation, quest for identity, commodification of woman by patriarchal society through the lens of feminist. Her *Conversations of Cow* (1985) is a novella portraying lesbian identity in the form of lesbian feminism as the main theme through the characters Suniti and Bhadravati. In *Mothers of Maya Diip* (1989), Suniti tried to present matriarchal society by challenging the patriarchal society. In her *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth* (2000) she explored diasporic consciousness through own childhood experiences. In *Goja*, she revealed her lesbian identity in front of two women, her grandmother and Goja, her maid. Her works reflected on quest for identity from Indian perspective, feminist perspective and lesbian perspective through western experiences. Her famous works

include *Building Babel* (1986), *The Blue Donkey Fables* (1988), *Saint Suniti and the Dragon* (1993), *Sycorax: New Fables and Poems* (2006).

Indian-American author Meena Alexander is a leading poetess, a novelist and a prose writer are known for her *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997). She creatively shared her own diasporic experiences, her journey of migration from India to Sudan, to USA. Like her life journey, her poems also have multiple layers evoking multiple themes. Her poems are intensely self-conscious and evoke layers of meaning with minimal words. The issues of exile, identity crisis, search for roots, migration, emptiness, frustration, east-west culture and discrimination are discussed from a much broader perspective. Her autobiographical memoir *Fault Lines* is the representation of immigrant experiences due to relocations, expatriation and quest for stability. She is “a woman poet, a woman poet of colour, a South Indian woman poet who makes up lines in English, a postcolonial language...” (Alexander, 2003).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the leading writers of diaspora, in her American Book Award winning first collection of short stories, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) beautifully presents the diasporic consciousness, rootlessness, nostalgia, questioning, and cultural conflict of the immigrants as they arrive in the western world. In this brilliant collection, which contains eleven short stories, Divakaruni's focus is mainly on women caught between two worlds, their dejection and disillusionment and adaptation to such conditions. Besides, it evaluates their attitude and approach toward life, abandonment or preservation of their cultural values. Each tale has a freshness and uniqueness of diasporic consciousness. In the majority of the stories, the author skilfully narrates the stories of Indian women immigrants living in the perpetual socio psychological conflict. Divakaruni belongs to the first generation of Indian immigrants in the United States who has spent a part of her life in India and has carried the baggage of her native land offshore. She has keenly observed the postcolonial society of India as well as the challenges of diaspora abroad. *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) deals with trans-culturalism and *Sister of My Heart* (1999) depicts the cultural diversity in between the East and the West.

Anita Rau Badami is an Indo-Canadian diaspora writer. Her critically acclaimed debut novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996) explores the sweet-sour nostalgic confrontation of mother-daughter relationship through mutability of memory while focusing on Indian domestic life and life in Canada. The relation of diaspora and memory contains important critical and may be even subversive potentials. Memory

can transcend the territorial logic of dispersion and return and emerge as competing source of diasporic identity. In this novel the quest for identity is reflected through the mutability of memory. The novel attempts to reflect the sensible Saroja's heart which longs to be in the company of her spouse during his trips of inspection. *The Hero's Walk* (2001) is about loss, disappointment and frustration. It is also about the transmutations of a millennia old culture. In this novel the writer expresses the emotional tensions that present in the South Asian diaspora. The story is about a Canadian raised orphan Nandhana return to her grandparents who live in a village. The young girl Nandhana faced many problems in a very new place of her grandparents. Her grandparents disowned her mother, when she got married with a white man. At the young age of seven Nandhana has lost her parents. Maya refused the arranged marriage and she ran away from her home. And she settled in Vancouver, Canada. Then she and her husband met with an automobile accident. After their death Sripathi has to take care of his granddaughter. Nandhana is troubled by adjusting to the Indian culture and customs. *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006) is set in Canada. She has presented three women characters who became the victim of political turmoil caused due to India-Pakistan partition in 1947 and later on in the year 1985 when the demand for an independent Sikh State called Khalistan came into violent existence.

Sunetra Gupta (1965) is one of the leading authors representing Indian diaspora with some memorable fictional works like *Memories of Rain* (1992), *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993), *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995), *A Sin of Colour* (1999) and *So Good in Black* (2008). *The Glassblower's Breath* presents the problems of alienation, dislocation, hybridity and the loss of the sense of belonging. It is about the young intellectual Indian woman who faces these problems in Calcutta, New York and London. *A Sin of Colour* is a family saga which shuttles in between Britain and India. It is an exploration of family duty, love, race and Bengali culture. *So Good in Black* deals with the problems of migration and self-definition exploring quest for identity as main theme.

Uma Parameswaran, renowned Indo-Canadian writer has critically analysed the diasporic consciousness in the following way: "The first is nostalgia for the homeland, left behind mingled with fear in strange land. The second is a phase in which one is so busy in adjusting to the new environment that there is little creative output. The third phase is shaping of diaspora existence by involving themselves in ethno-culture issues. The fourth is when they have arrived and started participating in

the larger world of politics and national issues” (108). Jhumpa Lahiri as a diasporic Indian American writer perfectly fits to Parameswaran’s concept of diasporic consciousness. She made her literary debut with the marvellous short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* which won her the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 2000. It has nine stories revolving around the South-Asian immigrants dealing with Indo-American encounters. Lahiri has won The Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award in 2008 for *Unaccustomed Earth*. It is also collection of short stories based on human behaviour and emotions in relationships. In *The Namesake* Lahiri has explored with utmost dexterity and originality, the emotional attachments and psychological feelings of the first-generation immigrants, Ashima and Ashoke and the second-generation immigrants, Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi. The novel wonderfully demonstrates how the idea of homeland, being far away from home, haunts the immigrants and creates an atmosphere of nostalgia and loneliness. In this age of transmigration, ‘home’ signifies its impermanence, displacement, and dispossession. The idea of home is more conveyed as a sense of being between the two places instead of rooted one. For instance, Ashima's sense of being at home is connected with her original homeland, i.e. India but Gogol, Sonia and Moushumi are supposed to be attached with the USA, their birth place. The character of Ashima throws light on the psychology of immigrants who become the victim of identity crisis; neither they shrug off their root culture and identity nor they wholeheartedly accept their new identity as diasporic community and assimilate in the host culture. Ashima travelled between two cultures, adjusts and adapts in a new culture and moves toward an identity that transcends culture. Reflecting on the theme of identity crisis among the characters in the novel *The Namesake*, noted critic Jagdish Batra emphatically says: “The Namesake is about this perpetual dilemma faced by immigrants as they struggle to maintain their identities while trying to shake them off at the same time. The first generation’s story was about adaptation and learning acculturing and also discovering new things about themselves. The second generation finds itself presented with two conflicting realities and cultures and sets of expectations – one of the host countries through the socio-cultural surroundings and the other of the home country through their parents” (Batra, 50).

Kiran Desai, a diasporic novelist differs from her mother Anita Desai, in her artistic exploration. Desai’s debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is set in a small dusty town of Shahkot in North India and revolves around the family of Sampath Chawla. The novel presents the problematic survival in an adopted language through eccentric characters. Her masterpiece and the Booker Prize

winning book, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) depicted the sense of belonging and quest for identity as main themes. In this novel, she elucidated the clash of culture, religion, race and gender, the consequences of colonialism and nationalism.

### **Conclusion**

The comprehensive survey of Indian women diasporic novelists in English makes us aware of the fact that they have created a milestone in the arena of English fiction. These female diasporic writers highlighted diasporic elements including Indian culture, alienation, assimilation, shared history and myth, development of ethnic groups, yearning for the comforts of home and the desire to visit the imagined ancestral home, upholding religious convictions, and others. Acculturation and integration are crucial for illustrating the experiences of the diaspora. It is reasonable to state as a conclusion that diasporic Indian English literature is a significant genre that accurately captures the experiences and mind-sets of the Indian diaspora in a broad sense. It provides that specific diaspora with emotional comfort and creates room for conversations regarding immigration from India. Being the representatives of the Indian diaspora, these women writers are successful in addressing the readers of Indian English literature in a sensitive, unpretentious style while carrying a sense of the universal experience of immigration. In conclusion it may be well said that these Indian origin diasporic women writers have contributed to sustainable growth in India through cultural exchange, representation and empowerment, economic impact, education and awareness, and cross-border collaboration and their writings have the potential to shape narratives, challenge stereotypes, inspire social change, and foster understanding between different communities, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive society at national as well as international level.

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