

Dialectics of Ostracism and Identity Expedition in the Select Postcolonial Literary Texts

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Introduction

Identity crisis has always enjoyed a defining significance in the thematic framework of the Indo-Anglican novels. The novels of R. K. Narayan, Mulkraj Anand and Raja Rao redesigned the techno-thematic fabric of Indian English fiction and laid the foundation of the new Indian English fiction. The postcolonial age represented by these three novelists was chiefly a quest for identity along with different dimension of socio-political and economic order of India. This constant quest for identity and its subsequent assimilation by the marginalized has been discoursed in this research which aims to explore R.K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* in the postcolonial light to discuss the issue of the marginalization of women and immigrants, and their quest for identity in the society. *The Namesake* portrays the painful and tormenting experiences of the immigrants who have a constant sense of dislocation and desire of belonging. Similarly, the literature across the globe is full of the images of women, who have suffered due to their gender/class/caste or race and the story of *Rosie* in *The Guide* is one such story.

Discourse on Ostracism and Identity Expedition in *The Guide* and in *The Namesake*

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* has probed deep into the psychological turmoil of Rosie to present her predicament, quandary and quest for identity in full intensity. Ujjwal Jana in his article *Mapping out Gendered Space: A Study in Narayan's The Guide* (2009:98) says that the two figures, Rosie and Raju's mother, are ostracized in their respective homes

and are pathetic victims of male hegemony. Rosie has been marginalized because of her family background and in spite of her higher education and good looks she was not able to get a suitable match. Though Marco pretends to be a liberal minded westernized intellectual and marries Rosie, the marriage is a failure. Here, Rosie's character has been undertaken to study the problem of female emancipation and it appears that the women owe their characteristic position in society mainly to two factors-economic dependence and mute servility. Rosie because of her low caste sailed unanchored on the troubled sea of life and it seemed that she would never be able to reach ashore.

Jhumpa Lahiri has documented the painful and tormenting emotions of being an immigrant and in exile in her novel *The Namesake*. She apertures and orifices the yearnings of the characters by demonstrating their edginess, restiveness and the nous of dislodgment. Predominantly, it is through the first-generation characters of Ashok and Ashima that Lahiri has presented the immigrants' struggles and constant wavering between two different cultures. As both the writers have very poignantly presented the pangs of women in their writing; it seems quite relevant to have a brief discussion about the marginalization of women and the efforts of their assimilation as well as emancipation.

Reconnoiter of the Dialectics of Ostracism and Identity Expedition in R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

R.K. Narayan started writing in the 1930's and Dom Moraes called Narayan "by far the best writer of English fiction that his country has ever produced" (Alam: 231). Probably, he is the most entertaining and distinguished of contemporary writers anywhere. His portrayal of life is realistic in physical details and at the same time suggestive of depths beneath. The chief strength of Narayan lies in his comic vision and the creation of Malgudi authenticates his creative genius.

R. K. Narayan explores the idea of the crisis of identity along various dimensions. *The Guide* (1958) is one of the most important novels of Narayan where the east-west

confrontation plays a decisive role in the cast of the narrative and thus the crisis of identity owes its genesis to the ideological conflict. Here, it is quite pertinent to look back in the traditional social structure of Indian society which ingrains the servile, sycophantic, groveling, toadying, obsequious mentality in the fair sex and endeavors to continue it.

Women's Issues in Indian Society

Women's issues are central to every society primarily because they go on to define all human relationships and social constructs. However, so far as Indian society is concerned, the marginalization of women is not only the outcome of historical forces but is also bound up with the power of myth and tradition, and has been resistant to change. A woman is considered blessed if she has a good marriage, children and financial security. Our society conditions girls to believe that real life consists of getting married, getting children, promoting one's husband's career by planning huge, endless meals for overfed people, buying the latest modal of this and that and so on and so forth.

It is in this regard that Mahashewta Devi in an interview said that "Even after fifty years we are at a point of no return. Today India has an extension of a medieval system". Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* shares quite a similar view when she presents the paradox of woman's life very effectively by saying that "Imaginatively she is of the highest importance practically she is completely insignificant, she pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. Men need her, love her, worship her, and write about her but they do so in relation to their own selves" (1929:25). This statement represents exact position of women in society whether urban or rural.

Marginalization of Women, Feminism and the Stereotypes of Feminity

More than hundred years ago feminism challenged women to concede that they are isolated individuals and they are supposed to shape their identities by becoming aware of themselves as individuals without any resort to stereotypes (Dubois, 2007:30). This search for identity is the first step towards her being human. Identity as defined by the self also encompasses gender, homeland, geography, occupation and her role within the community. It is in this regard that Rajeshwari articulates "... within the family that the girl children experience their first feelings of rejection or discrimination on account of their sex... recognition and articulation of this oppression is the first step in a feminist consciousness-raising..." (Rajan, 2004:81).

Feminist criticism records countless opinions on woman by early feminists and social critics. Simone de Beauvoir inquires "What is a woman?" and charges "For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less" (Beauvoir, 1949:13). Carolyn worries "I sometimes felt that we were just talking to ourselves when we should have been working in the public realm to change the political system known as patriarchy..." (Heilbrun, 1997:16). Women in literature and in real life have struggled to be accepted as wholly human as men. Here, Mary EU Mann's views are quite significant as she draws attention to the eleven major stereotypes of feminity i.e. formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy, the witch and the shrew, represented by male writers and critics (Ellman, 1968:55). Ancient Vedic literature such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* portray women as two stereotypes; Sita the submissive and Draupadi the defiant confronting the male ego. The only reason to look at these remarks is that they depict the exact position of women in our society and also depicts how even after seventy three years of independence, women in India have to fight for their equal rights and identity.

In spite of the continuation of this 'Angel in the House' image there are some systematic efforts which are directed towards the elevation, augmentation and enrichment of women's condition in the society and a brief discussion of them will bring some more light on these endeavors.

Postcolonialism: A Protest of the Marginalized

Postcolonialism is basically a protest of the marginalized sections of the society through which they try to assert and regain their lost identity. In the course of her struggle for existence, Rosie developed courage, self-respect and won space in the modern Indian society. She proves that she is not a bull of oil machine, parrot of juggler or animal or a circus party. Rosie's attempt of positioning herself as a recognizable human being with an identity of her own is successful as she moves from the periphery to the center. She faces all the opposing compulsions which weighed heavily on her life and propelled herself along a path usually uncharted for women in the Indian society.

Rosie's Transformation from Docile, Innocent Indian Woman into Nalini-an Artist and Independent Woman

Having been born into a family of temple dancers who "are viewed as public women" (75) Rosie had no option but to seize any opportunity of marriage. Her marriage is quite unconventional and funny. Rosie recollects that "I had myself photographed clutching the scroll of the University citation in one hand, and sent it to the advertiser. Well, we met, he examined me and my certificate, we went to a Registrar and got married" (72). She marries an archaeologist husband with no human warmth. "Dead and decaying things seemed to unloose his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs" (72).

Confined to a mechanical existence Rosie's instincts for dance cannot find fulfilment till she finds a patron in Raju and moves out of the walls of the family. Marco's apathy and indifference towards her feelings and desires take such a cruel form that Rosie readily receives the reader's sympathy. As events proceed, she gradually rises to fame.

Throughout the novel her passion for dance has been so intense and her devotion has been so sincere that her aberrations are viewed with kind understanding. Time and again her repentant self is brought to the forefront of the narrative through her repeated brooding over her husband. C.D. Narsimhaiah remarks in this context that "... especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint, Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the Feminine Principle in life" (153).

During all her unethical transactions Rosie remains the figure of a docile, innocent Indian woman and her inner self seems not to have been stained by what she does on the surface. It is after Raju's imprisonment that she becomes a completely pathetic figure by being virtually alone in the world. She tries her best to save Raju as an obligation and duty of hers. Her sins, if not from an ethical, yet from an existential standpoint are vindicated and her sufferings combined with her moral lapses, makes her strikingly different from other women characters in Narayan's novels. Her predicament verges almost on the tragic end. Here, it is quite noteworthy that Rosie is never condemned for being ambitious or for having an extra marital relationship. Narayan's handling of Rosie seems affectionate and understanding. We discover that she believes in karma as she states that "I felt all along you were not doing the right things. This is *karma*. What can we do?" (192). And then, Rosie is easily absolved from all responsibilities of her own actions.

In the end of the novel we see a reversal in Rosie's character. Rosie is transformed into Nalini-an artist and independent woman. Raju led an immoral life due to the corrupting influence of the west and he is reformed. And this desire to be purified is internal as well as spiritual. Nalini moves from the margin to the centre and this is interesting as a part of subaltern studies. Raju dies as a pious soul, typical of Indian mysticism. The way these two major characters of the novel return to Indian ways of life, though coming from totally different background gives unity to their identity.

Reconnoiter of the Dialectics of Ostracism and Identity Expedition in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*

Young Indian writers of the post-colonial era have succeeded in drawing the world attention with their psychoanalytical methods of characterization. Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Sashi Tharoor, Pankaj Mishra, Rajkamal Jha, Geeta Hariharan, Amit Choudhury, Manila Suri, Anita Nair, David Davidhar, Radhika Jha have written masterpieces which can be termed as literature of encounter. The Semitic creativity is enhanced by a significant enrichment of the narrative in the hands of young experts like Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri who employ their cultural, racial past as well as familial past as their recurring theme.

Reconnaissance of the *The Namesake* as Postcolonial Diasporic Fiction

One of the best ways through which *The Namesake* can be understood well is to reconnoiter it as a postcolonial diasporic fiction. Diaspora is an important area of postcolonial studies. The traditional notion of Diaspora indicates a certain dislocation from the normal or natural place of living or way of life. The literature of the Indian diaspora is the body of writing in English which is being written by writers living in places outside India. The writings of Indian diaspora have, of late, been the focus of much literary acclaim.

The very idea of a diasporic literature is pregnant with two relationships- the relationship to its motherland which gives rise to nostalgia and reminiscences and secondly, the forged relationship with the new land and its people which gives rise to conflicts and split personalities. The writings of any diaspora are full of these. They all talk of alienation, exile, loneliness, the cultural conflicts, the sense of rejection by the host community, their efforts at assimilation sprinkled with descriptions of back home which become sometimes romantic outpourings of nostalgia and longing.

Turning to the novel it can be seen that the story follows the lives of the Gangulis, an Indian family living in America. It explores the consequences of immigration through the experiences of those characters who exist simultaneously within two cultures. The novel describes the struggles between first-generation Bengali immigrants to the United States and their children particularly their son, Gogol. The story begins when Ashok and Ashima leave Calcutta, India and settle in Central Square, Massachusetts.

Tension between Generations within One Family

In this novel Lahiri also looks at the tension which often exists between different generations within one family and the breakdown in cultural traditions. The first-generation immigrants are invariably more obsessed by the home they have left behind and always suffer from a feeling of being uprooted which makes it more difficult for them to adjust. Generally, these difficulties are felt more by the women, especially when they do not try to enter the workforce of the adopted land or better themselves by study or otherwise. As merely homemakers, the sense of emotional exile becomes even more painful. Each of the characters has to struggle to cope with his/her efforts at assimilation and survival. For instance, Ashima starts working at a local library to keep herself busy.

First- Generation's Survival through Ghettoization

We begin to see quite early that Ashok and Ashima cope with the feelings of loneliness and exile by trying to live closer to other Bengali families. In other words ghettoization is their means of survival. Interacting only with other Bengalis, clinging closely to their cultural and traditional values, they isolate themselves from the mainstream American society. They never learn to belong with the result that even after twenty years Ashima thinks of Calcutta as home.

When they move from Cambridge to Dedham, the ghetto also gradually moves and soon "... all the Cambridge Bengalis have moved to place like Dedham and Framingham and Lexington and Winchester, to houses with backyards and drive ways.

They have met so many Bengalis that there is rarely a Saturday free, so that for the rest of his life Gogol's childhood memories of Saturday evenings will consist of a single, repeated scene: thirty odd people in a modestly sized suburban house, the children watching television or playing board games in a basement, the parents eating and conversing in the Bengali their children don't speak among themselves" (62-63). This is a typical example of ghettoization and it causes the children to suffer from split identities.

The First- Generation Migrants' Trip to Homeland

The first-generation immigrants try to keep their contacts with India alive to a degree by making trips to their homeland. Initially, it is also done as parents are still there. But as time passes, they begin to settle down in the new country and these trips become less frequent. Once they have a family of their own, their visits become fewer. Gogol had been to India three times till the age of ten but when his father gates his sabbatical the family decides to go to Calcutta for eight months regardless of the children's school.

Ashima's Assimilation with American Culture

With her husband's death or rather earlier when he moved to Cleveland Ashima learns to live alone. This, in some way, compels her to assimilate herself to the new culture more than she had till then. She takes up a job in library, makes friend with her American colleagues and learns from them that "parents had to stop assuming that their children would return faithfully for the holidays". But she is unable to give up her Indian identity and expectations to the extent that her children have been able to give. This is due to the difference between the two generations.

On the whole, it can be said that the novel deals with the search for identity, sense of alienation and exile experienced by the Indians in American culture. Despite their continuous efforts of assimilation, somewhere deep down they remain very Indian and that is why they end up confused and conflicted. Thus, they are not able to belong

wholly to either. In one of her interviews Lahiri confesses that she has “inherited a sense of exile from her parents”.

The Problem of Assimilation and Coping with the Second- Generation

It is a foregone conclusion that the second- generation would find the coping far easier as they are more easily able to assimilate. Having been born in the country of their migration they are able to become a part of that culture more easily. But they face a greater sense of rejection as they are constantly reminded by their peers that they are different, that they do not belong and all this leads to a great deal of conflict in the minds of these impressionable children born and brought up in a foreign land.

When it is thought about the problems of coping, we get a glimpse of this quite early in the novel where Ashok meets Mr. Ghosh in the train who is a Bengali and has returned from England because his “wife was inconsolably miserable abroad” (pg. 15). Yet he is full of reverence for the country and advises the young Ashok to pack up his bags and go to England or America before he is saddle with a wife and then it may be too difficult. When Ashok goes to America, Ashima, his wife discovers soon enough that “being a foreigner... a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling of out of sorts” (49).

Futility of Holidays for the Second- Generation Migrants

Neither the children, Gogol and Sonia think of these holidays as something relevant to their lives, nor their friends ever showed any interest in knowing where they went or what sort of holiday they had. After the eight month break when they were back “they call up their up their American friends, who are happy enough to see them but ask them nothing about where they have been. And so the eight months are put behind, quickly shed, quickly forgotten. The clothes worn for a special occasion or for a season that has passed, suddenly become cumbersome, irrelevant to their lives” (88).

At a young age they realized that India does not give them the sense of belonging which they have in America. Born and bred abroad they are more at home in that country. They cannot think of India as home like their parents can. Yet, when they are in America, they are not fully integrated in that society either. So, this sense of not belonging becomes ingrained at an early age. Their identity crisis is thus more pronounced as they have always known America as home and find India strange and more foreign than America. It is ironic to see that they never get acceptance as American citizens, the Americans do not accept them. Jhumpa Lahiri tells us that in one of her interviews how she answered that "she is an American" and she was questioned still further and asked "but, from where?" So the American identity she gets is a hyphenated one where she has been recognized as she is Indo-American. This sort of racial alienation haunts all the Indian children that crowd the pages of this novel with the result that in their childhood they grow up wanting to dissociate themselves from all Indian things.

Between the siblings the search for identity is more marked in Gogol's case. It is unfortunate but he grows up hating his name or being asked questions about it which only compounds his problems. When asked if it means anything in India, he hates having to say that there is nothing Indian about it. He finds his name "both absurd and obscure". It even sounds "ludicrous" to him "lacking identity or gravity". He cannot understand why he has been given a Russian name and later in his life he cannot understand why his pet name became his 'good' name. Matters only worsen when he comes to know about Gogol's life. He does not care if he was a great writer. Gogol wishes to get rid of his identity problem by becoming Nikhil once he enters the university. This new identity gives him a sense of freedom and he is able to make himself free from embarrassment.

In the course of the novel Gogol also pairs up with Maxine with whom he meets at a party. The premature death of Gogol's father ends the relationship between them. She couldn't understand why can't she go with him and meet his relatives and family or become a part of the rituals of going to Calcutta to immerse his father's ashes. She allowed him to immerse himself so totally into her culture but when she wants to do the same he doesn't allow her as he feels that the cultural gap is too wide to be bridged.

Conclusion

Following Fanon it can be said that the colonised people or intellectuals of the Third-World must reclaim their past as there is a dire necessity to resist the epistemic violence of marginalization. Thus, an attempt has been made in this research to explore the dialectics of ostracism and the ensuing quest for identity by presenting the struggles and coping strategies of the two most marginalised sections i.e. women and immigrants of the society. Though, this shift from Eurocentric criticism to the postcolonial reading of *The Guide* and *The Namesake* may appear to be conflicting, it is indeed rewarding as it portrays the different perspectives, complexities, changing attitude and depths of human mind. It is through the process of 'consciousness rising' that both Rosie and Ashima endeavour to form an identity and individuality of their own. It is in the course of their struggle for integration and recognition that they developed courage, self-respect and won space in the society. Their exertions of locating themselves as identifiable human beings with an individuality of their own are also to some extent become rewarding. On the whole, it can be said that looking at the evil of marginalization even in the post-colonial world, these novels can be reflected as immediate rejoinder and a form of non-stop social activism by desperately seeking justice for the victims of marginalization as the soul of both these works is hidden in the deep sympathy and respect for human life.

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