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BRIDGING THE HOMELAND AND HOSTLAND THROUGH PHYSICAL JOURNEY:  
READING JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the importance and the role of the physical journey of the immigrants in their life, which is represented in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee. This journey attempts to identify their desire to take a trip towards their homeland. The relative study of these texts establishes that their actual journey helps them to solve their problem of existence in society. This physical journey towards the rootland nourishes their present life. Hostland provides a conflicting experience of attachment and detachment. Through physical journeys, immigrants develop a strong association with their inherited homeland and advance to such integrity that reflects their heterogenous existence.

Key Words: Diaspora, Belongingness, Alienation, Journey , Identity, Memory.

As long as storytelling has existed, there have been the 'return home' tales. Returning home includes a happy ending in the life of human beings. The ancient Indian epic, the Ramayana, includes the return of Sita, who had been abducted by Ravan and taken away to Lanka. The Mahabharata includes the returning of Pandavas. There is the Greek epic of Odysseus' return from the war at Troy to his island home in Ithaca. The actual return to home includes a journey which takes place in the beginning of displacement of an individual.

Journey is a move from the known to the unknown. It is usually for a considerable amount of time, to be calculated in terms of years rather than weeks or months. It may be a traumatic journey due to the certain knowledge that those left behind in South Asia have invested much and are eagerly awaiting news of success. It is such a journey which is away from family, friends, home, nation and country and towards the loneliness, strangeness in a strange land for a promising future. The dominant culture of host land provides immigrants a desire to travel to their ancestral homeland related to their origin to feel connected to the roots and culture. The diasporic writers revolve around their homeland for various reasons. Such as Naipaul who is in a perpetual quest for his roots moves towards India. Rushdie visits India to mythologise its history. Mistry visits and re-visits India for a kind of re-vitalization and to re-energize his painful existence. Bharati Mukherjee's childhood memories harken her time and again. For such movements it is necessary to realise the importance of culture, roots, existence and assimilation. When Gogol is born, Ashima and Ashoke make Plans and saves for Ashima's first trip back home to Calcutta. She shops and buys presents for her family; loses her shopping bag on the subway and finds it again, untouched and pristine:

“Somehow, this small miracle causes Ashima to feel connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible” (43). The idea of leaving hostland for the native land makes them feel elated. Arjun Appadurai observes:

More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the well-spring of the increased rates of migration at every level of social, national, and global life. (6)

The attachment to the culture constitutes food cloth, language, religion, music, dance, legends, customs, and traditions. Their diasporic life can be recognized the way they view their homeland. They celebrate Diwali, Holi, Durga Puja etc with same manner as it is done in India. They show their affection for tv serials and movies. They worship Gods and Goddesses and also claim the magnificence and superiority of their culture. Ashcroft says that

The diasporic production of cultural meanings occurs in many areas, such as contemporary music, film, theatre and dance, but writing is one of the most interesting and strategic ways in which diaspora might disrupt the binary of local and global problematize nation and racial and ethnic formulations of identity. (218)

Global development has succeeded in creating awareness about the home and abroad. Though the process of globalization has not only unsettled people and cultures but has created new identities and connections in terms of both clashes and the associations. Globalization has abolished physical borders. That is why there are frequent physical journey of migrants to their native land. In such journeys the migrants have to maintain a dual identity so that these movements could not harass their identity on both the lands. Their frequency of treading the native land shows their desire to go back to the land of origin. The physical journey becomes the background for the psychological journey that diasporic people undertake. Each stage of the physical journey is allied to an emotional insight, and the inferences are sufficient to bring a stability in the life. Since there has come a considerable change in the outlook and identities of diaspora with the changed global economic, political and cultural scenario, the identities of diasporic individuals and communities cannot be placed only in relation to some homeland to which they all want to return or at all cost must return. Towards the end, the arrangement that Ashima will divide her time between India and America is quite symbolic in the sense that she is connected to both the countries: India is where her roots exist and America is where her children live. In a larger perspective, a young woman who accompanied her husband to a big country without any specific plan for herself, is leaving after having lived a happy life with her husband and raising her two children in that country. She is going to leave now but only with a clear plan of returning.

The physical journey of immigrants to their root lands may be regarded as linear or circular. Sometimes, migrants feel that their past life of homeland was much happier than the life as a minority group on a hostland. Tara comes back to India in Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* as does Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*. Even Mukherjee and Lahiri takes visits to India. Sometimes, this journey, associated with the actual return to the homeland of writers like Amit Chaudhuri who returned to and living, writing in Calcutta after spending several years in Britain, makes this an important aspect of diasporic writing. New technologies and faster communications in the present world have reduced the distances between the land of origin and land of adoption. But the immigrants always imagine for the physical presence in their root land. In doing so, they are searching for the places of personal heritage. This engaging them in such experiences that defines the values, beliefs, and practices of the imagined native land as a diaspora. New technologies and faster communications in the present world have reduced the distances between the land of origin and land of adoption. But the immigrants always imagine for the physical presence in their rootland. In doing so, they are searching for the places of personal heritage. This engaging them in such experience that defines the values, beliefs, and practices of the imagined nativelyland as a diaspora .

Consequently, the homeland return is considered the ambivalent space where one can now attempt to interrupt the dichotomies that have dominated their life as well as the swinging between homeland and host

land. Homi Bhabha has proposed the notion of the Third Space as an ambivalent space where the act of cultural enunciation and of interpretation can take place. He writes,

“The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code...the disruptive temporality of enunciation displaces the narrative of the western nation” (Bhabha 206)

Born in London and raised in Rhode Island in USA, Jhumpa Lahiri, has her roots in India, where her parents were born. In an interview she said: “It’s hard to have parents who consider another place “home”; even after living abroad for 30 years. We were always looking back. So I cannot fully accept America as my homeland. We have no relations here. Whenever I go to India I enjoy the family bondage and always relish being the centre of attention of all the family members in Calcutta.”

The diasporic writers revolve around their homeland for various reasons. Such as Naipaul who is in a perpetual quest for his roots moves towards India. Rushdie visits India to mythologise its history. Mistry visits and re-visits India for a kind of re-vitalization and to re-energize his painful existence. Bharati Mukherjee’s childhood memories harken her time and again. For such movements it is necessary to realise the importance of culture, roots, existence and assimilation. When Gogol is born, Ashima and Ashoke make plans and saves for Ashima’s first trip back home to Calcutta. She shops and buys presents for her family; loses her shopping bag on the subway and finds it again, untouched and pristine: “Somehow, this small miracle causes Ashima to feel connected to Cambridge in a way she has not previously thought possible”(43).

The idea of leaving hostland for the native land makes them feel elated. The novel also depicts a panoramic view of the economic imbalance of a culturally rich and varied country. Poverty peeps in the scenes of Calcutta. Both Ashima and her daughter remove their gold ornaments before boarding a train in India. The novelist also presents a contrast in the way an American and an Indian family greet and feed guest. Gogol and Sonali think about their visit to Calcutta as: "Every few weeks there is a different bed to sleep in, another family to live with, and a new schedule to learn." (54)

On one of their visits to Calcutta, Gogol and Sonia are surprised at the change in their parents. “Within minutes before their eyes Ashok and Ashima slip into bolder, less complicated versions of themselves, their voices louder, their smiles wider, revealing a confidence. Gogol and Sonia never see on Pemberton Road.” (81-82)

The reaction of Ashima and Ashoke reflects their joy and independence in native land. Every few years she visits her hometown, Calcutta, with her children and Ashoke and one year she and her family spend eight months in India for Ashoke’s sabbatical, which she and Ashok love And her children hate.

Ashima has decided to spend Six months Of her life in India, six months in the States... In Calcutta, Ashima will live with her younger brother, Rana,and his wife...in a spacious flat in Salt Lake. In spring and summer she will return to the Northeast, dividing her time among her son, her daughter, and her close Bengali friends. True to the meaning of her name, she will be without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere.(276)

In Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters*, Tara chooses to find her origins by journeying back to India with her son, Rabi. Both of them take a voyage with a vision that booms the imageries used in the tale of the Tree Bride at the beginning of the novel. Tara has an image of kerosene lamps that echoes the opening scene and experiences a spiritual moment of wonder. Tara, who is now a divorced mother, tries to find her identity. She grieves the strain of an immigrant mother. The host country, U.S., and her son, Rabi, are at one side of the bridge, and the longing for the home is on another side. Parvati pleads with Tara to return to India with Rabi before it is too late. According to Auro and Parvati, it is good for Tara to go back to roots otherwise, her son, Rabi, may not be either Indian or American. Thus, Parvati says, " your child isn’t American or Indian and if you stay any longer, you won’t be either” (66).

As Tara visits her roots, returns home to find relief at her father's house. She enquires about her family tree to reveal the life of 'Tree Bride'. The reflective journey is indeed a return to the roots trying for homeland therapy for the disease shoot up in the host land. Tara's journey to the homeland is a quest, and a re-search for her cultural location.

She visits her sister Parvati, enquires about friends and relatives and expresses her longing to support her parents in their old age. Bharati Mukherjee in her making out of cultural metamorphosis, includes the unbending and inflexible pairs between East and West. Her way of life is positioned in the new cultural amalgamation. It is only because of Tara Lata's story which concludes that her identity could be attained through securing her Indian connections and interconnections. In the novel, *Desirable Daughters*, explores how Tara reunifies with her home, family, roots, and tradition in the way of search for her identity. In this way, Tara's visit to Mishtigunj which is her ancestral place, makes her understand the importance of existence of the old home with acquaintance in native land. In contrast to the spiritual satisfaction and mental peace which she experiences in India, she finds materialistic passion of America to be waste and useless. She finds solace in the pious atmosphere of Rishikesh and the banks of Ganges. There is yearning for home to go back and check the native land they have left behind in search of a promising future.

This journey of immigrants assures that the migrants belonged to that place which is always created in the memories. This journey proves to be a quest of self. Through physical journeys, immigrants reclaim their roots to which they have gripped through memories on an alien land. These immigrants are tied to their memories of the past land and helps them to stay abroad till their next visit to ancestral land. The physical journey is not merely a journey to meet people and culture but it is a quest for 'belonging' in terms of meaning and significance.

As Avtar Brah writes:

What is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experiences of pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be differently experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth century England. (192)

New technologies and faster communications in the present world have reduced the distances between the land of origin and land of adoption. But the immigrants always imagine for the physical presence in their root land. In doing so, they are searching for the places of personal heritage. This engaging them in experience that defines the values, beliefs, and practices of the imagined native land as a diaspora. The movement of people involves the circulation of money, technology, goods, information, ideas, lifestyles, etc., what Appadurai describes with the rather shorthand terms mediascapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes and ethnocapes (6).

The physical journey of Homeland connects immigrants to the native place and allows them to explore their history or the first steps towards the journey of belonging. The individual's return to the homeland includes altered circumstances, behaviour as well as reactions. Their identity is also marked by the stamp of host land they have left behind.

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