



IMMIGRANT VOICES IN INDIAN-AMERICAN  
LITERATURE: A STUDY OF THE SELECTED  
WORKS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE, CHITRA  
BANARJEE DIVAKARUNI AND JHUMPA LAHIRI

BY

MARZITA MOHAMED NOOR

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
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Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge  
and Human Sciences  
International Islamic University  
Malaysia

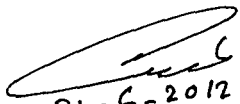
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the immigrant voices in Indian-American literature. My objective is to investigate texts by three American women writers of Indian background: Bharati Mukherjee (1940-), Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni (1956-) and Jhumpa Lahiri (1967-). These women writers share similar themes and concerns in their works which make them ideal writers for this study. The works I have chosen for interrogation are *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) and *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) by Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni, and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003) by Jhumpa Lahiri. The study purports to see if the perceptions and imagination of these immigrant/diasporic writers contribute to our understanding of the immigrant experience itself. The study is based on a qualitative research. It is crucial to determine whether “displaced” Indian writers enable readers to relate to the immigrant experiences better as only an immigrant would be able to empathise with the plight, anxiety and ambivalence of other immigrants. Part of the thesis is also focused on gender discourse as the writers under scrutiny are female writers, and their fictions are often populated by female characters. The fears and traumas experienced by these female migrants in their culturally uprooted circumstance, their process of reconciliation with the new culture, and their overall representation in the works of these women writers have been researched at length in this thesis. The themes and concerns of Indian-American writers are often different from the mainstream American writers as their works deal with multiculturalism, cultural clashes and hybridity, identity crisis, displacement and nostalgia, among others. My theoretical framework employs the post-colonial theory as the main theory. I will also apply the diaspora theory and Third World Feminist theory on the works. The post-colonial theory is used because the books are post-colonial in nature. The diaspora theory is used to show the issues of diaspora and its effects on identity and character. The Third World feminist theory is used because many of the characters in the fictions are female, and so are the authors. Their works are crucial as examples of women who have triumphed in the process of assimilation, among others.

## خلاصة البحث

تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى تحليل الأصوات المهاجرة في الأدب الأمريكي -الهندي-. ولدراسة هذه الفئة من المجتمع، تقوم الباحثة بدراسة نصوص لثلاثة كاتبات هنديات تحملن عبء الشتات، وهن باهاراتي موخيرجي (١٩٤٠م)، شيترا بانارجي ديفكاروني (١٩٥٦م)، وجهومبا لاهيري (١٩٦٧م). هؤلاء الروائيات جمعن عوامل مشتركة عديدة في مواضيعهن ومخاوفهن من خلال أعمالهن، التي جعلتهن مثلاً لهذه الدراسة. وتمثل تلك الروايات التالي: السماسرة وحكايات أخرى (١٩٨٨م)، والياسمين (١٩٨٩م) للكاتبة باهاراتي موخيرجي. ومن الكاتبة شيترا بانارجي ديفكاروني أختارت الباحثة روايتي الزواج المرتب (١٩٩٥م)، وعشيقه التوابل (١٩٩٧م). إضافة إلى رواية الأمراض المترجمة للكاتبة جهومبا لاهيري (١٩٩٩م)، ورواية البحث عن الهوية (٢٠٠٣م). كما تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى رؤية تصورات الروائيات لمساهمات المهاجرين في فهم تجارب الهجرة. وتستند الدراسة على البحث النوعي. كما يركز جزء من الدراسة حول الخطاب بين الجنسين، إذ أن الدراسة تقوم بتحليل نصوص نسوية، وغالباً ما تكون شخصياتهم نسوية أيضاً. ولعل المخاوف والصدمات التي واجهت المهاجرات قد اقتلعت منهن ثقافياً، وذلك من خلال الاندماج في الثقافة الجديدة التي تمثلت في أعمال الكاتبات، وناقشتها الدراسة بشكل مطول. وتختلف المواضيع والمخاوف في الأدب الأمريكي -الهندي- عن كتابات الأمريكيين، حيث يتناول ذلك الأدب مواضيع مثل التعددية الثقافية، وصراع الحضارات، والاختلاط والتهجين، وأزمة الهوية، والتشرد، والحنين إلى الماضي. واستخدمت الباحثة نظرية مابعد الاستعمار، كإطار نظري أساسي للبحث. كما استخدمت نظرية الشتات لرؤية قضايا التشتت وأثرها على تشكيل الهوية والشخصية. واستخدمت أيضاً نظرية العالم الثالث في المساواة بين الجنسين، لأن معظم الشخصيات الممثلة في الروايات والقصص من النساء، علاوة على مؤلفي تلك الأعمال، إذ تعد مثلاً للمرأة المنتصرة على عمليات التدويب الاجتماعي.



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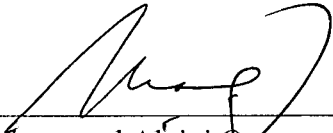
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## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Marzita Mohamed Noor has been approved by the following:



---

Mohammad Abdul Quayum  
Supervisor




---

Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof  
Internal Examiner

---

Ruzy Suliza Hashim  
External Examiner



---

Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd Mokhtar  
Chairman

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Marzita Mohamed Noor.

Signature ..... *Marzita* .....

Date ..... *13/7/12* .....

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**IMMIGRANT VOICES IN INDIAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE: A STUDY  
OF THE SELECTED WORKS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE, CHITRA  
BANARJEE DIVAKARUNI AND JHUMPA LAHIRI**

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*Dedicated to*

*My beloved parents,*

*Mohamed Noor b. Pakir Mohamed and Hasnah bt. Abdul Halim*

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When V.S. Naipaul (1932- ) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2001, he stimulated a continued interest in the works of writers with a similar background like his. These are writers known as diasporic writers because they have uprooted themselves to other countries, but at the same time brought along their own values and cultures. V.S. Naipaul, a Trinidadian-born English novelist of Indian background is an example of a diasporic writer in the post-colonial era. His well-known novels are *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) and *The Mimic Men* (1967).

Other famous post-colonial writers such as Bharati Mukherjee (1940- ), Salman Rushdie (1947- ), Hanif Kureishi (1954- ), Amitav Ghosh (1956- ), Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni (1956- ) and Jhumpa Lahiri (1967- ) are also internationally-recognised and have won multiple international awards for their works. This thesis would discuss the literature by individuals with such displaced backgrounds, i.e. the diasporic writers.

The word diaspora is derived from Greek, and had previously been applied to a limited number of transnational ethnic minority groups such as Jews, Armenians, Chinese and Indians. According to Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur,

Etymologically derived from the Greek term *diasperen*, from *dia-*, 'across' and *-spieren*, 'to sow or scatter seeds,' diaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile. (p.1)

Vijay Mishra writes, “Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport” (p.1). Stuart Hall suggests that “The ‘New World’ presence — America, *Terra Incognita* — is therefore itself the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference, what makes Afro-Caribbean people already people of a diaspora” (Brazier and Mannur, 2003, p.244). Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk observe, “Combined with a hyphenated, hybrid identification, it can be argued that diaspora allows us to move beyond the static, fixed notion of immigrant” (p.14). Robin Cohen describes diasporas as “communities of people living together in one country who acknowledge that ‘the old country’— a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore— always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (McLeod, 2000, p.207).

From the variety of definitions mentioned above, a person with a diasporic background is an immigrant who leaves his physical homeland and strives for acceptance from the “host” country. However, not all of those who live in diaspora have experienced migration. For example, the children of immigrants who were born and raised in the adopted country did not experience migration even though they lived in diaspora. That also explains why we have the first generation, second generation and third generation of immigrants in a family.

The diasporic writers’ novels and short stories revolve around immigrants’ lack of roots, alienation and displacement. One of the main themes in their works is cultural hybridity which is a combination of two or more cultures and languages that are present in the immigrants’ lives. John McLeod argues, “Hybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves, like orderly pathways built from crazy-paving. Instead, they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription” (p.219). Thus, hybridity is a concept that is heavily

linked to diaspora, where the act of migration itself is not only about crossing the physical boundary, but the intertwining of identities and cultures that are never fixed. Cultural hybridity is one of the themes in the diasporic works which will be discussed in this study.

Homi K. Bhabha, a theorist, identifies cultural hybridity as a condition in the Third Space, which, he explains, though unrepresentable in itself, “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised, and read anew” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989, p. 208). Therefore, it can be argued that despite the similar diasporic backgrounds, cultural hybridity is one of the reasons why the diasporic experiences are distinctive from one another.

When these post-colonial writers document the personal growths of individuals from a diasporic background, various circumstances and conflicts as well as the immigrant experiences prior to and after migration are taken into account. Vijay Agnew affirms, “Immigrating to a new country and a different culture means crossing frontiers and borders that can intimidate, but, as Rushdie notes, it also allows for possibilities of personal and intellectual growth that shapes the character and tests the mettle” (p.20). Without migration, a person will not be able to experience circumstances that shaped him to become the person he is today. For the women, migration can also transform them to become resilient. Shamita Das Dasgupta claims, “Away from traditional structure of the extended family, which affords some protection, South Asian women in the United States are being victimised in unique ways” (p.8). South Asian women in the USA may suffer because they do not have

family members to support them when domestic violence arises. Some of them are too dependent on their husbands to walk out from these abusive marriages.

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the representation of immigrants, especially Indian immigrants in Indian-American literature, with emphasis on women's identities. The selected works of diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri are used because they deal with characters of displaced backgrounds. In their works, there is a blend of Eastern culture and contemporary American culture, which make their writings distinguishable from others. Yasmin Hussain explains, "It is within this literature that diaspora is used as a social and political tool for expressing immediate grievances, those of which are intimately concerned with identity and the quest for individuality" (p.3). This statement argues that since female immigrants are considered a minority, writing about them will create awareness of their circumstances among readers. Instead of seeing these women as merely exotic beings, they are perceived objectively by diasporic writers. Consequently, by writing the short stories and novels, these female diasporic Indian writers are going 'home', even if it is only in their works and their imagination.

The first writer discussed is Bharati Mukherjee, born on July 27, 1940 in India. She is the second child of a chemist, Sudhir Lal Mukherjee and Bina Mukherjee, a housewife. She received her B.A. (with honours) in English from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and her M.A. in English and Ancient Indian Culture from the University of Baroda in 1961. In 1963, she received her M.F.A. from the University of Iowa. She then received her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from the same university in 1969. She moved to the USA in 1961, and then to Canada in 1968. After a decade in Canada, she returned to the USA and became an

American citizen in 1980. She is now a professor in the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley, and travels extensively to give talks and lectures worldwide. She married writer Clark Blaise in 1963, and has two sons.

Her first book, *The Tiger's Daughter* was published in 1971, followed by *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tea Bride* (2004). She has also written a memoir entitled *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, with her husband, Clark Blaise, published in 1986. Her short story collections are *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). In this thesis, two of her best works are selected for discussion. They are *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and *Jasmine* (1989). *The Middleman and Other Stories* is a compilation of short stories about immigrants of different races and ethnicities that won the National Book Critics Award in the USA in 1988. Fakrul Alam comments, "On the whole, though, *The Middleman and Other Stories* shows a confident Mukherjee working dexterously on her theme of the making of new Americans and ringing all kinds of fascinating variations on that theme" (p.99). *Jasmine*, published a year after *The Middleman and Other Stories* is a story of an Indian female immigrant who changes her identity several times in the USA, which then allows her to experience different lifestyles and meet interesting people. Fakrul Alam comments, "*Jasmine*...has drawn fire for simplifying and misrepresenting the lives of immigrant women, but it was also widely praised when it was published" (p.117).

The second writer is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who was born on July 29, 1956 in Kolkata, India, and came to the USA in 1976. She is the second child and only daughter of Rajendra Kumar Banarjee, an accountant and Tatini Banarjee, a school teacher. In 1976, she received her Bachelor's degree in English from the

University of Calcutta. She then continued to earn her Master's degree in English from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio in 1978 and her Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley in 1984. She is currently a professor of English at the University of Houston, Creative Writing Program, and a co-founder and former president of an organisation called "Maitri," a helpline that provides assistance to abused South Asian women. She has written *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (1990), *Black Candle* (1991), *Arranged Marriage* (1995), *Leaving Yuba City* (1997), *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001), *Vine of Desire* (2002), *Neela: Victory Song* (2002), *The Conch Bearer* (2003), *California Uncovered: Stories for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (2004), *Queen of Dreams* (2004), *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming* (2005), *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), *Shadowland* (2009) and *One Amazing Thing* (2010). An award-winning author and poet, her works have been published in more than 50 magazines, including *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*. Her writings have been printed in some 50 anthologies. On her website, it states that "Her works have been translated into 20 languages, including Dutch, Hebrew and Japanese" (<<http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/about/background>>). She lives in Houston with her engineer husband Murthy Divakaruni and their two sons, Anand and Abhay. Among her works, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) and *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) have been selected for this study. *Arranged Marriage* deals with the struggles of Indian women in their marriages, where some resort to divorce while others try to make them work. The book won the 1996 American Book Award, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award and the PEN Oakland Award for fiction. *The Midwest Book Review* claims that *Arranged Marriage* is an asset to the diasporic Indian community as "Indian-born girls and women who are torn between two cultures receive a fine collection of stories

which examine women's independence and roles under India's social constraints. These are excellent, hard-hitting stories which are revealing and engrossing" (<[http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/arranged\\_marriage](http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/arranged_marriage)>). *The Mistress of Spices* was named as one of the best books of 1997 by the *Los Angeles Times* and one of the best books of the twentieth century by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and was nominated for the Orange Prize in England in 1998. It was released as a film with the same title in 2005. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the main character is caught between two worlds. Written in prose and poetry form, Tilo falls in love with a non-Indian which results in conflicts within herself. Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni reveals in her website, "I wrote in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the timeless one of myth and magic in my attempt to create a modern fable" (<[http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/the\\_mistress\\_of\\_spices](http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/the_mistress_of_spices)>).

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in London in 1967 but was raised in Rhode Island, USA by her father, a librarian at the University of Rhode Island and her mother, a teacher who earned an M.A. in Bengali literature. She presently lives in New York City but during her childhood she frequently visited India. She graduated with a B.A. in English Literature from Barnard College and received her M.A. in English, M.A. in Creative Writing and M.A. in Comparative Studies in Literature and Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies from Boston University. Till the present she has written three books. In 1999, she wrote her collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* that won the O' Henry Award for best American short stories and the PEN/Hemingway award for the best fiction debut of the year. When *Interpreter of Maladies* won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize, she was the first Indian woman to win this award. She is also a recipient of the Transatlantic Review Award from Henfield Foundation and the

Fiction Prize from Louisville Review. She has also been named as “one of the 20 best writers under the age of 40” by *The New Yorker*. *The Namesake* (2003), which is her first novel, was released as a movie in March 2007 in the USA and the UK. Her latest book is *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). She married the former deputy editor of *Time* Latin America, Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush in 2001. They have two sons. In this thesis, her earlier works, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003) will be discussed. *Interpreter of Maladies* is chosen because it is a selection of short stories that deals with the complexity of immigrants’ lives in the USA as well as India. *The Namesake* is a novel mainly about Gogol Ganguli, a second generation Indian-American in the USA who shifts back and forth from being an Indian and an American. Paul Brians affirms, “Lahiri has been hailed as an outstanding member of a post-Rushdie generation of Indian writers who have turned their backs on magical realism and other experiments to write well-crafted traditional realist fiction” (p.196).

The diasporic literature of these three urban writers focuses on immigrants’ issues such as identity and cultural hybridity. Asha Sen asserts, “What begins as a subtle use of transnational geo-political ideas to foreground the limitations of US nationalism in Mukherjee and Divakaruni develops in Lahiri’s stories into a movement away from localised US identities to global ones” (p.1). Their works are not merely tales, theirs are a revolution, an eye-opener to the conditions of immigrants in the USA — particularly women of colour and of Indian roots.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In reading and analysing the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri, it should be noted that there are challenges for immigrants in a Western country. The research would unearth the dilemmas and issues of immigrants

and make others empathise with their plight and be more supportive, as a person with a displaced background has to face discrimination from many parties. This research would show that time after time, women writers write about domestic issues as ongoing occurrences in the lives of many women out there. The domination of male writers like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Amitav Ghosh as diasporic writers in the post-colonial era should allow a certain leeway for diasporic female Indian writers who do well in championing women's issues in the course of their writings. By acknowledging the works of Indian female diasporic writers, the research gives voice to the minority. Hence, this thesis analyses the characters and conflicts of individuals from displaced backgrounds in the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divarakuni and Jhumpa Lahiri.

When reading these books, one could not help but feel admiration for people who live in diaspora as the stories capture the struggles and triumphant moments that the characters face. The characters are torn between two worlds and this gives a rare perspective that one may not be able to appreciate if one does not experience such a life. Husne Jahan in her article "Colonial Woes in Post-Colonial Writing: Chitra Divakaruni's Immigrant Narratives," published in *South Asian Review*, points out that:

Relocating from a site with a history of confrontation between colonial and indigenous forces to a nucleus of neo-colonial power confronts a writer with the difficult challenge of negotiating between a heritage of resistance to colonialism and the pressure of adapting to the colonial or imperial 'Other' as the new home. (p.149)

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study focuses on the works of three Indian-American female writers. This research will apply the post-colonial theory as the main theory, as well as diaspora and

Third World Feminist theories. Hence, the study will result in a fresh and unbiased perspective of the immigrants' lives which deal mostly with Indian women.

The potential achievement of this study is that by looking at the literature in this manner, Indian-American literature will not be seen as merely exotic literature by the mainstream literary world, but as significant to society. This study will contribute in our understanding of the immigrants' lives and thus will become a valuable contribution in literature on issues of identity and cultural hybridity.

This study will not only show that Indian immigrants contribute financially to their non-resident country but at the same time too channel their expertise to the countries that they wish to call their own. For example, there are 20 million Indians abroad in 44 countries, 200,000 of whom are millionaires in the USA alone. These 20 million Indians are changing the meaning of Indian communities. They have made contributions in several different fields, from politics, literature, business, technology, culture, popular culture to sports and others and therefore are worth studying.

Writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee and Hanif Kureishi have increased our awareness of these immigrants as they write about them in their works. Thus, by analysing Indians abroad, we can study how their post-colonial journey transformed them into becoming the people they are today. In reaching this goal, six books by three female writers of Indian origin will be examined. They are the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. Their works capture the migrants' disillusioned circumstances where the writers' imagination plays a part in creating a place that may or may not exist. Thus, their writings introduce us to a new kind of literature which is neither American nor Indian. Two of the novels from these writers have been adapted for the cinema which signifies that people are curious and interested to know more about the lives of Indian people overseas. Paul

Brians observes, “The world of Indian popular films is the subject of a London musical called *Bombay Dreams*, and young women from New York to Los Angeles are having their hands decorated with intricate traditional henna designs. South Asia is now chic in the West in the way that Japan was a decade ago” (p.3).

The experiences that these women have are also different and one of a kind. Indians abroad are simply different, not so much because of geography but because of their lack of reference to the past and sometimes their constant reference to it. Readers who lead diasporic lives read this literature to understand themselves better, hence, feeling relieved that they are not the only ones who feel disillusioned. Immigrants who are twice removed because of their linguistic and racial differences will find their works as comforting and perhaps therapeutic.

The study of the positive traits and characters of the immigrants in the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri will assist in the understanding of the immigrants’ plight and triumphant moments. Consequently, it is also a means to honour immigrants as high achievers and tradition preservers.

This study will compare the portrayals of immigrants from the short stories and novels by the diasporic writers. Thus, one will begin to analyse their dilemmas, dual experiences and desire to belong in a land that was never theirs in the first place. For instance, the struggles of a female immigrant might be different from that of a male immigrant and this will be highlighted in this research.

#### **1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The scope of the study is on feminist issues, within the post-colonial literature that deals with diaspora and Third World Feminism. It is confined to the selected works of three female Indian writers. The thesis will examine the elements of identity,

displacement, cultural hybridity and Third World Feminist issues in the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. These writers write in different forms of literature such as novels and short stories.

From among Bharati Mukherjee's works, the selected texts are *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and *Jasmine* (1989). *The Middleman and Other Stories* is a collection of short stories that won the 1988 National Book Critics Award. It provides a tapestry of the trials and tribulations of immigrants in the process of becoming Americans. The diversity of characters in the book is an asset in this research. It is a book about the melting pot itself and therefore essential for the discussion on immigrants and literary writing. Mukherjee's second book, *Jasmine* has been selected as it establishes continuity from a short story to a novel. It is actually a follow up from one of the stories with the same title in *The Middleman and Other Stories*. Even though *The Middleman and Other Stories* and *Jasmine* are one year apart we can see the transition from an early state to a mature state in her works. *Jasmine* is the most well-known work of Bharati Mukherjee and her first major book with a transnational theme, and the most outstanding as it is a major breakthrough for her.

From Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni's works, *Arranged Marriage* (1995) and *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) have been chosen. *Arranged Marriage* won the 1995 American Book Award, the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award and the PEN Oakland Award for fiction. Apparently, *Arranged Marriage* is developed from the poem, "Arranged Marriage" in Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni's collection of poems *Black Candle: Poems about Women from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (1991). *Arranged Marriage* is a collection of short stories that revolve around marriages and relationships of Indian women in India and in the USA. In Indian culture, marriage is considered a huge event in a woman's life as it gives her a status in society. The

second book from Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni is *The Mistress of Spices* because “spices” are used in almost all Indian dishes and it is an essence of Indian tradition. In this story we can see the influence of Eastern pseudo-magic in the daily life of Tilo, the Mistress of Spices. *The Mistress of Spices* is a book that clearly shows how ancient beliefs still linger in the lives of these immigrants. They may be far away from their home country but these immigrants are still wrapped up in their traditions. *The Mistress of Spices* was also made into a movie in 2005. The movie version is directed by Paul Mayeda Berges and stars Bollywood actress Aishwarya Rai. This book is also an example of how diasporic literature is being transformed on the screen to become a part of the popular culture in the USA.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003) are also selected for this study. *Interpreter of Maladies* is a collection of short stories of Indian immigrants in the USA that won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. *The Namesake* was transformed into a movie in March 2007. It was directed by Mira Nair. Bollywood actress Tabu and actor Irfan Khan acted as the parents of Gogol who was acted by Hollywood’s Kal Penn. *The Namesake* is a story about the first and second generation Indian immigrants in the USA and how they adapt to their lives in diaspora.

These three writers were chosen after careful consideration of their backgrounds and their works. Firstly, they each have a Ph.D. in their respective fields which gives them academic credibility. Secondly, they each have published a short story compilation as well as novels. All of their short story compilations have won awards in the literary scene. Thirdly, their works have attracted Hollywood movie producers, hence inviting a larger audience and readership. Both Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri had published books that became screenplays on the

cinema and are synonym to popular Indian culture. When one discusses Indian literature, one would have read or came across their works. Fourthly, they are female Bengali diasporic writers who mainly write about displaced women, their plights and the triumphant moments that they experience. They are genuinely concerned with helping women overcome adversity abroad, and by creating disillusioned characters who triumph in the end, these three Indian writers seek to give women hope in diaspora.

## **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this study is to see how these writers deal with cultural dislocation in reference to the short stories and novels chosen for the research. It will also explore the portrayal of immigrants by these three Indian-American writers. It will explain the extent the works of fiction relate to the issues of an immigrant. It will show how the male vs female experience is portrayed. It also aims to highlight the diasporic journey that has transformed the “Overseas Indians” from scattered/dispersed people to individuals with newfound identities. Apart from that, this thesis will provide a comparative study of the writers’ works as a mechanism to contribute in the understanding of the struggles of the immigrants.

## **1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.6.1 Critical Reception of the Works**

The analysis of the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri seeks to expand the studies of post-colonial literature. The following literature review would explain how contributive this study would be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The selected texts would provide a framework for the study of Indian-