
Pages To Pixels: Women's Journey from Vulnerability to Agency in Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Diasporic Fiction**¹T. Sharon Raghukar**

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving representations of women's vulnerability and empowerment in selected short stories from Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Interpreter of Maladies' and 'The unaccustomed Earth' and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'The Thing around your Neck'. Set within diasporic, patriarchal, culturally and emotionally restrictive environments, the female protagonists in these narratives experience emotional alienation, marital dissatisfaction, cultural displacement and psychological silencing. Their vulnerability is shaped not merely by external structures such as gender norms and migration, but also by internalized expectations of obedience, sacrifice and emotional restraint.

Drawing upon feminist literary criticism and diaspora studies, this study argues that vulnerability in these narratives is not a permanent condition but a transitional phase that leads to self-awareness, resistance and agency. Through acts of introspection, emotional assertion, moral choice and narrative voice, women gradually move from passive endurance to active self-definition. Lahiri's women navigate domestic spaces marked by silence, intergenerational conflict, and emotional distance, gradually arriving at moments of self-realization and moral choice. Similarly, Adichie's Protagonists confront racial, gendered and cultural hierarchies through voice, desire and narrative assertion, transforming private suffering into conscious resistance. In both writers, agency emerges not through rebellion but through psychological awakening, emotional articulation and the reclaiming of selfhood. By metaphorically extending the literary "pages" to contemporary "pixels", the paper situates these representations within a broader discourse of modern female empowerment. The psychological resilience and self-assertion depicted in these texts anticipate present day concerns such as digital visibility, voice and agency. Through their nuanced portrayals of women negotiating identity, choice and voice, Lahiri and Adichie illuminate the enduring relevance of literary narratives in shaping empowered female consciousness from pages to pixels. Thus, the paper foregrounds literature as a foundational space where women's empowerment is imagined, articulated and sustained -long before it finds expression in digital and social platforms.

Keywords: Women's empowerment, diaspora, identity, vulnerability, agency

Introduction

Diaspora refers to the movement of people from their homeland to other parts of the world due to migration, education, economic opportunities, displacement. Diasporic communities live between cultures, negotiating identity, memory, belonging and alienation. It emerges from this in-between space. It has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for social change, challenging existing power structures, fostering empathy and understanding and inspiring action.

Diasporic fiction occupies a prominent place in English Literature where people talk about who they are and where they come from. It is also what they talk about, how they feel about themselves. Women who write about the diaspora uses stories to fight back against things that are not fair. Jhumpa Lahiri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are two women who are good at doing this. They come from different geographical locations. Lahiri is from the Indian- American community and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is from Nigerian- American community. Even though their origins, backgrounds are different to each other, their stories, portrayal of characters are somewhat similar. Diaspora is really about losing things that matter to you. Like your home, the language you speak and the culture you are used to. For women it can be even harder because of the things that people expect from them from where they came from and where they move to. Lahiri and Adichie write about women who are trying to find their place, in the worlds and who are dealing with people who do not understand them, women who are trying to balance two cultures at the same time. Lahiri and Adichie tell stories that start on a level and then go out on a whole wider level, where everyone can see them on computers and phones. This idea of “Pages to Pixels” really shows how things have changed with writing. Jhumpa Lahiri’s women usually stay in an emotional space that you would find in a book. On the other hand Adichie’s stories are meant for a global audience where women can express themselves stand up for they believe in and figure out who they are. These two writers Lahiri and Adichie show us a range of experiences in stories, about people who have moved to a country. From being vulnerable and not taking control of their own lives by speaking up moving around and creating their own stories. Through their texts, diasporic women move from being subjects of migration to agents of meaning, asserting that empowerment lies not merely in relocation but in the ability to narrate one’s own life – whether on the page or through the pixels of a globalized world.

Diasporic literature encourages readers to question power structures, confront biases and engage in social justice conversations, ultimately shaping a more inclusive and empathetic world. Women in diaspora experience double marginalization – Women as migrants and as women leading to personal silence and vulnerability.

The phrase “Pages to Pixels” symbolically represents the transformation of women’s representation from traditional literary spaces to contemporary global narratives. This transition reflects how women move from vulnerability to empowerment, from silence to voice. Vulnerability here refers to emotional alienation, cultural displacement, patriarchal subjugation and identity crisis experienced by women in Diaspora. Agency, on the other

hand, it refers to women's capacity to resist oppression, negotiate identity and assert autonomy within transnational spaces.

Jhumpa Lahiri And Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Jhumpa Lahiri, a Bengali -American writer, explores Indian diasporic experiences in America. Her works highlight emotional silence, family conflicts and cultural displacement. Lahiri's women characters often experience silence, loneliness and identity crisis, but they gradually develop self-awareness and subtle agency.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian -American writer, presents African diasporic experiences with a strong feminist voice. Her characters challenge patriarchy, racism and gender stereotypes.

Both writers contribute significantly to diasporic literature by portraying the emotional and cultural complexities of migration. Together, they illustrate how diasporic fiction becomes a powerful space for exploring vulnerability, hybridity and women's journey toward agency.

Feminist Vulnerability and Emotional Silence in interpreter of Maladies

This theme highlights how women often carry emotional burdens silently, especially in marriages and diasporic settings. Lahiri shows that silence is not weakness-it is a space where reflection begins.

In *Interpreter of Maladies* Jhumpa Lahiri shows us women who are living away from their home country and are very quiet about their feelings. These women, like the characters, Mrs. Das, Mrs. Sen are hurt because of their marriages moving to places and not getting what they need to feel happy. Mrs. Das is a mother. She does not really care about her kids. She is just going through the emotions.

When she tells Mr. Kapsi that she has been unfaithful it is like she is saying please notice me. She is not sorry for what she did she just wants someone to recognize her feelings. Elaine Showalter argues that "women's writing has been a literature of silence and repression, shaped by the structures of patriarchy" (Showalter, 11) Even though Mrs. Das is still not free from the expectations talking about her feelings is the first step towards change. *Interpreter of Maladies* and the story of Mrs. Das is an example of this and it is something that feminist critics, like showalter have written about. Mrs. Sen is a woman who really struggles with feeling dependent on others and being alone. She is stuck at home and cannot drive so she does not have the freedom to go where she wants. Mrs. Sen uses food and memories of her past to deal with the fact that she is living in a country and everything feels different. When people move to a country it can be very hard especially for women like Mrs. Sen. They often feel like they do not have the power to make changes in their lives. The accident with the car is a moment, for Mrs. Sen it shows how sad and overwhelmed she is and it is not just because she has been holding everything inside for so long.

Shoba, in "A Temporary Matter" is really hurt after losing her child and she stops talking. Bell hooks also states that "feminist consciousness begins when women recognize

the ways they have been silenced” (hooks, 22) Shoba is different from Mrs. Das and Mrs. Sen because she starts using talking as a way to take control of her life. When Shoba decides to leave her marriage, it shows that she is strong and can make her decisions. She chooses to take care of herself instead of staying in a situation that is not good, for her. These women, including Shoba are just starting to find their power and they are learning to speak up and not to be quiet. They are becoming aware of their strength and they are starting to use their voices to challenge the things that have been holding them back. They show different stages of women’s empowerment -from silence to expression, and finally to decisive action.

Diasporic Negotiation and Female Autonomy in Unaccustomed Earth

This theme explores how women navigate identity and independence in immigrant families. It emphasizes how autonomy is shaped not just by internal desires but also by cultural and generational expectations. In *Unaccustomed Earth*, Lahiri shows how women can change who they are. They do this by talking and making deals in places. Ruma is a woman who was born in a country to immigrant parents. She is torn between what her family wants her to be, a mom and what she really wants to be free.

Ruma has a time inside because she is expected to take care of everyone else but she wants to take care of herself too. This is something that feminists have talked about how women are expected to do work and follow certain rules just because they are women. Ruma starts to change when her father does not need her much as she thought and this makes her realize that she needs to be independent that *Unaccustomed Earth* and Ruma and her story are all about women, like Ruma finding their own way.

Stuart Hall writes that “cultural identity is not fixed but always in process, constructed through representation” (Hall, 225) The women’s power come from deciding what it means to be a woman for herself of doing what people around her think she should do. Her empowerment comes from redefining womanhood on her terms which is really about taking control of what womanhood means to her. This is very different, from the following the rules that society says women should follow.

Sang, in the story, “Nobody Business” is a woman who does what she wants. She has her money and is not afraid to speak her mind. This is not what people usually expect from a woman in her situation. Even though her personal life is a mess, Sang does not want to give up her freedom. She wants to make her choices. This is what feminism is about.

Avtar Brah emphasizes that “diaspora space is where multiple subjectivities intersect and power relations are negotiated” (Brah, 208) Sang is an example of a woman who is comfortable with who she is even if that means. She does not fit into traditional roles. She is a mix of things, like a lot people are and that is okay.

Aparna, in the story “Hell-Heaven” is from a generation where people did not express their emotions openly and had desires they could not fulfill. Her life is very different from her daughter’s life, where her daughters are independent. This shows how things have changed from one generation to the next. Aparna does not have control over her life but her

story shows the bad effects of staying silent. This helps the women in the generation to make progress in terms of women's rights.

The women in the story including Aparna and her daughter show that having control over your life is something that happens slowly and it is affected by the people and circumstances around you especially when you are living in a country or culture like, in diasporic life. These characters highlight the generational shift from restriction to independence, showing that women's empowerment in diasporic fiction evolves across time and context.

Psychological Feminism and voice in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

This theme shows how psychological and emotional growth are crucial to female empowerment. Women's transformation comes from understanding themselves and asserting agency over their lives, even in diasporic or oppressive contexts. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Thing around Your Neck" is a book that really makes you think about women and how they feel. It shows how women can move from feeling really bad about themselves to standing up for what they believe in. The main character Akunna moves to America thinking it will be a new start, but she faces a lot of problems like people being mean to her because of her skin color feeling really alone and being treated like an object.

Gayatri Spivak questions whether marginalized women can speak, noting that "the subaltern cannot speak within dominant discourse structures" (Spivak, 287) The Thing around your neck is like a symbol of how scared and worried she's because she has been through some really tough things that she does not like to talk about. As Akunna figures out what is really going on with her feelings she starts to make some changes. She decides that she would rather be happy and respected than just try to get by so she leaves a relationship that's not good for her. This is a deal for Akunna because she is taking control of her life and making choices that makes her feel strong and proud of the thing around your neck and its message about women, like Akunna.

Nkem, in the story, Imitation is first shown as a wife who moved to a country with her husband. She feels really sad and alone. She depends on her husband for money. When she finds out that her husband is cheating on her, she starts to think about her life.

Bell hooks further notes that "self-recovery and self definition are political acts" (hooks, 36), which is evident in akunna's and nkem's psychological transformation. She does not yell at him, try to fight with him. Instead, Nkem starts to focus on herself and pulls away from her husband emotionally. This is how she takes control of her life and becomes a person. This is something that some feminists, like hooks talked about a time ago where women can be strong, by making changes inside themselves.

Nwamgba, in the headstrong Historian, Represents historical psychological resilience. Through constrained by colonial and patriarchal systems, she asserts agency through cultural preservation and maternal authority. Her resistance is quiet yet enduring, ensuring continuity of Identity. Collectively, these women exemplify Adichie's feminist

vision- where voice, choice and self-awareness transform vulnerability into empowerment, completing the journey from Page bound silence to empowered articulation.

These characters show that women's empowerment can be open, silent or cultural but all involve reclaiming identity and control in patriarchal and diasporic contexts.

Conclusion

Lahiri and Adichie offer nuanced portrayals of diasporic women who navigate vulnerability, emotional silence and cultural displacement. While Lahiri's women often begin in silence and gradual negotiation, Adichie's women articulate resistance and feminist agency more explicitly. Together, these narratives demonstrate a trajectory from marginalization to empowerment.

Diasporic fiction, therefore, becomes a powerful platform where women rewrite their identities, challenge patriarchy and claim global visibility. The movement from pages to pixels symbolizes not just literary evolution but the transformation of women from passive subjects to active agents in transnational feminist discourse.

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