

Diasporic Elements in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most prolific Indian immigrant writer who understands the problems and experiences of the people living far from their homelands. Like other diasporians writers who see diaspora in terms of marginalization, Mukherjee favours assimilation and absorption in the alien land. Her own life in America is no doubt full of challenges and being a diasporian she has faced every challenge and made her accept the mutual assimilation. She considers it as a two-way metamorphosis. Her belief in mutual assimilation and understanding leads to the coexistence of two different culture in her writings. Bharati Mukherjee was one of the most prominent writers of diaspora literature. She was born in Calcutta and died in New York. In her life span she wrote eight novels and many other non-fictional works. She had talked about the experiences of her personal life in her writings. She had started with the immigrant perspective and today she is widely known as one of the best Indo-American writers of diaspora literature. Mukherjee's perspectives change from one work to other. Her eight novels are different in approach.

KEYWORDS: Assimilation, Cultural- conflicts, Diaspora, Identity-crisis, Immigration.

Diaspora is an emerging word in every sphere whether in literature or in the lives of the individual. It is not only concerned with movement from one place to other but is about the problems that come in the whole journey. It relates to external and both to the inner core of an individual. It describes their response to the alien land and their love and nostalgia towards the previous homeland. It is about the loss of identity, culture, land or individuality and multiplicity in culture. It is an opportunity to know and to get absorbed in a new culture and environment.

Many writers have touched the various issues of immigration and migration. Identity Crisis is one of the theme of immigration. Writers like Virginia Woolf, May Swenson and Ursula K. le Guin have dealt with the theme of identity crisis. Virginia Woolf and Bharati Mukherjee both had dealt with the theme of Identity Crisis but their perspectives were quite different from each other. Virginia Woolf and Bharati Mukherjee's writings had feminist touch in it. For Virginia Woolf the path for women, were marginally opened with lots of obstacles in their ways. Women experienced the crisis with their identity and faced all the challenges with all the obstacles in their journey.

The features of Diaspora had influenced the world literature with every language. Diaspora literature is also known as Expatriate Literature. Indian writings has contributed a lot to diaspora writing and received great recognition and admiration worldwide.

Diaspora is an umbrella term that includes many things and concepts; diaspora literature is a vast term to explore; it includes the works of the writers living outside their native land or country. Their works are associated with their native background and culture. Diaspora writers are those writers who are related to their native country through their writings; while living in an outside land.

Diaspora literature deals with the sense of alienation, rootlessness, nostalgia, identity-crisis, displacement, sense of loss, the disintegration of cultures etc. it also reflects the experience of the immigrants, after their settlement to the other land.

The Tiger's Daughter (1971) is the first notable novel of Bharati Mukherjee. Tara, the main protagonist of the novel faces cultural shock when she return back to India. Calcutta and West Bengal is not the same, what she left behind.

In Wife (1997) she depicts the very concern about a traditional girl who after her marriage moved to New York City with her husband from India. The frustration and isolation inside her for the host land is at the peak when she murders her own husband and commits suicide in her madness.

In another novel Jasmine (1989) that is widely read novel of Mukherjee is a story of a young girl whose biographical events falls in the period of her Punjabi childhood and American adulthood. Her life revolves around the past culture of India and the present culture of America. The plot of the Jasmine is quite different from the other work because the girl absorbs the new culture for the sake of survival by the assimilation of new culture. The search of Jasmine is for concrete identity. She is caught between the past and the present, the east and the western culture. But until the last page of the novel, she fights for her own identity and survival. In 'Jasmine', the girl decides to live for herself. The binary opposition between east and west is seen. Jasmine the character shows two binary states of India and America. America is still explored by her. The influence of west over east people and the survival for the existence is clearly seen in this writings of Mukherjee. Cultural conflicts sometimes lead to cultural alienation and loss of identity.

The Holder of the world (1993), Mukherjee depicts the mingling of time and culture. It is a story of an American woman who travels to India to track her ancestors. The story revolves around the crisscross between the historical culture and the contemporary culture of India.

The next work of Mukherjee Leave It to Me(1997) is a young American who seeks her roots in India and rejects her adoptive parents of America. It is a story of the journey of the character between reality versus fantasy and between eastern versus western cultures.

Bharati Mukherjee works on a different approach and widely portrays autobiographical trends in a different manner like other diasporic writers did earlier. From personal and families identities Mukherjee moves towards society as the subject matter of her memoir. Here in her memoir Days and Nights in Calcutta(1977), she writes about the nostalgia present in the story of every immigrant.

Bharati Mukherjee is a prolific expatriate writer who empowers the individualistic society of immigrants towards west. Her novels speak and stand for individualism. Her novels deal with all the issues whether big or small of immigration like adjustment, adoption, assimilation, amalgamation of the character with self and

society. 'Jasmine' stands for oneself and remaking of self. Middleman and other stories (1988) deals with the painful experiences in U.S and Canada. The Tiger's Daughter(1971) is for the individuals who come back to their country when they feel homelessness and nostalgia in the country where they want to settle down. Wife is about the support needed by an individual when she/he moves to another land.

Bharati Mukherjee is the established voice of Indian diaspora. She has been redefining diasporic experiences. Diaspora is the process of gain rather than the conventional perspectives. She takes up the issues of the complexities and impact of immigration on the lives of diasporians. She touches the diasporic sensibility in her works. Her works are constructed around the realities of the characters, who are transplanted to the other country, as in her work north America. The psychological metamorphosis of the individual in the new land is observed in many works of the author. All her characters belong to different ethnic groups and community. Their origins, values, ethics all are different but the one bond from which or one thread in which all are beaded is of the diaspora. Their cultural histories, their social differences all are shared by one another and they explore the new way of belonging and becoming Americans.

Desirable Daughters, The Tree Bride and Miss New India, these are the trilogy of Mukherjee. Desirable Daughters (2002) is the first novel of Mukherjee that approached autobiography. It's a story of three sisters who takes different paths in their lifes. Tara Bhattacharjee is the main protagonist of this novel. She is living in San Francisco with her son Rabi, divorced her wealthy husband. She refused to consider herself as foreigner. Her journey and struggle is towards her search for identity. Tara is different from her two sisters Padma and Parviti. Padma like Tara also immigrated to America but lives in other part of the country New Jersey. She is a news anchor and runs designer sari business. Padma lives in India and living a life of Indian housewife.

The cultural values strikes when Tara come to know about the illegitimate son of Padma, who comes to meet her aunt Tara and reveal the secret of his birth. All Indian cultural values get shattered for Tara when she comes to know about this.

Tara is torn between her place where she is living in present and her ties to the past. Desirable Daughters focuses on the options young women are offered and the choices they make. The novel ends with a bomb attack on Tara's house and she decides to find her roots by travelling back to her homeland India along with her son.

The next part of trilogy is The Tree Bride (2004) which is a narration of colonial rule over India and also India's freedom from colonial rule. It's a historical novel and sequel to Desirable Daughters. One of its theme is British assimilation in India and the best example of this is John Mist who is an important character in this novel, as he left England to settle in India. The journey from London to Calcutta changes him and he displaced himself from his country and makes India his homeland. This novel is an attempt by Mukherjee to show that our past histories intersect with our present. Diasporic situations creates various histories. Dislocation results in changing Identities, Tradition. Cultures and Languages.

Diaspora elements are clearly seen in the novel Wife of Mukherjee when Dimple is packing Indian Spices, food items, Darjeeling tea and Indian clothes to foreign land with them. They try to connect with their homeland with these things:

She was happy to leave the real work to him while she herself took care of frivolous details. During the day she took winter clothes out of the trunk (there was a hand-knitted cardigan, two sweaters and a Balaclava cap the late Mr Basu had worn on a trip to Darjeeling); she spent the evenings mending bugholes. She sewed long-sleeved blouses for herself and bought a dozen cotton petticoats from a hawker near Gariahat Market. In the early afternoons, instead of sleeping or reading novels as she had done when she was pregnant, she cleaned out empty Horlick's bottles and filled them with spices to take with her to the States. (Wife 43)

Bharati Mukherjee's has touched the element of Quest for the identity with female characters in her writings-they keep fighting for their identity. The protagonist of Mukherjee's writings are depicted as the fighter and the individuals with the quest and zeal for the search of their identity. Mukherjee's female characters are seen as strong women who are caught between their two identities and between tradition and modernity. It is a psychological transformation, that they undergo with their feet grounded in their roots.

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