

Diasporic Consciousness in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee was one of the foremost novelists of Indian Diaspora who explored the theme of socio-cultural consciousness, rootlessness, nostalgia, and Indian diaspora in her novels with depth and intensity. Bharati Mukherjee's unforgettable works explore not only her conceit in her Indian legacy but also festivity of acceptance of America. She recognized herself as a powerful member of the American scene. Her memorable works tell the account her own experience to display the changing shape of American society. She presents a picture of the clash of cultures and consequently predicament of the immigrant. She succeeds to understand the immigrant experience, pain, Indian Diaspora, which she explores in her major works. Her writing represents the South Asian community in North America. This paper explores the Bharati Mukherjee predicament as an expatriate through her works.

Key words: Indian Diaspora, cross-cultural conflict.

Introduction:-

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian born American novelist who relocated herself into various cultural societies; therefore, her creative life has undergone enormous changes. She had varied deep feeling to know of the custom and importance of both cultures. She was born in India an upper middle class of Hindu Brahmin family, then went to the United States for higher studies, after marriage with Clark Blaise, she settled down in Calcutta; then once again back to the United States. In process of transpiration from one socio- culture background to another, she got various experiences, sweet and sour. She was granted several awards for her remarkable works from Canadian Government, Universities, and the Guggenheim Foundation. She received national attention and decided to settle it out of the country. In her fiction, she deals with the Western themes and setting as well as characters who are westernized or biocultural. Bharati Mukherjee works focus on pains, struggles and happiness of the immigrants who are trying to realize their dream in American. In an interview with Sybil Steinberg she says:

“It is the wisest of my novels in the sense I was between both worlds. I was detached enough from India so that I could look back with affection and irony, but I didn’t know America long enough to feel my conflict. I was like a bridge poised between two worlds.”(P. 46)

Bharati Mukherjee, at her best in the depiction of cross- cultural conflict and how her heroine takes control over their destinies. She dealt with difficult them like Indian Diaspora cultural shock, the quest for self-identity and her character find themselves caught in the net of tradition and modernity. Her characters are neither completely detached them from the past nor they have any certitude in the future. There is a consistent quest for identity in all her stories. As Maleshri Lal points out that:

“Mukherjee’s protagonists are confident sophisticated, poised who will not melt into American main stream but visible expand in margins”. (p.149)

‘The Tiger’s Daughter’, Bharati Mukherjee’s first novel, she expresses the aspect of psyche problem, cross-cultural conflicts, pain due to migration on foreign land. The story revolves around female protagonist ‘Tara’ who is raised in Calcutta, educated at New York and married to a Canadian man. It is the reflection of Bharati Mukherjee own personality, experiences and circumstances, through the female protagonist ‘Tara’ who caught between two cultures. Indian born young woman Tara returns to her native place Calcutta after having spent seven years in the United States. She perceives that she now neither Indian nor truly American. She tries to adjust herself to the foreign land but unable to adjust. This paper explores the circumstances of isolation, the loneliness of the immigrant. She says:

“New York, she thought now, had been exotic. Not because it had laundromats and subways. But because these were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. Because students were rioting about campus recruiters and far away wars rather than the price of rice or the stiffness of final exams. Because people were agitated about pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary and it had driven her to despair” (P.34)

When Tara comes to India to see her family and become conscious that the conditions have changed. She becomes painfully aware that while she has not yet eased herself into an American culture, she no longer derives substance from value and moral of her native land, memories of genteel Brahmin lifestyle are usurped by the new impression of poverty, hungry children, and political unrest. She describes:

“The entrance now seems, “small, almost shabby”, the “walls are patterned with rust and mold”, the “sidewalks along the hotel are painted with obscenities and political slogan” (P. 3)

She is always conscious of her foreignness while living in America and felt rootless but the situation is not better in India also, Tara unable to establish an emotional affinity with her old relatives and friends because the foreignness of her spirit does not allow her to mingle her with them. Her friends wanted to know about the American way of life, about television, frozen food. But she notices a big change during last seven years. She even thinks that it was her mistakes to marry a foreigner:

“In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreigner, and this foreigner ness, was a burden.”(P.62)

Through ‘Wife’, Mukherjee exhibits the dilemma of Indian wife slit between the expectation of society and her need for self-expression. In this novel, the writer has dealt at length with psychological crises that immigration could generate. The story revolves around the female protagonist ‘Dimple Das Gupta’ who migrates from Calcutta to New York after marriage to fulfill her dreams and imagination. She is longing to seek out an identity that would take her away from the wifely ideals. This novel explores the plight of an Indian immigrant’s wife in North America because she is neither communicating with the people around her nor share her feelings of expression with her own people. The obstacle in Dimple’s path to self-realization is the expatriate Indian community in which she has to spend her time. Dimple’s quest for identity in her husband is one main obstacle. In response, her husband Amit is unable to understand the complicated changes in his wife. Dimple could not keep apart herself from confusion and anxieties about her identity.

In ‘Desirable Daughters’ the writer illustrates the aspect of Indian Diaspora of the immigrant. The story revolves around central figure character ‘Tara Chatterjee’, divorced from silicon valley billionaire Bishwapriya Chatterjee, now lived in San Francisco with her boyfriend and son Rabi . The plot of *The Desirable Daughters* swings back and forth, from past to present from a small village in East Bengal where Tara’s ancestors live to San Francisco and back to Mumbai and Calcutta, thus highlighting the extreme cultural variation at the same time raising the issue related to

the authenticity of various cultures. In America, Tara observes another important cultural digression in connection with names and as she puts it:

“In India every word relating to family carries a special meaning. My oldest sister Padma is my didi or Padma di, my middle sister is Paravati di..... Children are taught to call every family friend uncle and aunty or in our language mashi or mesho for mother’s side and or pishi mashi or kaku for father’s side, it is how the family based culture. See the world.”(P.36)

Through *Jasmine*, the writer explores the strong willpower of female protagonist named Jasmine. Mukherjee presents the positive approach of female protagonist toward the problem of immigration perspective. She is neither fanciful like Dimple, nor unwise like Tara, but she displays the fortitude to fight the psychological injuries. This paper tries to explore unravel the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures which heroine undertake during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York, and Iowa. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of isolation. Jasmine’s every move is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development, a vital change is marked in her personality. It is clear that Jasmine made her mind to acculturate herself into the new culture, and America embraces her determination open arms.

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee was a writer of an Indian Diaspora who explores the problems of rootlessness, nostalgia, alienation and cultural clash involving diverse cultures. Her works portray the experience of immigrants from the third world countries go through numerous difficulties and finally migrate to America. They pay heavy price for the necessary requirement to migrate to United State, their visa, passports, transport, etc. They consider the land of America is their ultimate destination to fulfill their desire and want to settle down permanently but they are nostalgic on foreign land. Almost all the works of Mukherjee represents such an intention of the central character. Her subject matter indicates her assimilation with an American culture and ethos. Mukherjee confirmed very frankly that she is nostalgic about India but has no remorse and state publicly that she is an American citizen.

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