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Diasporic Sensibility In The Novels Of Bharati Mukherjee

Abstract

The term diaspora is based on Jewish history. Diaspora in the fast changing world refers to the hordes of displaced persons and communities moving across the globe. To be precise, Diaspora is used as an umbrella term to refer to all such movements and dislocations from the native country and culture. The term 'Diaspora' now relates to shifted communities which have been dislocated from their homeland through immigration, migration, origin and relocation in another territory or country. Today, Indian diaspora has emerged with the “multiplicity of history, variety of culture, tradition and a deep instinct for survival.” Therefore, Bharati Mukherjee’s diasporic literature reveals issues like culture, identity, nationality, hybridist, homelessness, home, mimicry and finalism like self/other, insider/outsider and margin/Centre. The Oxford English Dictionary explains diaspora as, “The dispersion of any people from their traditional homeland.” Life in diaspora reveals one’s struggle to adopt a new culture while retaining the native culture. The double diaspora is characterized by a dispersed, constructed nostalgia and some approval of one, if not both the hosts. One time diasporic has a negative position and nostalgia. Bharati Mukherjee’s novels fall in his category.

Keywords: Diaspora, immigration, hybridist, diasporic literature, nostalgia.

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee in her novels like the *Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife, Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World*, *Leave it to Me*, *Desirable Daughters* and *Tree Bride* effort to bridge the gulf between 'home' and 'exile'. Being a writer of Indian Diaspora, she in her novels arrange the 'melting pot' notion of America. Her main theme through her writing centers on the state of Asian immigrants in the USA and Canada, with special to the changes taking place in south Asian women in a new world. The diasporic sensibility can be decided in the terms of its statement in the attitude to home and host. Diasporas live in one country as community but look across time and place to another. The expatriate diasporas and their descendent experience marginalization, fragmentation, displacement and isolation in the cultural talk of the subject countries.

Identity is an important issue in a diasporic literature. Bharati Mukherjee in her novels find out the conflict of immigrants, living in Canada and The United States. Bharati Mukherjee reflects her own life in her novels as an immigrant first to Canada and later to The United States. Many of her characters are Indian women who are victims of sexism and racism. We can see, are the two themes in her novels. The first theme is the immigrant experience and the feeling of alienation as a migrant. The second theme is the misconduct of women in Indian society owing to the overburdening hope to conform to societal norms tradition. At first sight, the list of Bharati Mukherjee's novels shows like the disorganized proposals of a powerful and prolific writer. "But on closer scrutiny, it becomes apparent that all of Bharati Mukherjee creativity is focused with razor, sharp precision on a diasporic imagination and the politico – cultural implications of this imagination. The trope of diaspora, of dislocation, transcends the rhetorical dimension of the text and becomes the material core of Bharati Mukherjee's narratively." [Emmanuel S. Nelson]

To show the problem of diasporic sensibility in her novels by Bharati Mukherjee

Since being diasporic a matter of personal choice, the journey of life becomes an exploration of an individual's sense of 'self' and a quest for the liberation of the human spirit. The possibilities are diverse and varied as there are individuals. Characters in diaspora literature, particularly those in Bharati Mukherjee's novels provide a key to unravel the quest of diasporas. The awareness that their dislocation is final characterizes the perpetual gaze of the diasporas towards the homeland. They relate to the country of origin and their immigrant status in different ways. Ultimately it is creating one's own cultural space in the adopted homeland that matters. In other words, Diaspora is all about creating new identities achieving cultural hybridist acquiring spaces for growth resolving conflicts and forging a new culture either composite or plural. Diasporic traversals interrogate the rigidity of identity.

Diasporic identities constantly produce and reproduce themselves through transformation and difference. 'Hybridist' also opens diasporic subjectivity to a luminal, dialogic space wherein identity is negotiated. Thus diaspora experience double identification that constitutes hybrid forms of identity which are separate from the essential form of cultural identity with its affiliations to the constructions of nation or homeland. In other words, Diaspora concepts shift from essentialist notions of homeland, national or ethnic identity probe multiple belongings and address the conditions that allow people to inhabit more than one national space. In such a diasporic context, the United States which is a land of immigrants, finds itself not as a melting point but as another diasporic switching point. The diasporas in their journey through space restrict as well as widen the blurring boundaries of nations.

Diaspora literature has become a genre in itself. In invariably deals with themes like nostalgia for a home that exists only in memory, failed quests and thwarted dreams, conditions of

dislocations and loneliness, the utter loss of a support system and futile attempts to forge a new support system, the identity crisis, painful quest for the lost 'self' intergenerational conflict between the 'expatriate' first generation parents and the 'immigrant' assimilated second generation children, marital conflicts as spouses adapt to new culture differently, misreading of cultural codes, the experience of racism in all its manifestations.

Bharati Mukherjee as a diasporic writer

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the greatest novelists of Indian diaspora who have got desirable position. Among the writers of diaspora, Mukherjee has been believed as one of the gifted novelists and is called as the openly-eyed but loving immigrant in American society. Mukherjee, like any other post modern writer, has taken up the distress and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in the United States or the western world.

Bharati Mukherjee has sustained a difference between immigrant and expatriate writers. She has told in an interview conducted by Vrinda Nabar in *The Times of India*: "An expatriate works very hard to artificially hang on to the past. I say let the old self die, if it must, if the new self must be born".

India as a cultural power is diverse, amorphous and undefined. An interesting author like Bharati Mukherjee adjusts her view and, as a migrant, defines it for her readers. She views life as a shifting reality, ever in instability, and with struggles of attitudes. She writes with a different setting, an innovative set of characters and a fresh emphasis. East-West face forms a vital area of concern in Bharati Mukherjee's works. She treats this theme in its different colors. In presenting this idea, her main pre-occupation seems to be the research of such factors that come in clash with different races and cultures.

Bharati Mukherjee's transmigration to the other country could not destroy her familial ties with her homeland. Even after four decades she continues to write about India and Indian immigrants to the West. From *The Tiger's Daughter* to *Miss New India* one can scrutinize a stout metamorphosis from acculturation to self-actualization in Bharati Mukherjee's novels. Transformation and migration have been her two major themes. In her novels, one searches portraits of herself and optional selves. She slowly moves away from themes of nostalgia and expatriation for old homes to focus on shifting identities and the creation of emotional ties to North America.

Bharati Mukherjee's characters belong to varied national origins and cultural backgrounds. One fact that binds them together in spite of their dissimilar cultural histories and social differences is their shared experience of diaspora as they search new ways of belonging and becoming in America. Her characters in diaspora have sentimental attachments to their far homeland but have no actual wish for permanent return. As Marowski and Matuz say in "Bharati Mukherjee", Mukherjee's focus is upon "sensitive protagonists who lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity and are victimized by racism, sexism, and other forms of social oppression". She establishes the trajectory of her identity and cultural politics in the course of crossing and recrossing manifold borders of language, culture, race, history and time.

Bharati Mukherjee being a woman in diaspora is in a position of cultural disorder. She deplored racial struggles in multi-cultural Canada and at the same time gender partiality in India. In her novels, the icon of motherland is celebrated in the rainbow colors and proposes ethnic plurality to the American global readers. Her effort as an Indian diasporic woman writer is to present the Indian woman as pervasively as possible, specially to the American society around her, and to her fellow Indian-American, and to the diaspora world at large.

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee approximated that in an era of diaspora one's biological identity – social group, ancestry and ideology - may not be one's real identity as migrant brings changes, tangible and psychological. Her novels contain the ideal of split between social and psychic identity, dependent security and independence, desire and reason. She believes in the present and not in the past, for it will help contour her future. She perceived that her transformation was a two-way process because it impressed both the individual as well as the national cultural identity. She writes enthusiastically of achieve on arrival to a new place. It is just an issue of one's outlook and natural.

Bharati Mukherjee's novels of diaspora exemplify her sense of what it means to be a writer who was born and raised in India, has been a citizen of Canada and the United States, and who has been formed and changed by the cultures of India and North America. Bharati Mukherjee herself explains her artistic stand on the identity reformulations made feasible by diaspora. In this era of diaspora, she infers that one's biological identity may not be one's only identity. Erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration.

At the point of intersection between one's own country and the other adopted country which assails the sheltered area of emotion and affection, the description of Mukherjee's protagonist becomes interesting. Bharati Mukherjee in an interview with VrindaNabar admits: "I am in fact writing about America more than about dark-complexioned immigrants. My focus is on the country on how it is changing minute by minute. My stories explore the encounter between the mainstream American culture and the new one formed by the migrant stream. I'm

really writing about the seams joining two cultures. Many expatriate writers are destroyed by their duality; I personally feel nourished by it”.

Bharati Mukherjee's narratives have an inbuilt urge to expose caste, exile locations of identity and identity wherein definitions disintegrate and amalgamate. Identity forms an important axis of self-definition for Bharati Mukherjee in an international cultural context. Caste and religion often become the identity deciders in India whereas they play a minor role in the identity of an Indian subject in diaspora.

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