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**THE ROLE OF EXILE IN THE NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE**

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**Abstract:**

The voice of Indian woman speaks in many languages, each having a rich regional flavor of its own. The thoughts of women, writing in regional Indian languages and in English, Significantly from post-independence times, have guided the shaping of modern India. An examination of the works of Mukherjee reveals a movement from expatriation to immigration. This movement coincides with her migration from Canada to the U.S.A. That is, Mukherjee's interpretation of and reaction to her experience in Canada led her to see herself as an expatriate and this theme of expatriation is reflected in her writings in Canada. Tara Banerjee Cart Wright returning to India after seven years in the U.S.A. experiences the alienation of an expatriate who senses a gulf between herself and her native people and traditions. In the U.S.A. Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as an immigrant. There in her works, which were either completed or fully written, she explores the immigrant sensibility, recognizing its duality and fluid identity and acknowledging alternate realities. When she experienced herself as an expatriate, Mukherjee saw Naipaul as her model. It is only when she outgrew and discarded the posture of an expatriate that she rejected Naipaul as a model and chose Bernard Malamud instead. Analyzing the characters in DARKNESS, we discover that the theme of expatriation is linked to fragmented, disintegrating, alienated characters, while the immigrants are fairly well adjusted to the new country and its lifestyle.

Keywords: languages, Tara Mukherjee, immigrant, Naipaul, disintegrating, etc

The voice of Indian woman speaks in many languages, each having a rich regional flavor of its own. The thoughts of women, writing in regional Indian languages and in English, Significantly from post-independence times, have guided the shaping of modern India. They have been opting to have the best of both the worlds of Tradition and Modernity. Thus their thoughts and words brought modernity into traditional India. Exile plays a significant role in shaping Indian English sensibility. It is a complex evolutionary process entailing cross-cultural shifts, loss of mother tongue, native ethos combating with the militating elements of the new environment and the dual pull of cultural loyalties. To have only a few, Kamala Markandeya is married to an English man and settled in England. Anita Desai has a German mother and a Bengali father. Bharathi Mukherjee who rejects a hyphenated identity has avowedly become one of the Americans. Across the world women, writers from Indian Diaspora have carved their distinct niche. She migrated to the U.S.A in 1980 with her family and became a U.S.A. citizen in 1988.

While in Canada, Bharathi Mukherjee published two novels, *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER* in 1971 and *WIFE* in 1975. She also co-authored a book of memories with her husband, entitled *DAYS and NIGHTS in CALCUTTA* (1977), on their year-long stay in India in 1973-74, after a fire in their Montreal home. Other writings in Canada included articles on civil rights such as *AN INVISIBLE WOMAN* and a few short stories, which were later, published in the collection *DARKNESS* (1985). Another collaborative effort with her husband *THE SORROW AND THE TERROR* (198) was published in the U.S.A. on the 1985 crash of the Air India plane Kanishka. Mukherjee's collection of short stories *THE MIDDLEMAN AND OTHER STORIES* (1988) has won critical recognition and awards. Subsequently, there has been one more novel *JASMINE*.

An examination of the works of Mukherjee reveals a movement from expatriation to immigration. This movement coincides with her migration from Canada to the U.S.A. That is, Mukherjee's interpretation of and reaction to her experience in Canada led her to see herself as an expatriate and this theme of expatriation is reflected in her writings in Canada. In the U.S.A. there is a growing recognition of her as an immigrant with an increasingly strong attachment to the U.S.A. and this experience of immigration is reflected in her writings in the U.S.A. This paper is a study of her works of fiction up to *THE MIDDLEMAN AND OTHER STORIES*.

As the very terms imply, expatriation focuses on the native country that has been left behind, while immigration emphasizes the country into which one has entered as a migrant. The expatriate dwells on his "ex" status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates his present in the new country. Expatriation is quite a widespread phenomenon in this century and describes the expatriate writer as "the contemporary everyman". Expatriation is actually an complex state of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile.

Faced with rejection, the newcomer clings to his ethnic identity. As Viney Kirpal observes, "Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these migrants in the new land."

In Canada, Bharathi Mukherjee claims to have experienced an anti- Indian attitude. Further, while her husband's writing was recognized, her own was mostly ignored. Canada's hostility to Indians and the non-recognition of her writing in Canada are the twin recurring themes that appear with an almost obsessive regularity in Mukherjee's writing. In her fiction written in Canada, the experience of expatriation is reflected.

Both in her *THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER* and in *WIFE*, the protagonists, Tara and Dimple are expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. They share the expatriate characteristics of being ill at ease both in the native culture and in the alien one. They represent the dilemma faced by expatriates. Commenting on Tara and Dimple Siva Rama Krishna says that the "retention of their identity as Indian is in constant tension with the need for its renunciation if they have to acquire a new identity as immigrants. According to Roshni, in these novels, Mukherjee presents "Some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions".

Tara Banerjee Cart Wright returning to India after seven years in the U.S.A. experiences the alienation of an expatriate who senses a gulf between herself and her native people and traditions. But in analyzing her own sense of alienation Tara realizes that it extends further back into her Indian past, to her education under Belgian nuns. "How does the foreignness of the Spirit begin?"

Dimple also experiences intense loneliness, which is different, qualitatively from the loneliness of the expatriate. There is a progressive and total estrangement from the environment, from herself and from existence itself.

In the *Tiger's Daughter*, Hotel Catelli- Continental, described as the "navel of the universe", becomes an important symbol of a rootless existence, a symbol of Tara's expatriate sensibility. In *Wife*, the Cage is an important symbol. It stands for a comfortable but restricted existence, for isolation and denial of freedom.

Viewing herself as a writer in 1977, with the two novels behind her, Bharati Mukherjee saw V.S. Naipaul as her model. In thus identifying herself with Naipaul at this stage, it is clear that Mukherjee too saw herself as an expatriate writer in the light of her first two novels.

The seeds of the change from being an expatriate to becoming an immigrant were sown during Mukherjee's stay in India in 1973-74. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee says, " The year in India had forced me to view myself more as an immigrant than an exile"-

(284). The realization too could be traced to this sojourn in India. Again it was in India that Mukherjee realized the limitations of the stance of third world expatriate writer. "To be a woman writer in North America to be a third world woman writer in North America is to confine oneself to a narrow airless, tightly roofed arena". (285-86). Probably this led to later opting for the viewpoint of an immigrant.

In 1985, distancing herself from the earlier stance of an expatriate Mukherjee emphatically brings out the futility of such a stance. In *Darkness*, she observes, " If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait – surrendering little bits of a reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past- you'll never belong anywhere". Bharati Mukherjee regards expatriation as a restrictive and self – defeating attitude in a writer. The expatriate writer nurses his grievances parade his pain of exile and become a "permanent scold". Ultimately this adversely affects his sensibility and also his writing, which becomes self- imitative and predictable.

In the U.S.A. Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as an immigrant. There in her works, which were either completed or fully written, she explores the immigrant sensibility, recognizing its duality and fluid identity and acknowledging alternate realities. In the introduction to *Darkness*, Mukherjee clearly articulates her movement from expatriation to immigration and traces the change to act of migrating to the U.S.A. The movement from expatriation to immigration is also reflected in the choice of the writers whom Mukherjee acknowledges as her models.

When she experienced herself as an expatriate, Mukherjee saw Naipaul as her model. It is only when she outgrew and discarded the posture of an expatriate that she rejected Naipaul as a model and chose Bernard Malamud instead. The shift from Naipaul to Malamud as literary model signified the transition from the exiled expatriate to the vibrant immigrant.

Unlike the expatriate with his nostalgia for the past, the immigrant plunges into the present and gets enthusiastically involved in the environment around him. While the expatriate parades pain and grievance, the immigrant celebrates the fact of being alive in a new world, of being reborn. Immigrants are energetic, resilient and able to accept changes. They themselves change in the encounter of cultures and they also bring about change in their environment. The assimilation involved in immigration does not mean a denial of the past. It only means giving up a rigid holding on to the past. In *DARKNESS*, Mukherjee says that she saw her Indianness not “ as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration” but “as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated”.

In the collection of stories entitled *DARKNESS* published in 1985, four were written in Canada, in Montreal and Toronto. They are *THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HIS ISOLATED INCIDENTS*, *HINDUS*, and *COURTLY VISION*. Mukherjee comments on

these stories in her introduction: " The purely 'Canadian' stories in this collection were difficult to write and even more painful to live through. They are uneasy stories about expatriation". Most of the remaining stories were written in the spring of 1984 in Atlanta, Georgia, when Mukherjee was a writer- in- residence at Emory University. This collection, which contains stories written both in Canada and the U.S.A., illustrates the transition from expatriation to immigration.

In 'THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HSU', Ratna, of Indian origin and her husband Graeme Clayton, a Canadian professor of psychology at McGill University, Montreal, are on holiday at an island off the coast of Africa. The story ends on a poignant note. "She poured herself another glass, feeling for the moment at home in that collection of Indians and Europeans babbling in English and remembered dialects.. Here, in Ratna, we see the eternal exile of the future. After they shift to Toronto, she would be an alien forevermore, one who had felt most at home among strangers in an island off the coast of Africa.

In the short story ISOLATED INCIDENTS, the expatriate is viewed from the point of view of a native Canadian -Ann Vane, whose job is to file complaints from immigrants on problems concerning human rights. In HINDUS, Mukherjee juxtaposes an expatriate against an immigrant to draw out the contrast. Leela Lahiri, the narrator of this first-person narrative reveals an immigrant fluid identity. She proudly declares, " I am an American citizen" (133) but she is also proud of her Bengali Brahmin past. H.R.H Maharaja Patwant Singh of Gotalh is an obvious expatriate with a grievance against India for not having treated him well. Writing his memories with nostalgia, he is expatriate to the core. While the Maharaja parades his pain and grievance, Leela celebrates rebirth in a new world. In this story, it is implied that the expatriate stance is futile. The story though written in Canada, reveals the movement from expatriation to immigration.

Analyzing the characters in DARKNESS, we discover that the theme of expatriation is linked to fragmented, disintegrating, alienated characters, while the immigrants are fairly well adjusted to the new country and its lifestyle. One might even go to the extent of saying that the movement from repatriation to immigration, as Bharathi Mukherjee sees it, is a movement from alienation to integration.

JASMINE is a short story in this collection using the third person narrative. Jasmine, an enterprising girl from Trinidad, arrived at Detroit via Canada, an illegal immigrant. At first, she stayed with her fellow countrymen the Daboos who owned a motel. Later, she shifted to Ann Arbor and took up a housekeeping job with the Moffitts, Bill and Lara and their daughter Muffin. This ongoing journey becomes a metaphor for the universal quest from alienation to integration. Just as expatriation was a metaphor for existential alienation in the first two novels, immigration becomes a metaphor for the reintegration of the alienated sensibility in the two collections of short stories.

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