

## DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S FICTION

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### Abstract:

Man's relentless inquisitiveness since the time of his creation has proven to be both a boon and a bane. How it is considered depends on the perspective of an individual. Beginning with the loss of Paradise, it has been a mundane quality in the human being trying to know the unknown and far placed things. The Indian diaspora which began during the colonial period, as a result of the imperialism throughout the world are now inhabited by second and third generation people of Indian origin. The earlier generation of diasporic Indian writers includes V.S.Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate, who has had and continues to have a stormy relationship with the land of his ancestral origin. Bharati Mukherjee in her very first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* portrays the fact that Indian women emigrating to America face more psychological problems. "The Indian women who are living in America often encounter cultural dissonance. They are often burdened with the additional internal conflict that is associated with their femininity. Debby casts aside her well laid out life and opts for a highly disorganized life. She journeys from the routinely normal world in which she is nurtured to the most horrible, crime filled, hippie world, in search of her bio-parents. Like so many earlier Mukherjee's characters, Debbie is a woman with multiple lives- a self-proclaimed chameleon who talks vaguely of fulfilling her fate.

Keywords: creation, colonial period, human being, Indian origin, .etc

Man's relentless inquisitiveness since the time of his creation has proven to be both a boon and a bane. How it is considered depends on the perspective of an individual. Beginning with the loss of Paradise, it has been a mundane quality in the human being trying to know the unknown and far placed things. In the process, man has lost what he originally possessed; and gained from the loss, new possessions, and experiences. The process also ensured that he break the shackles of time and space. Whatever the loss and gain might be, is individual perception and acknowledgment. But one definite thing about the whole process is the ensuing experience, many times painful.

India, a unique nation since the Rig Vedic era, has also not been spared of the painful process and has had its share in the immigrant, diasporic experiences. The term diaspora' has been accepted from the Greek, meaning 'to disperse'. A diaspora can be described as a community of people who live together in one country, but "acknowledge that the old country- a nation often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore- has always some claim on their loyalty and emotions" (Cohen 9). Thus people of a diaspora live in one country as a community but look across time and space to another.

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The more recent writers among the Indian diaspora are Salman Rushdie, M.G. Vassanji, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Rohinton Mistry among many others. All these writers have been alternately lauded and reviled in their ancestral homeland. This reflects not only the ambivalent relationship these writers have with their motherland but also the feeling of acceptance and rejection manifested towards them by India herself. The identity crises faced by the writers themselves form the basis of their writing.

Bharati Mukherjee deals with the immigrant lives of the Third World people who are at the crossroads of two cultures. Their ability to tolerate, accommodate and absorb another culture varies. The resulting adjustment or confrontation is a matter of discussion. Nostalgic reminiscences of one's native country, the satiric celebration of their new-found liberation point out to the feeling of something have been lost in the process of growth. The position of an immigrant, according to Salman Rushdie, is one of "Profound uncertainties." According to him, an immigrant is at home neither in his native nor in his adopted country. Hence in an essential sense of the term, the immigrant is 'unarmed'.

Home is not simply a place where one lives. It is one's identity-national, cultural and spiritual. Home is security. Exile is the loss of home; it is uprooting. The immigrant faces the dilemma of being unable to return home and yet not finding a home in the adopted land. They muster the hope that they will be able to merge into the culture of the new land. In A

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Change of Skies by Yasmine Gooneratne, Edward writes in his diary "He who crosses the ocean may change the skies above him but not the color of the soul" (Gooneratne 262). Thus in the quest for identity many forms of alienation like emotional, spiritual and physical occur. There is a constant conflict between the modern, liberal, permissive society one goes to and the traditional upbringing where freedom, right, and choice have been taken for granted about work and relationship.

Bharati Mukherjee in her very first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* portrays the fact that Indian women emigrating to America face more psychological problems. "The Indian women who are living in America often encounter cultural dissonance. They are often burdened with the additional internal conflict that is associated with their femininity. As women, differing gender norms and expectations can create a profound identity crisis that encompasses their sense of self" (Nityanandam 51). Her protagonist, Tara, expresses her confusion and yearning for the sense of security, she has lost by marrying a foreigner. She looks forward to the peace she can secure by returning to her native country. Ironically, the protagonist who was able to survive the alienation in an alien country falls a victim in her native soil. Moreover, she realizes that she finds more security in the arms of her American husband as is clear from her thoughts during her last moments. The portrayal of liberation through the characters of Tara and her husband David, and that of conservatism and Indianness through Tara's mother Aarati is a gulf that cannot be bridged. The split personalities have no retribution.

In her second novel *Wife*, Dimple the protagonist looks forward to the emigration eagerly believing in a change that will come over her life. After listening to the acquaintances of her friend, the idea of emigrating suddenly turns bitter. Still, she goes to America with her husband hoping for a rejuvenated life with a nascent beginning. She longs to be free, even work as a librarian; but the mysterious world of TV influences her so much that she tries to Americanise herself imitating the projected films and serials. According to Ragini Ramachandra, "Dimple's problem is her utter rootlessness. As she cannot come to terms with either her own culture or of America's culture, she finds herself at crossroads and visualizes her life as a dying bonfire" (Ramachandra 13). She tries it out in attire, food bits, extra-marital relationships and finally the murder. S.Sujatha rightly says, "Displacement distances Dimple from Amit. She is lonely and alienated. When the outlets to relate to people around her get blocked Dimple's personality indicates fragmentation. She suffers from insomnia, which is a direct result of the feeling of insecurity and fear" (Sujatha 66)

In Mukherjee's third novel *Jasmine*, the life of the protagonist in her different identities as Jyoti Jasmine, Jazzy, Jane and Jase is portrayed from the time she is born into a poor backward Punjabi village and in the course of the novel transferred to the U.S.A. (Sengupta 15).

Jasmine is portrayed as a person who has learned not to live for her husband or for her children but for herself; a complete deviation from her cultural upbringing. But the irony is that she has achieved a new identity only through and with the help of her cultural past. Jasmine, unlike Dimple or Tara, is quick to catch the contrast between the two cultures. She is equally quick in discarding the old and adapting to the new. Though the first two novels victimize the protagonist in two different ways, in the third novel Jasmine we find the protagonist firmly facing the complex problems in her adopted country and overcoming them through sheer will power.

In the fourth novel *The Holder of the world*, we find that the migration occurs from west to east and not from east to west. The protagonist in this novel is white and not an Indian as it was in her previous novels. The protagonist Hannah Easton migrates to India wishing heartily to escape from the puritanical surroundings of her home town. Her journey to India is fraught with images of adventure, action, and passion. She welcomes the change with an open mind and adapts herself to the Indian style of life, by even embracing Hinduism. This does not happen in the previous novels. The first two end in tragedies and in the third the protagonist settles down under an American identity. But in this novel through the protagonist adapts herself willingly, returns to her native land towards the end. Like Jasmine, Hannah finds final contentment and joy in the adopted land and it is the morality of this land that she carries with her. For Hannah, the benefits of the voyage were mostly internal. Her transformation clearly reflects the changing scenario, wherein people tend to change, refashion or rather transfer themselves to what they feel is the contemporary and current trend.

The fifth novel *Leave It To Me* is variant from the others in the sense that the migration is not between countries but within the same country. The protagonist Debbie is the child of a Eurasian father and a hippie American mother. She is shown to belong to a totally different generation. The disappearance of culture, social and religious barriers has slowly culminated in the obliteration of national and international identities too. This is what exactly happens in this novel. Here migration occurs between the different 'worlds' that inhabit the various parts of the country.

Debbie casts aside her well laid out life and opts for a highly disorganized life. She journeys from the routinely normal world in which she is nurtured to the most horrible, crime filled, hippie world, in search of her bio-parents. Like so many earlier Mukherjee's characters, Debbie is a woman with multiple lives- a self-proclaimed chameleon who talks vaguely of fulfilling her fate.

To conclude, in the first two novels the protagonists became victims of alien climate and social conditions before they settle down after fighting with opposition forces. In Jasmine, the protagonist establishes herself an identity. She finds herself a position of her choice in the foreign country. She, in fact, sows the seeds of acculturation to adapt herself as a natural

citizen. In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee treats the theme historically with contemporary ideas of east-west liaison. The novel *Leave It To Me* is said to be completely American in atmosphere and milieu in which violence and killings are identified as an order of the day.

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