



A Thematic Dissection of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels

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Abstract

This paper is a thematic dissection of selected novels of Bharati Mukherjee. During pre-independence number of Indians migrate to colonies of Europe and other countries. Migration studies have emerged as a new area of research. 'Diaspora' is one of the concepts of sociological that it has place in literature today. Even Diaspora literature deals with expatriated sensibility. Diaspora dream figures are found prominently in all the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee covering many moods of expatriation - nostalgia, uncertainty, frustration and despondency. In her novels, she explores the motif of expatriation, immigration and transformation. The protagonist of the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara Banerjee Cart right is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee. There is a strange fusion of the American and Indian in the psyche of Tara. She can take refuge neither in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. By analyzing the novel, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. *Jasmine* has achieved a proper identity and balance between tradition and modernity in the concluding part of the novel.

Keywords: Diasporic literature, the Immigrant, the Exile, relationship of mother-daughter, Colonization.

Identity – Significant figure in Diasporic Literature:-

Identity is a significant figure in diasporic literature. Diasporic. Indian Diasporic literature is the result of colonization and decolonization, the period in Indian history in which a large number of Indian people migrated to other countries either through colonization or by their need for work. This feeling of lack of identity gets classical expression in the diasporic literature of the period. So many writers like V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Arvind Adiga and others have expressed the feelings of rootlessness in the countries to which they migrated, where they were treated as 'others'. They have discussed the issues of globalization, consumerism, cultural hybridity, alienation, and identity crisis faced by the individuals. Their works focus on the dislocated self, which desires to search for

home and identity in transnational and trans-cultural situations. Diasporic dream figures are found prominently in all the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee covering many moods of expatriation - nostalgia, frustration, uncertainty and despondency. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated writers of the Asian immigrants' experience in America. Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American novelist, short story writer, non-fiction writer and journalist. Bharati Mukherjee, one of the famous women writers of the Indian Diaspora, in most of her works brings out the experiences she has encountered in her life as an immigrant.

Motif of Exile, Immigration and Transformation:-

In her novels, Bharati Mukherjee explores the theme of expatriation, immigration and transformation. Her creative works comprise six novels *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004). Her latest novel is *Miss New India* (2011). Her two collections of short stories are *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988).

Jasmine

Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1988) reveals a more positivistic approach to the problem of immigration. The narrative shuttles between past and present, between India of the narrator's early life, and America of her present one. Jasmine is a giver. She is a vital, life-giving force to Bud, Taylor, Duff and Du - they all love her and depend on her. She learns how to reinvent both herself and the American dream. The novel begins with the retelling of a story from her childhood about an astrologer who predicts her future as a widower living in exile. Then we are transported to see her living in Baden, Iowa where Jasmine (known as Jane in Iowa) is 24 years old, pregnant and living with 53 year old banker Bud Ripplemayer, and their adopted son Du. Bud insists on marrying Jane, who refuses for unknown reasons. Here in India, she is known as Jyoti. She has a teacher named Masterji, who teaches her English. Masterji urges Jyoti to continue with her education instead of getting married. Soon after Jyoti's father passes away, she meets Prakash. They marry and move in together. He begins to call her Jasmine. Prakash works two jobs and studies for his diploma exams while Jasmine runs a Ladies' Group raffle and sells detergent to make money. Prakash receives a letter from Professor Vadhera who encourages Prakash to study in America. While he is making plans to move the two of them to Florida, one day Prakash is killed by a bomb, when he was out shopping for saris, set off by a man named Sukhwinder.

Jasmine continues with Prakash's plans to move to Florida, travelling by plane, train, and ship. Half-Face, the captain of the ship drives Jasmine to a motel when they arrive to land. He then sexually assaults her. She

burns Prakash's suit that she carried with her and leaves the motel. Jasmine meets Lillian Gordon, who takes her in. Mrs. Gordon is also housing three Kanjobal women. For five months, Jasmine lives with Professor Vadhera, whom she calls Professorji. She becomes depressed because she has qualms, hesitating to leave the house without a green card. Professorji agrees to get her a green card, for fifty thousand rupees, or three thousand dollars.

Jasmine begins working for Wylie and Taylor Hayes, friends of Kate Gordon-Feldstein. She moves in with them in Manhattan to take care of their adopted daughter, Duff. Taylor calls her "Jase." Wylie falls out of love with Taylor and falls for Stuart. Wylie leaves Taylor, but Jase continues to take care of Duff. She falls in love with Taylor, but one day while the three of them are at the park, Jase spots Sukhwinder, the man that killed Prakash. She flees New York for Iowa. She chooses Iowa because Duff's birth mother lives in Iowa.

Jane receives a letter from Taylor, letting her know he and Duff are on their way to find Jane. Jane goes to visit Darrel because he says he feels crazy, but she leaves soon when he starts insulting her and Bud's relationship. She suspects he might shoot himself that night. When she returns home, Du announces that he is going to L.A. to live with his sister and he leaves with his friend John. Karin visits, and the two of them drive to see how Darrel is faring. He is fixing up his hog house. Back at the house, Jane tells Bud that Du went to visit his sister but he will be back before school starts. Bud later approves of Darrel's loan application, and the two of them drive over to let him know the news. But when they arrive, they discover him hanging from a rafter.

Bud begs for Jane to tell him she loves him, but she doesn't respond. Du has decided to stay in California. While Jane is working in the kitchen, she sees a car pull up the driveway and Taylor and Duff get out of the car. Taylor tries to convince Jase to come with him to California. Jasmine has achieved a proper identity and balance between tradition and modernity in the concluding part of the novel. Mukherjee's novel reaches the theme of fulfillment within the inner self at the final moment

The Tiger's Daughter

Mukherjee's novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) is a fine presentation of cultural conflict. It was conceived in a very difficult phase of her life when she was struggling to determine her own identity in the Indian heritage. *The Tiger's Daughter* runs parallel to Bharati Mukherjee's own experience when she returned to India with her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise in 1973. In this novel, she feels a special oneness with India. It deals with the problems of immigrants.

The protagonist of the novel, Tara Banerjee Cartright is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee. There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and the Indianness in the psyche of Tara. She can take refuge

neither in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. The novel is divided into four parts. Part I deals with the part of Tara, her family background, and the process of her settlement in New York; Part II deals with Tara's arrival at Bombay, her journey to Calcutta, and her reaction to India; Part III concentrates on Tara's life at Calcutta and her Catelli-continental friends; Part IV of the novel deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her friends to spend summer vacation, her coming back to Calcutta, her boredom and alienation, her victimization in a mob, and her tragic end which remains mysterious.

The novel begins with Tara's return to India after seven years in America first as a student at Vassar and later as the Indian wife of her American husband, David Cartwright. Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries David, an American and settles down in New York. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her home, to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of the Bengal Tiger and as the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Panchapara. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality.

Tara returns to India after a lapse of even years. Having married David Cartwright, a writer, she is now Tara Banerjee Cartwright. They treat her like a foreigner. Though her parents, relatives and friends are eager to own her with her acquired foreignness, Tara feels insecure. Her alienation is deepened as she is welcomed by her relatives as 'Americawali' and her husband a 'meleccha' which means an outcast. Even at home she finds it difficult to play the role of a typical Bengali Brahmin. She feels guilty every time she enters the pooja room. Even while sitting before the rows of god and goddesses, she is not filled with piety. She thinks only about David. She is not able to sing bhajans. Tara remembers that as a child she had sung bhajans in the same house. But now, she is not able to sing spontaneously. She forgets her various steps in the religious rituals.

Every time she meets her friends at the Catelli- Continental, she feels out of place in their company. She visits the funerary banks with Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, the owner of tea estates in Assam. She also feels that her visits are far from pleasant. When Tara visits Nayapur, a mining town near Calcutta with her friends, P. K. Tuntunwala, a businessman-turned-politician, he seduces her in the Nayapur Guest House. Tara so much that she resolves to leave Calcutta for good. But before she actually leaves, she is trapped in Sanjay's car in the midst of a rioting mob on the road facing the Catelli-Continental. The rioters thrash Joyonto when he stirs out of the Catelli-Continental in a bid to save Tara. The mob also attacks Pronob, Tara's friend violently when he goes out to rescue Joyonto. Even Tara's visit to St. Blaise to meet the nuns is disappointing. To her the nuns seem "browner than she remembered their accents more Indian than she had

expected”. (200) All her early ideas of love, fair play and good manners had come from these women. But now, their quaint formation on the steps of St. Blaise’s seems to be “people in a snapshot, yellow and faded”. (201) Thus Tara’s Indian dream is thoroughly shattered. She reconciles herself to reality. The story ends quite abruptly. The protagonist is left to wonder whether she will ever leave Calcutta and whether David will ever know that she loves him fiercely. In this novel, 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 India she travels from Bombay to Calcutta, visits her aunt’s place, the Catelli-Continental, Mr. Worthington’s Council, the charity carnival, the funerary banks, Tollygunge, Darjeeling and Nayapur. There is also the temporal movement from Old India to New India. As Gillian observes, Old India implies order, safety and comfort and New India implies danger, disorder and confusion. The novel is open-ended as the reader is left wondering whether she could succeed in returning to her husband. The ending of the novel is used as a paradigm to question and discover – rediscover the new ways of defining reality in a world standing on the brink of the glorious mountain consisting of cash and pebbles.

Wife

The central character of this fictional write-up of Bharati Mukherjee 'Wife' is Dimple. Mukherjee presents this character of 'Wife' in such a way that the reader is left wondering about the attitude that he or she develops towards her. Mukherjee takes us deep into the mind of Dimple as she makes a transition from being single to marrying a husband chosen by her father. It also depicts the transitional situation of living in the familiar surroundings of Calcutta to moving to the so-perceived violent city of New York. As the novel progresses, Dimple's hidden unstable personality reveals itself leaving the reader shocked, yet filled with wonder and delight. The protagonist 'Dimple' is characterized as a young, naive Indian woman, who tries to reconcile the Bengali ideal of the perfect, passive wife with the demands of her new American life. In this story Dimple lacks the inner strength and resources it takes to cope in New York City as the young wife in an arranged marriage. Again in this novel, Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and in the end live. This story reflects the author's mental status in many of its parts. At the end of the story being suppressed by such men and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife she becomes frustrated and out of fear and personal instability she ultimately murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. The main character depicted in 'Wife' is regarded as a weak one as she fails to make the transition from one world to another.

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