

DIASPORA AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVELS OF BHARATHI MUKHERJEE

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ABSTRACT

*This paper mainly focuses on the diaspora and Identity crisis is one of the key issues that are given space with ,especially in diasporic writings of Bharathi Mukherjee, who was born in india left her motherland and settled in America in that alien culture she faced many odd situations which she has aptly reflected in her writings .As the novelist herself was born in India she has a close bond with Indian culture she has a difficult time to adjust with foreign culture. In a wide range of her works be it **Jasmin , or Tigrer”s Daughter, or wife ,Leave it to me ,Holder of the world,Tree Bride and desirable Daughters** all her women characters are depicted facing many adverse situations in their respective lives.They all are victims of immigration .Moreover all her women are the ones around whom entire action of the story revovls.she has very skillfully dealt with feminism. True that her characters suffered at many levels yet they emerge out of those situation to be a new woman who survives in a male-dominated society because of discrimination inequality,patriarchy.More importantly her women characters are life –like they undergo various situations that they have never faced in their lives we meet Tara Banerjee in The novel Tiger's Daughter,In another novel Desirable Daughters we meet . three sisters Padma, Parvati and Tara ,we are introduced to Jyoti in Jasmine which is her amous novel and we meet Dimple in Wife. Bharati Mukherjee who suffered all the adverse problems created by male dominated society and highlighted the very picture of Indian society at large. Her female characters belong to the middle class and lower class of the society. The main concern of the characters is clash between modernity and old customes of society . Mukherjee as a migrant writer faces a large number of problems and difficult situations*

Keywords: Diasporic, ,Immigration Feminism,Inequality

Introduction

Bharathi Mukherjee is a big name in literature,as a novelist ,as a unique women novelist of Indian diaspora.She is known as immigrant novelist of America.She was born in a Bengali family in Culcutta.She belonged to a rich,well –cultured Brahmin family. She completed her graduation in India then started working as a professor emerita in the department of English university of California Barkley She has about eight novels and a few short stories to her credit.

Special Issue

227

06 April 2022

Website: www.langlit.org

Contact No.: +919890290602

UGC Sponsored One Day Virtual International Conference on *Diaspora: Literature, Culture and Identity* organized by Shri Shivaji Arts & Commerce College, Amravati, Maharashtra State, India and Late Narayanrao Amrutrao Deshmukh Arts & Commerce College, Chandur Bazar, Amravati, Maharashtra State, India.

Indexed: ICI, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IBI, IIFC, DRJI, The CiteFactor, COSMOS

The major concern of her novels is an immigrant life in America. This subject she deals with in most of her works.

Many of her novels underline her diasporic consciousness as well as identity crisis. The article in The New York Times reveals “In many of her novels and stories, a young woman — shaped, as she was, by a male-dominated culture, sometimes have to face a completely new situation. Mukherjee believes that there is hardly any meaning in clinging to the past as it is fruitless. In *Darkness* (1985) she says boldly:

“ 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”

Many of her novels are replete with diasporic elements and every one of her woman character is trying to create her new world. She uses her full capacity to prove herself. There is psychological trauma, feeling of rootlessness in alien culture, there is nostalgic remorse for past life.

The Tiger’s Daughter deals with the journey of a female character named Tara, born in India, brought up in Calcutta, who marries a man from America. The novel deals with the cultural shock. Various studies establish Tara as a woman trying to find a place for herself. Her critically studied novels and collection of short stories are really works of literature that give expressions to expatriates. *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a story of a young woman who is born in India. But the course of time leads her to America and gets married there with an American. Having born in one culture and marriage in a different culture creates a problem of identity crisis. The present novel she walks place to place in search of her stable identity. But the tragic thing is that till the end of the novel she fails to achieve her goals. She was staying with her husband in America, yet she was feeling nostalgia for her land of birth. The vision of her house constantly dwells in her mind. For the fulfillment of this dream, she comes back to India, but in vain she fails in her aim.

The changing scene of India and the family reputation of her father affects her aim of finding her ‘true self’. Her ‘identity is lost’ because of Indian modernity and the changes taken place there. Her dream of achieving her own identity shatters due to frustration, she prepares to return finally. Another novel is *Wife*, a story of Dimple and her unfulfilled dreams. Dimple is keen to get married and she dreams of her life partner whose handsome moves and glances could take her to fulfill her wishes in life. In *Dimple* is a highly imaginative girl who has concern for lofty purposes in life, having little significance to daily responsibilities, not really willing to adjust with in-laws. Her husband, Amit, a young man whom her parents find to be a suitable match for her, fails to meet her dream husband vision. Dimple finds marriage a huge burden she feels life after marriage to be very dull in Calcutta. She tries to go to America but in America too another problem was waiting for her. Amit tries to keep his wife happy in every possible manner despite his own struggle to find a job. He

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fails to give his quality time to his wife as he has to remain out of house for long time . This situation forces Dimple to think that he does not love her . She used to watch T.V. for hours together. She spends time in watching the films and the television serials which have murder as a part of the episode . Unable to adjust with her psyche, one night as Amit comes home from his job, she attacks him on the neck with kitchen knife and after the horrid act she sits silent, safe under the impression that in the television serials the murders never come to light. A dominant theme is sense of belongingness which the protagonist wants to achieve ,her struggle, toils all are depicted from immigrant perspectives.

Jasmin is the masterpiece that the novelist has contributed. In Jasmine, is journey is in metaphorical manner that advocates the reality and nature of life that is all the time moving forward. In India, as Jyoti, Jasmine is seen was born in a strictly male –dominated society , Indian society. Nevertheless In America, her awareness of the self is obviously seen in the relationships with Bud, Taylor. Her first life -partner Prakash decides to change his wife’s identity from traditional Jyoti to highly individualized American women, Jane. Jasmine was born in a village, Hasnapur. She tells the story as a twenty-four year old pregnant widow, living in Iowa with her lover, Bud Ripplemeyer. Jasmine mixes in her memory each of her names - as Jyoti, , Kali, Jazzy, Jasmin ,jase Jane, . Jasmine creates a new world having unique principles ,new ideas and values, constantly thinking of her past Jyoti is literally strangled to death by her grandmother is a survivor and fighter from the beginning. Jasmine survives that incidence only to become a rebellious child who stands bold and faces the hurdles in life with firm attitude. very beginning Bharati Mukherjee has delineated Jyoti as a rebel against blind beliefs and superstitions. Breaking from the usual tradition she chooses Prakash Vihh, an educated, intelligent young man, who renames and reshapes her personality as Jasmine. The renaming prompts her to be a new woman. Prakash supports her and gave her a space for life . Jasmine appears to be all time happy sharing the ambition of her husband, wants to go to America, which was a land of her dreams and opportunities. But she loses her husband .An untimely death when she had just started her life, leaving her completely , shattered and heartbroken at very young age of 17. Prakash is killed in a blast on way to America. She was totally sad after his death yet she was ready for transformation because a new challenges were ready to come in her path of life.

The Holder of The World is a nice story mixing of the elements of Eastern and Western Culture. The story revolves around Hannah Easton, a woman born in Massachusetts who travels to India and becomes busy with a few Indian lovers and in course of time a king gifts her a diamond called the Emperor’s Tear. The story is told through the defective searching for the diamond. Mukherjee’s focus continues to be on immigrant women and their freedom from relationships to become individuals and she also uses the female characters to explore and spatiotemporal connection between cultures. The novel is set in the last decade of the seventeenth century India when the country was experiencing a transition of power from the Mugals to the English. Hannah becomes famous all around the city through her works. She marries Gabriel Legge, East India Company worker and comes to India. Later on Gabriel dies. After death of Gabriel in the sea, Hannah falls in love with Raja Jadav Singh. But unfortunately this happiness last only for some time for Raja is arrested in a fight with emperor Aurangzeb. She appeals to the Emperor to leave the Raja but Raja was killed and

Special Issue**229****06 April 2022**Website: www.langlit.org

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she returned to Salem. Her decision of giving birth to the child which was illegitimate child shows her integrity to the truth.

Desirable Daughters is a novel, which deals with the story of three sisters as they find their very different ways in life. The novel is highly autobiographical as it captures immigrant experiences. Family legend of a “Tree Bride,” Tara Lata, an ancestor of the novel’s main character living in a Bengali village. She is to be a traditional child bride in an arranged marriage. But just before the ceremony, the groom is bitten by a venomous snake and she dies, even though both families had properly worshipped the snake goddess to avoid tragedy. To add to more drama, The bridegroom’s father claims dowry even though the marriage has not taken place. The bride’s father refuses to give it to him.

But as according to Hinduism the only way for a woman to get salvation is through the worship of her husband. This means that an unmarried woman is both a social outcast and neglected. To save his daughter in this life and the next, Tara Lata’s father symbolically marries her to a tree. To be called as a tree bride. The story now shifts to current time in San Francisco. Tara Bhattacharjee, named after her “Tree Bride” ancestor, has divorced her rich husband, “the richest and most important Indian in the country,” bringing up her son, Rabi, on her own. She has a white boyfriend, Andy. Divorce is unheard of in Tara’s Indian immigrant community, so hers has become an open secret, something everyone knows about but which no one ever talks about. She is happy with Andy as she was not with her husband, who saw love as interchangeable status and *9

She differs from her two sisters. Her older sister, Parvati, has remained in India where all three women were born. She married in a love match rather than through an arranged marriage, but otherwise fills the traditional role of a typical Indian housewife. The third sister, Padma, has also been shifted to America but lives, in New Jersey. Padma is a famous news anchor who also works as a sari- designer.

Tree-bride is yet another novel that catches our attention in this novel she deals with cultural conflict this is a tale of a brahmin girl from Bengal, who becomes fighter, against the British rule. The narrator appreciates her ancestor's struggle for mother land, trying to establish herself as atypical American in culture..

Conclusion:

Mukherjee's novels are highly diasporic in the sense they throw some light on the inner urge for the past memories and through the struggles also explores the potential characters, especially women who face all tough situations in life yet show their indomitable spirit. Mukherjee has very skillfully presented her women characters. Her major characters Jasmine and Dimple show their similar spirit fighting against all atrocities of patriarchy in which women are denied some special rights which men freely enjoy. Mukherjee very aptly highlighted this topic in her range of works. The experiences of all her female protagonists of the novels have a very tough time in their lives they are dislocated, they undergo

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transformation, they are neglected yet , they showed their spirit and integrity till the very end emergence of strong will –power even in tensed situation without accepting defeat. They move on with the time.

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