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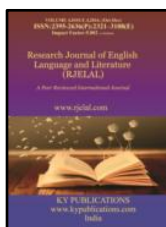
AUTO BIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an in depth analysis of auto-biographical elements in the select novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee is a famous Indian born diasporic writer who secured a permanent place among the writers of diaspora. She focused on the themes of immigration, cultural conflict, racial discrimination, alienation, expatriation, feminism etc. most of her works are reflections of her life. She has beautifully woven the characters through the shades of her personal journey in different lands. Like the creator, her characters are also from South Asia in particular India who migrate to America for various reasons, struggle to adapt to new situations in the adopted land. An autobiographical touch is given to the lead characters of her novels and her novels are best in a perfect blend of fact and fiction.

Keywords: Auto biographical, Immigration, Transformation, Expatriation,

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most popular diasporic writers. A perfect mix of fact and fiction can be seen in her novels. She stands for feminism, which is reflected through her lead women characters. The transformation of women when migrating from a place to another is beautifully portrayed in her writings. She has secured a steady place among the diasporic writers, because of her portrayal of women in the newly adopted land. The transformation includes ups and downs, where the female characters face many problems and struggles but they survive all those by taking bold and strong decisions, clear thoughts and a vision for future.

Author's Credentials

Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta in 1940. Later she moved to Europe along with her parents and then returned to India. She went to United States to study at university of Iowa. She

then married Clark Blaise and wrote few works collaboratively. She also has many novels to her credit - Tiger's Daughter, Wife, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave it to Me, Desirable Daughters, The Tree Bride, Miss New India. She has written some short stories like Darkness, The Middleman and other stories, A Father and The Management of Grief. She has won National Book Critics Circle Award for her short story The Middleman and the Other Stories.

Author's voice on her characters

Most of her novels reflect auto biographical element. Her works have the shades of Mukherjee's personal life journey, her experiences and this has been accepted by the author in an interview. Being a diasporic writer, she writes about women migrating from east to west and also from west to east. The author herself has experienced various stages of immigration, identity crisis, racial discrimination etc.

she has faced all these as a women writer as well as a South Asian.

Mukherjee has adopted many transformations and she was born new from each transformation. She lived in a joint family in her childhood days, then as a single family and then migrated to west where she was an expatriate, immigrant and became a citizen of America. Bharati Mukherjee in her *Days and Nights in Calcutta* has expressed about her transformation:

My life, I now realize, falls into three disproportionate parts. Till the age of eight I lived in the typical joint family, indistinguishable from my twenty cousins, indistinguishable, in fact, from an eternity of Bengali Brahmin girls. From eight till twenty-one we lived as a single family, enjoying for a time wealth and confidence. And since twenty-one I have lived in the west. Each phase required a repudiation of all previous avatars; an almost total rebirth. (Mukherjee, *Days* 179)

Like the chameleon like character of her famous novel *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee has also lived several citizenship and evidenced different socio-cultural issues during her lifetime. As most of her novels are auto biographical, her life in Canada as an expatriate who cannot accept the new and forget the past, her life in America as an immigrant who adopts to new situations denying the past and accepting the new culture form the basis of her novels. Mukherjee's biography and her works have a very close connection. Though her life is not portrayed exactly, she has used her imagination and creativity excellently.

Tiger's Daughter

In her first novel "*Tiger's Daughter*", the lead character Tara resembles Mukherjee herself. This novel was written when Mukherjee was in her expatriate phase, struggling to find her own identity in the new land, not losing the connections from the past. The novel focuses on a young girl, who goes to America for her higher studies at the age of 15. She faces many difficulties at that age and struggles to accept the American life and culture. The racial discrimination affects her much. Eventually, she loves and marries an American David Cartwright in

America. The socio-cultural clashes become predominant after her marriage where she wants to compromise the situations.

The first part of the novel deals about Tara's separation from her family, her journey to America and her stay in Newyork. Next part of the deals with Tara's Journey to India after seven years and her response towards Indian society. The third part of the novel focuses on her life in Calcutta and her continental friends. The last part of the novels concentrates on her visit to Darjeeling, spending her summer vacation, her boredom, sense of alienation, victimization of mob and her mysterious tragic end. Tara returns to native, after a seven long years' stay in America. India, the country of her origin becomes alienated for her. When her parents, relatives and friends are very eager to receive her, Tara feels she is alienated and insecure. when she was called as "Americawali" by her neighbors, she feels the distance from the homeland. She finds it very difficult to be a typical Bengali Women. She becomes foreign to Indian culture and values and she cannot accept India now. This is one of the novels in which author's personal experiences, difficulties faced struggling between two worlds, and her acceptance towards America is well portrayed and reflected through the character Tara. The novel is a mere representation of author's state of mind, during the phase of expatriation. The psyche of Tara has a strange fusion of Indianness and Americanness. She faces problem in accepting the new land as well to forget the past.

Wife

Mukherjee's second novel "*Wife*" is about a Bengali girl Dimple from a middle class family, who marries Amit Basu, a consultant engineer. Dimple dreams about her marriage with a neuro surgeon or with an architect which could give her the freedom of expression. But Dimple always worried about her sitar-shaped body and rudimentary breasts. Mr.Dasgupta, Dimple's father was tired of searching a groom and he felt "No one would marry an ugly girl like her; no one would make her happy or treat with respect" (Mukherjee, *Wife* 10). Finally he found Amit Kumar Basu, who had applied for immigration to Canada and U.S.

The novel "Wife" corresponds to the phase of expatriation. Dimple moves to America with her husband also with her dreams on America. In contrast to her expectations, she feels a big cultural shock in the new land. She expected happiness and freedom. But all she got is despair and pain. The novel begins in Calcutta, though the author was in Canada. The novel reflects Mukherjee's difficulties as an expatriate to adapt to the new life in Canada, where the racial discrimination towards south Asian was at its most.

Dimple's dreams about marriage, searching for the groom, her marriage with Amit Basu and the joint family life with Mrs. Basu forms the first part of the novel. The second part travels with Dimple's journey to America and their stay in Queens with another joint family in Amit's friend Jyoti Sen's flat. Being new to the place, they were completely dependent on others. In the last part of the novel, Dimple and Amit moves to New York and lives in a luxurious sophisticated apartments. They are free from other bonds but the difficulties in adapting to western culture begins here. Mukherjee's own experience in Canada is reflected apparently in this part of the novel.

Jasmine

Bharati Mukherjee's novel "Jasmine" was published in 1989, when the author was in immigration phase. The narrator of the novel, Jasmine was born in feudal village called Hasnapur in Punjab and moves to America after her husband's death. Jasmine like her creator Mukherjee, changes her names and her identity along with it.. Bharati Mukherjee admitted in an interview:

"Jasmine became the summary of my own emotions, without any of the events or characters being in any way autobiographical. My fiction comes out of my personal obsessions. I listen to the voices in my head, I find the appropriate metaphors for getting it across, for embodying an obsession. My Jasmine or Mukherjee have lived through hundreds of years within one generation in the sense of and then coming out a world with fixed destinies, fixed cultures taking on culture which, for us, is without rules. I'm making

the rules up as I go along, because, in many ways, I and my characters are pioneers." (Meer 26)

The author Bharati Mukherjee lived a privileged life in India. She was born in Calcutta to Sudhir Lal Mukherjee, owner of a pharmaceutical company. She spent her childhood in a luxurious mansion. But, the protagonist of the novel "Jasmine" was born as fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children in a society where daughters are considered as curse. She lived in a mud hut and she had to fight against her family and society for her education. Though Jasmine and Mukherjee has different backgrounds, Jasmine's life experiences have their genesis in Mukherjee's life.

Bharati Mukherjee believes immigrants undergo series of rebirths. Immigrants live several life from their birth to death depending upon the prevailing situations, sometimes by willingness and most of the times under compulsion. Bharati Mukherjee confides in her interview:

I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil right activist I was in Canada and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States. (Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 46)

The protagonist, Jasmine has also undergone through many transformation- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane via divergent geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and California. Jyoti's transformation from a village girl to an assertive and life affirming Jasmine is possible only when she reaches America. She rejects to be a victim of rape and kills the rapist. She has nothing to lose and this proves to be her advantage as she displays the chameleon adaptability to the alien culture and crosses the stifling boundaries of caste, religion and sexual sanctions. She willfully denies her ghettoisation in America by moving out from the sheltered abode of her late husband's teacher, Devendra Vadhera. She goes on doing permutations and combinations to her persona, facing the challenges of survival in an alien culture. She is on the move and the process of her transformation as it

appears, would continue. As the protagonist gets rooted in American soil so the novelist with this novel finds her niche among the writers of American mainstream. Sybil Steinberg states,

Mukherjee's characters have always reflected her circumstances and personal concerns and one is able to trace her growth in self-confidence and her slowly developing identity as American. (1)

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's life experiences are reflected in *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*. The female protagonists of her novels move from East to West. Mukherjee used feminism as her theme in all the above discussed novels. She gave voice to south Asian immigrant women in Canada and U.S. The first three novels are dealt with expatriates and the other novels are dealt with immigrants. Portrayal of Tara or Dimple or Jasmine are just outbirth of the author's own life. To conclude, Bharati Mukherjee has beautifully woven the place of South Asian Women in American continent as how she herself secured a place of herself as a diasporic writer and eventually managed to be a citizen of America.

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