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BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVEL : A THEMATIC STUDY IN IMMIGRANT SENSIBILITY

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ABSTRACT

Immigrants undergo displacement in their lives geographically as well as culturally. Diaspora literature talks about the story of these individuals who are victims of multiple dislocation. It also throws light on the complexity of Identity, hybrid and hyphenated identities as well as the difficulty in finding a sense of belonging. This paper gives an overview of diaspora literature and dislocation in the lives of immigrants. Immigrant experiences are a composite one made up of journey and border crossing. Immigrants' psyche shows the interaction of traditional culture within the culture of an adopted alien land and bring about a transformation in the inherited traditions and culture of the immigrants. Almost all her novels depict immigrants looking back to her mother country with pain and nostalgia but immigrants who share the common grievances of those who are impelled by an insistent urge to give voice to the aspiration of these new settlers. In all her novels we confront characters that despite suffering they are not ready to look back. Their sensibility gets altered under the stress of circumstances at the same time they are changing the situation around them by fighting.

Keywords: Immigrants, diaspora, dislocation, immigrants' psyche, transformation, hyphenation.

Introduction

The term "immigrant" in general refers to persons who live outside their own country either by choice or otherwise. But in the works of Bharati Mukherjee, this term assumes different connotations. The 'immigrants' willingly transform herself/himself to fit in and absorb the best in the host culture. The immigrant experience, therefore, becomes a transformative process of the 'self' in its relation to society.

The Tiger's Daughter illustrates uprooted condition of Tara, the protagonist of the novel, born in the family of Banerjees in Calcutta. Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries with an American man David in New York. After seven years when she returns

homeland Calcutta, trace her cultural roots and return her inherited identity as the daughter of Bengal Tiger and as the great Grand daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee. She is caught between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American culture. She is caught between two cultures, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality. The main concern of the artist is to underscore the futility of the expatriate's search for roots.

The novel emphasizes the need to reinvent and redefine the notion of "home / homeland" and the notion of 'Identity' from immigrant's perspective. The term 'home / homeland' as the immediate connotation of a natal territory or space that takes love, warmth, and security for granted.

Though home basically implies a specific geographical locale in the context of immigrants experience, because of the need to belong in the immediate reality, its parameter are enlarged.

Tara is a dispossessed exile in both the worlds. Though she lived in United State, she has an American husband, she is not eager to belong to American. A closer look at Tara's days in the United States will help us understand her uprooted condition Tara fails to make use of the freedom and opportunity offered by the host culture. Her problems of alienation, loneliness, despair, loss of identity and total anonymity in American spring from her uprooted condition. Therefore, in the Tiger's Daughter there is a call to end futile engagement with the past.

In her second novel 'Wife' the protagonist Dimple, migrates to the United States with her husband Amit, an engineer from IIT Kharagpur, while Amit is engrossed in amassing money like other Indian expatriate in the novel, Dimple is in pursuit of happiness and independence. Since Dimple enters the United States abruptly, without any mental preparation, the shocks is too much for her. She has difficulty in understanding the cultural code of the country. She does not want to turn 'expatriates' living in the United States for emotional support as she understand the inadequacies of the style of life. Dimple is caught between the stage of "expatriation" and the stage 'immigration' between the 'Bellygunge ghetto' of 'expatriate' and the 'Manhattan enclave' of 'immigrants'. She is also turn between the traditional role model of submissive self effacing Indian wife and a new model of assertive independent wife offered by West. But at a particular stage, she establishes contact with host culture. She built Bridge between the Indian expatriates and the host culture. But in the absence of good facilitator and adequate knowledge to help her encounter the alien reality. She eventually succumbs to social/ cultural and ultimately become disillusioned "expatriate".

Jasmine the protagonist of Mukherjee's third novel though widow at a young age casts aside the weeds of a widow and begins her stride towards liberation and empowerment. Mostly on the ground of committing Sati on the Florida University Campus

where husband Prakash wanted to stud, Jasmine lands on Florida coast. Despite the odds against her, she gets assimilated successfully into the American culture/ society. She changes herself in order to change the world around. Jasmine become Mukherjee's 'objective correlative' for her assimilationist ideology. With Jasmine, a new phase dawns in Mukherjee's literary career. Though she continues to talk about Immigrant life, her angle of vision has radically changed. Mukherjee presents immigration from the third world to North America as a process of uprooting and re-rooting. Her obsessive theme in this new phase is a making of New America and the changing face of America so there is decisive shift from the 'dark phase' of 'expatriate' writing to the 'bright phase' of 'immigrant' writing. This is articulated well in *Jasmine*. All along the narrator, Mukherjee's protagonist transform herself and in the process transforms America. So, immigrant experience as Mukherjee visualises it, is a two way process

A 'translated' immigrants is one who has come through a series of transformation while he/ she is exposed to a wide range of experiences in an alien land. Hanna Easton, The protagonist of *The Holder Of the World* emerges from Brookfield, a puritan outpost in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. She becomes Hanna Fitch under the care of her foster parents. On marrying Gabriel Legge, she becomes Hanna Legge. When she falls in love with Raja Jadhav Singh of Devgad, she becomes Salem Bibi. Ultimately she ends up as the priceless possession of Aurangzeb, 'The holder of the World'. 'Translation' takes place in the life of Hannah, Bhagmati and Beigh Masters, the narrator. They serves as means of bringing about a contrast between Hannah and Bhagmati and parallel between Hannah and Beigh Masters. As such the term 'translation' employees linguistic connotation. But in narrative it gains religious, cultural and racial connotation. The term 'translation' has also been used to refer to displacements through adoption and marriage. In the novel the word translation is used to describe the transformation of Hannah Easton, and is used simultaneously in the dominant seventeenth and twentieth century meanings. Hannah is Mukherjee's model of a 'translated' self. The novel has a wide

canvas send sweeps across continents, cultures and religions. The West meets The east and the new World falls in love with the old world. Hanna Easton, the citizen of the new world, undergoes the process of 'translation' in her journey from The West to The East.

Debby Di Martino, the protagonist of the novel *Leave It to Me* is a twenty three year old American girl. She is the adopted daughter of Manfred and Serena Di Martino, an Italian-American couple Schenectady New York. Her bio parents are "laussy" people who considered her lousier still and had left her to be sniffed ad by wild dogs like carcass in a mangyshade(leave 10)in the desert Of Rajasthan, India. The Gray nuns of the sisters of charity save the child, Christen her Faustine after a typhoon and send her to the United States for adoption. In the context of diasporic dislocation Debby's immigration is quiet different from that of other. Her dislocation is neither a villain or a force done. Genetic conflict begins in Debby very early in her life. The crossing of signals and conflicting impulses are a result of the struggle between nature and nurture.

The title of the novel, *Leave It to Me* is very significant. The title can be interpreted in many ways. It could be a statement of an immigrant who wants to remake/ reinvent himself/ herself on his/ her own terms. Immigrants experience is essentially on individual experience. Devi Dee wants to be left alone to deal with her fragmented self. At another level, the novel deals with the universal theme of the struggle between Good and Evil. As the ferocity of Evil in the world becomes rife. Goddess Devi wants the mortal beings to leave it to her to deal with. As nature also forms a part of the apocalyptic movement. *Leave It to Me* in the call of nature which is ready to disperse natural justice according to the rules governing the universe.

As the product of diaspora Mukherjee deal with the nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of 'expatriation', 'fragmentation of the self' exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation and negotiation. Mukherjee's sixth novel *Desirable Daughters* marks a new trends in her writings. In *Desirable Daughter* Mukherjee focuses on cultural hybridity simultaneously and the third space of

enunciation which are markers of the post colonial condition of our existence. *Desirable Daughters* throws fresh perspective on the collision and synthesis of multicultural strands. New World sensitivity and tradition, mythology and Old World values. Tara is cultural hybrid, who is at home in both the cultures. she has 'affiliation' with the host culture but that does not in any way hinder her 'filiation' with her home land and native culture. Padma is an Indo American who believes in hyphenation. She is an Indian cultural ambassador in the United State, Parvati is a western educated Indian women of the conventional mould. she is content with her role as the women of the household. These are three distinct and different ways to belong in the New World.

The Tree Bride, A sequel to *Desirable Daughters* begins, "Abbas Sattar Hai: I pray we do not meet again", (1). The prologue succeeds in creating the mood of awe about life- before- birth, life- after -death, incarnation, and the angst of the imperishable soul waiting to re- inhabit another living body. The Epilogue takes the readers on a journey to Kashi, where Tara Chatterjee conducts the cremation ceremony for Taralata, her great-great aunt. She has been prompted by the spirit of Taralata to perform the rites in a strident voice,. "I am trapped in your world of mortal, perform the rites..... set me free, Tara" (279) It is clear to Taralata Chatterjee that the spirit of Taralata is dangling between worlds, waiting to be released to the Abode of Ancestors. In the *Tree Bride*, Mukherjee weaves at least four stories together; connecting the lives of Tara Lata Gangooly (the *Tree Bride*) and her great- great niece, Tara Chatterjee; Tara's gynecologist Dr. Victoria Khanna and her grandfather Vertie Treadwell, who was a colonial officer; John Mist, a British orphan who established Mistgunjj in East Bengal and Abbas Sattar Hai, leader of the Indian Mafia. These stories tell of the magic of 'convergence', how each person we meet can impact our lives. The convergence Mukherjee would like us to believe are; Victoria Khanna Tara's gynecologist, has a grand father whose path crossed that of Tara's ancestor, the tree bride.

The maniacal (madling) killer, Abbas Sattar Hai, who is out to get the Chatterjee is actually

related to RafeekHai, a person raised in Tara's ancestral home, Mist Mahal. In other words, The Tree Bride moves back and forth in time and across continents in order to locate the connections and convergences and not mere coincidences of the past and present. In The Tree Bride, Mukherjee seems to suggest that the promise that America hold out to the immigrants is always circumscribed by familial compulsions, religious and cultural codes.

Conclusion

Mukherjee's contribution diasporic literature lies in her significant analysis of cultural collision in the Tiger's Daughter, disillusionment in Wife ; assimilation in Jasmine, cultural translation in The Holder of The World, fragmentation in Leave It to Me, cultural negotiation in Desirable Daughters and diasporic convergences in The Tree Bride. Mukherjee takes up these seven stands of immigrants experience and creates various models of expatriates immigrants. Immigrant sensibility in the novel of Bharati Mukherjee accounts as artistic expression of both cultural sycretism and a definite revisioning of the American National identity. The present study has made an attempt to read her now well as a process and not as a finished product .

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