

Diasporic Writing and Bharati Mukherjee- A Study

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Abstract

Science and Technology have completely changed individuals' lives in the twentieth century. Globalization, new immigration policies, rapid transportation, and ever-increasing telecommunication media have all aided the emergence of multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural nations. They have also brought about a variety of reactions amongst immigrant people, depending on individual situations and experiences.

Migration was a phenomenon in the second half of the twentieth century, though it had its roots in the early stages of civilization. The reasons for migration may vary. Some people migrated in search of fortune, some to fulfill their dreams, and others in search of identity and stability. The ultimate reason is to search for greener pastures. Despite the different paths, the immigrants have specific experiences in common. The article discusses various aspects of diasporic experience. A brief preamble of diasporic writers and their works has been discussed, as well as Bharati Mukherjee's life and her contribution to diasporic writing.

Keywords: Science and Technology, Globalisation, Migration, Diasporic experience.

Man's relentless inquisitiveness since 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 human beings trying to know the unknown and far-placed things. In the process, Man lost what he originally possessed and gained from losing new possessions and experiences. The process also ensured that he broke the shackles of time and space. Whatever the loss and gain might be, it is individual perception and acknowledgment. However, one definite thing about the whole process is the ensuing experience, many times painful.

Pain, as some people put it, is both sweet and bitter. A hopeful reunion after a separation is a sweet pain; however, denial of reunion is bitter. Whatever the outcome of the experience, pain is a must. Some successfully conquer it, while some deplorably fall a fatal victim to it. The known and the unknown have always been enigmatic questions to knowledge-seekers. Having gained a firm foothold on the

known, Man has tried to leap into the unknown, searching, researching, and re-researching to unveil the undiscovered facts. The pursuit has been relentless and continues to do so.

The relentless pursuit has continued on all fronts: scientific, cultural, artistic, agricultural, technological, psychological, medical, economic, social, political, etc. The immense knowledge gained in the process has dramatically widened Man's mental capacities. He, who once curtailed himself to his small group, has today turned global. His narrow vista has broadened spectrally, resulting in the rapid emergence of a multicultural, multilingual, multireligious, and hybrid society. The change has yet to spare even the writers and authors of short stories, novels, and articles. They play a significant role in society's transformation, transmutation, and transfiguration. They are the torch-bearers, the palanquin-carriers of the new wave of modernism in the offing.

Writers, especially the diasporic, have contributed immensely to globalization and have gained worldwide recognition and acclaim. Leading a diasporic life is like leading a life of voluntary exile. A plant that has been uprooted from its native ground and replanted in alien surroundings takes time to acclimatize itself to the new surroundings. It hesitates to widen its root base initially, just trying to survive on its original. Slowly, when it feels it can compete with the neighboring plant species, it tries widening its base, searching for water and nutrition sources to grow to its full stature. Thus, Man, uprooted from his native place and having emigrated to another, faces many psychological problems. The loss of identity, recognition, acceptance, approval, and appreciation curb his instincts, and he lives off his meager sources. Once he starts befriending his co-species, his confidence is boosted, and he starts regaining all he feels he has lost. The process cited is an average incident. It differs from individual to individual. Some smoothly merge into the alien fabric, while some struggle initially; for some, the struggle ensues continuously. Some emerge out of it victoriously, while some fall victim to it. The struggle is ultimately what matters. This has been the topic of discussion in the writings of almost all the diasporic writers who portray the problems of displacement, rootlessness, fragmentation, discrimination, and identity crisis.

This struggle for survival in an alien country has been termed immigration. The term is a commonly used word with a great depth in meaning. Shahrukh Hussain describes it as, "a move from one country or city to another, the experience of meeting people, strange environments and all the paraphernalia that goes with the actual, physical movement from one place to another. In short, a substantial change of both landscapes physical" (Hussain 19-37).

Despite different destinations, all immigrants share specific fundamental characteristic experiences. As Emmanuel S. Nelson puts it, the experience of migrating to a different land entails pain, as it involves a rift between home and tradition. Though migration offers new forms of personal and political freedom and an enhanced feeling of well-being, "the pleasures are subverted by a sense of loss, discontinuity, and broken identity" (Nelson 1-9).

The identity crisis the writers face forms the basis of their writings. They further deal with the immigrant lives of the Third World people who are at the crossroads of two cultures. Their ability to tolerate, accommodate, and absorb other cultures varies. The resulting adjustment or confrontation is a matter of discussion. Nostalgic reminiscences of one's native country and satiric celebration of their new-found liberation point to the feeling of something having been lost in the growth process. According to Salman Rushdie, an immigrant's position 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 'unhomed'.

Home is not simply a place where one lives. It is one's national, cultural, and spiritual identity. Home is security. Exile is the loss of home; it is uprooting. The immigrant faces the dilemma of being unable to return home and 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 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, sexual, spiritual, and physical, occur. There is a constant conflict between the modern, liberal, permissive society and the traditional upbringing where freedom, rights, and choice have been taken for granted about work and relationships.

In an interview with Linda Hutcheon, Rohinton Mistry voiced his opinion about the clash between the old culture of India and the new culture of Canada in his works as follows: If you have a cupboard with a certain amount of space in it, then you have to arrange your belongings in that cupboard the best way you can, given the space, but if you buy a new cupboard you have more space (Hutcheon 1990).

The experience of exile has assumed mythic proportions in Commonwealth literature. It starts as a condition of living and gradually intensifies to change into a condition of the mind. Its broad sources are cultural displacement and cultural shock. Cultural displacement implies the co-presence of more than one culture—biculturalism or multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism has assumed phenomenal proportions globally, and biculturalism shapes the Commonwealth's reality. Incidentally, all the countries that have had the misfortune of being colonized have experienced the traumatic splinching of the self. India's glorious cultural heritage, dating much earlier to the Vedic period, through nearly three centuries of British colonization, has had its irascible impact, which continues even today. The Portuguese, the French, and the Dutch have also added their share to the new patterns of cultural and behavioral value systems, thereby creating uneasiness and discontentment in the society. Impatience arising from tradition versus modernity, Indian vs. Western, dwindling of the conventional value system, marital discord, the collapse of the joint family system, ambivalent cultural response to the West, socioeconomic disparities, and colonial consciousness - all a hangover of the British rule.

Be it an ex-colony like India or any other colonies of the Third World, colonization was a system of institutionalized political force by which an ambitious country controlled the destiny of an introverted country. No doubt, modernization, Technology, a network of communication systems, and liberal ideas were the beneficial impacts of the colonial system. However, the negative aspects of the system were far more poignant. It has now been generally concluded that the colonizers only wanted to work to break the spirit of rebellion in the natives by 'educating' them to suit their work style and infusing into them a sense of inferiority and contempt for their own culture and values.

The spiritual and moral maiming of the natives' consciousness was so intense that they began to admire the Whiteman for everything and undervalue their tradition. Even after attaining freedom, these countries have yet to be able to solve their fundamental problems, such as poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, hunger, illiteracy, and health care. On the contrary, the West projected a rosy model of all-around development, which proved tempting.

Unable to keep intact the shattered economy in their own countries and having become educated in a different way unsuitable to the native standards, the natives were burdened with joblessness and poverty. This made them decide to migrate to what they felt were ideal countries like Britain, America, and France in an attempt to secure 'steady. Remunerative jobs. This thought of migrating for better prospects is human nature. Hence, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, a tremendous change has occurred, changing the face of the globe. Science, Technology, globalization, liberal immigration policy, rapid transportation, and telecommunication have brought a phenomenal difference in the general outlook of Man. Nations are emerging as multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural. 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, always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions" (Cohen 9). Thus, diaspora people live in one country as a community but look across time and space to another.

The Indian diaspora, which began during the colonial period as a result of the imperialism of the British Empire, spread rapidly. The little Indias established throughout the world are now inhabited by second and third-generation people of Indian origin. The Indian Government has labeled them as Pravasi Bharatis (Non-resident Indians). The Indian Government has extended a hand to these N.R.I.s and accorded certain privileges. The N.R.I.s, in turn, have been imaging India to the world. The earlier generation of diasporic Indian writers include V.S. Naipaul, the Nobel Laureate, who has had and continues to have a stormy relationship with the land of his ancestral origin.

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 by India herself. This can be argued to be natural because these prodigal daughters and sons are resented for having betrayed their parental home by leaving it, as they are sometimes loved for displaying a continuing attachment to it despite the thousands of kilometers stretched out between them. However, R.S.Pathak believes that "the Indian novel in English sustains challenges and enigmas. But it has endured the test of time and proves its excellence" (Pathak 1).

In addition to this, hostility and rejection from the host country had produced in immigrants a more profound sense of consciousness about their oppressed condition and forced them to search for their roots and identity frantically. The ensuing situation results in various psycho-sociological problems such as nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, and schizophrenia. Their dilemma of staying on or returning has made critics define *the post-modern world* as "the age of the refugee" (Steiner 10-11) and modern man as "the new nomad" (Toffler 74-94), not being able to root himself anywhere. The counter-pulls that these people experience after a journey and temporary settlement are reflected in the literature they produce. As Mordecai Richler has noted in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, the diasporic home is both a cage and a process of life. Being referred to as a journey is quite a famous saying in many world traditions. Hindu culture goes a step further in calling death a mahayatra. Though ancient Indians considered a voyage across the ocean a taboo, they were ardent travelers. Going on pilgrimages to various religious centers all over India was obligatory for them. Journey as a pilgrimage is a prevalent motif in the work of the first generation of Indian English novelists. An exciting novel experimenting with technique, M. Ananthanarayanan's *The Silver Pilgrimage* (1961) presents the growth of the hero's psyche through a pilgrimage to Kashi. However, younger novelists write about protagonists who voyage abroad. This journey, usually to America, is presented in various modes. Bharati Mukherjee concentrates on the tragic and sensational in novels like *Wife* (1976) and *Jasmine* (1989); Anurag Mathur and Boman Desai present its comic side, while Amitav Ghosh considers the philosophical implications of voyaging. Nina Sibal and Indira Ganesan describe journeys within India performed by the protagonist in search of selfhood, wherein the religious element is absent.

Most of these writers use their personal histories to explore not only the self and larger community but also to explore and subvert reader expectations that adhere to various personal modes of writing. Truth, presence, and verifiably witnessed history are all called into question by these would-be discreet confessionalists. In this process, postcolonial, contemporary literature is born.

Indian fiction in English is now reckoned to be a literature of world stature. Contrary to what generally happened until the eighties, it has become a favorite with postcolonial critics in the past two decades. Several factors have contributed to its new-found status, prestige, and global visibility. Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, and Manju Kapoor have elevated Indian fiction in English to new heights.

Generally considered the greatest novelist of the English-speaking Caribbean and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2001, VS. Naipaul deals with the artistic chaos of the Third World and the problem of an outsider, a feature of his own experience as an Indian in the West Indies, a West Indian in England, and a nomadic intellectual in a postcolonial world. Naipaul has also raised much controversy because of his politically incorrect views of the half-made societies. He has consistently refused to evade unwelcome topics, describing his role as a writer to look and to look again, to re-look and rethink.

Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born in a small town in Trinidad into a family of Indian Brahmin origin. His father, Seepersad Naipaul, was a correspondent for the Trinidad Guardian. He also published short stories. When Naipaul was six, the family moved to Port of Spain, the capital. Seepersad Naipaul died of a heart attack in 1953 without seeing the success of his son as a writer. He had encouraged Naipaul in his writing aspirations, telling him in a letter not to be scared of being an artist. He quoted the example of D. H. Lawrence being an artist through and through and insisted that V.S. Naipaul think as Lawrence. He asked Naipaul to remember what Lawrence always said: 'Art for my sake.'

Born in Mumbai, India, Rohinton Mistry emigrated to Canada in 1975 after obtaining an undergraduate degree in mathematics and economics from Mumbai University in 1973. He worked in a bank for a while before returning to studies, leading up to a degree in English and philosophy. His books, thus far, portray diverse facets of Indian socioeconomic life, as well as Parsi Zoroastrian life, customs, and religion. Many of his writings are markedly "Indo-nostalgic."

Sir Ahmed Salman Rushdie, born June 19, 1947, is a British-Indian novelist and essayist. He achieved notability with his second novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981), which won the Booker Prize in 1981. Much of his fiction is set on the Indian subcontinent. His style is often classified as magical realism mixed with historical fiction, and a dominant theme of his work is the story of the many connections, disruptions, and migrations between the Eastern and Western worlds.

MG Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania. Before coming to Canada in 1978, he attended M.I.T. and the University of Pennsylvania, where he specialized in theoretical nuclear physics. From 1978 to 1980, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Atomic Energy of Canada; from 1980 to 1989, he was a research associate at the University of Toronto. During this period, he developed a keen interest in medieval Indian literature and history, co-founded and edited a literary magazine, and began writing stories and novels. In 1989, with the publication of his first novel, *The Gunny Sack*, he was invited to spend a season at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa. That year ended his active career in nuclear physics. He considers his contributions there modest in algebraic models and high spin states. He considers that he was never tenured a blessing, for it freed him to pursue his literary career.

Vassanji is the author of six novels and two collections of short stories. His work has appeared in various countries and several languages. His most recent novel

was shortlisted for the Giller Prize and the Governor-General's Prize for best novel in Canada. It has appeared in the U.S. and India and is scheduled to appear in the U.K.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a significant segment of contemporary writing in English. It provides telescopic insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings, and a basis for discussion. Through the eyes of the women writers, we can see a different world. With their assistance, we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement. An appreciation of women's writing is essential while appraising Indian English literature.

Numerous Indian women novelists focus on a journey, a move from one country or city to another, the experience of meeting other people, strange environments, and all the paraphernalia that goes with actual, physical movement from one place to another. Two essential terms of the journey are expatriation and immigration. As the terms imply, expatriation focuses on the native country left behind, while immigration emphasizes the country where one has entered as a migrant. The expatriate dwells on his "ex" status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates his present in the new country.

Expatriation has been quite a widespread phenomenon of this century, and George Steiner describes expatriate writers as "the contemporary everyman" (Steiner 10-11). Expatriation is a complex state of mind and emotion that includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings, an assumption of moral or cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. The Expatriate builds a cocoon around himself as a refugee from cultural dilemmas and the experienced hostility or unfriendliness in the new country. Faced with rejection, the newcomer clings to his ethnic identity. As Viney Kirpal observes, "Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these migrants in the new land" (Kirpal 165).

Jhumpa Lahiri is a famous Indian American author of Bengali origin. Her first novel, *The Namesake*, was a major national bestseller named the New York Magazine Book of the Year. Jhumpa Lahiri became the first Asian to win the Pulitzer Prize when she won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her book *Interpreter Of Maladies*.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born in July 1967 in London and was raised in Rhode Island. Jhumpa is an alumnus of Barnard College, where she received a B.A. in English literature, and of Boston University, where she received an M.A. in English, M.A. in Creative Writing and M.A. in Comparative Studies in Literature and the Arts, and a Ph.D. in Renaissance Studies. She took up a fellowship at Provincetown's Fine Arts Work Center for two years. Jhumpa Lahiri also taught creative writing at Boston University and Rhode Island School of Design.

In Canada, Bharati Mukherjee claims to have experienced an anti-Indian attitude. Further, her husband's writing was recognized, while her own needed to be more noticed. Canada's hostility to Indians and the non-recognition of her writing in Canada are the twin recurring themes that appear with an almost obsessive regularity

in Mukherjee's writing. She felt herself to be "a psychological expatriate" in Canada and clung to her ethnic identity - "remember how bracing it was to cloak myself in my Brahminical elegance" (Mukherjee, Immigrant, 1988). She turned a Civil Rights activist in Canada and penned the crippling effects of racism on individuals. The expatriation element is reflected in Mukherjee's personal and political writings and even in her fiction written in Canada. While Jasbir Jain states that "Mukherjee's novels are representative of the expatriate sensibility (Jain 12) to Roshni-Kerns, these novels of Mukherjee present "some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions" (Roshni 659)

As Bharati Mukherjee disclosed in her interview with Alison B. Carb, "The new changing America is the theme of the stories in *The Middlemen and Other Stories*" (Carb 645-654). Her immigration from the Third World to the U.S.A. is a metaphor for the process of uprooting and rerooting or what her husband Clark Blaise in his book *Resident Alien* calls "unhousement" and "warehousemen" The immigrants in her stories go through extremities of transformations in America, At the same time they alter the country's appearance and psychological makeup. In some ways, they are like European immigrants of earlier eras.

Discussing the question of 'identity," Bharati Mukherjee is relatively straightforward and firm when she states that, unlike writers like Anita Desai and R.K Narayan, she does not write in Indian English or about Indians living in India. Her role models, views of the world, and experiences are very much unlike theirs. Moreover, these writers reside in a world where specific ties and rules still exist. Further, they are a part of their society's mainstream. She continues by saying that she does not write from the vantage point of an Indian expatriate like V.S. Naipaul. She might have hailed from the Third World, but the comparison between her and Naipaul ends there because she had settled in the United States through choice. She has adopted the United States as her home. She views herself as an American author on par with other American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island.

Displacement in Bharati Mukherjee has led to alienation and a search for self. She moves away from nostalgia to focus on changing identities and establishing new relationships. Her protagonists face a multicultural society and are deeply aware of the social reality surrounding them. The multicultural ethos they confront leads to the struggle for a new life but does not entirely break away from the past. As a colored expatriate, Bharati Mukherjee has faced her entire share of racial discrimination despite being married to a Canadian. Her experiences forced her to quit her job and shift to the U.S. Just as the clash of cultures is imminent, the need for adaptation is also a part of all expatriate experience.

In this connection, Bharati Mukherjee's stance regarding the interaction of native and foreign cultures assumes a novel significance. In her shorter fiction, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), Bharati Mukherjee repeatedly proclaims the universal truth that a foreign culture is not a hindrance to a person's coming to terms with oneself. At best, it works as a catalyst. She also dares to point out that a remote intellect will find itself estranged anywhere in the world: America, Uganda, Trinidad,

or, for that matter, even in India - because alienation here is a part of the protagonist's mental makeup.

In recent years, Bharati Mukherjee's writing has gained significant recognition because she voices immigrant experience, particularly that of the South Asian diaspora in North America. The immigrant experience in Mukherjee's novels is multi-faceted and emphasizes immigrants' cultural identity problems. This identity problem is strongly connected to the geopolitical space that the immigrant occupies. It is manifested in the novels not as a simple nostalgia for one's country of origin but as the need for immigrants to construct a narrative of home for themselves. Mukherjee's work emphasizes the need for immigrants to choose their home by constantly adapting to the new homeland and renegotiating their relationship with the old homeland. The immigrants' relationship with the old home and the new home is neither constant nor colossal, and Mukherjee's fiction, novels, and short stories emphasize the heterogeneity of the immigrant experience.

Immigrants and expatriates are essential figures in Mukherjee's writing because she uses them to interrogate spatial location and dislocation. Both the Expatriate and the immigrant lie on the margins of American society. "Expatriate suggests being in exile and renouncing a 'national identity' whereas "immigrant" indicates moving from one country to another to settle and accept a different 'national identity. The crucial difference in meaning between the two terms is not so much the spatial dislocation as accepting a geographical space as home. To her, expatriation is not only a great temptation but also "the enemy" of the ex-colonial. While passing through the final naturalization stage, she found it roughly religious. Therefore, immigrants are often born, and assimilation is a spiritual rebirth, a recurring theme in Mukherjee's fiction. Her fiction truly reflects the temperament and mood of the present American society as experienced by immigrants in America. One of the significant themes of modern literature is the depiction of cross-cultural crisis, which has assumed great significance in the present world of globalization. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the best examples of this kind of writing.

Born in 1940, Bharati Mukherjee went to the U.S.A. in 1961. Even after more than two decades since she left India, familial ties continued to bind her to the country of her birth. In 1963, at twenty-three, she married Clark Blaise, a fellow student. She regularly traveled to India, especially during the summer. Mukherjee's first novel was written during such a summer break. In *The Tiger's Daughter and Wife*, Mukherjee put her Canadian experience of traumatic transformation behind her and found her voice. However, she is clear about where her loyalties lie today. She emphasizes that she is an American writer, though she dramatically attaches to Calcutta. "The city will remain a habit with me, but as a writer, I have developed entirely in the United States (Carb 650).

Mukherjee's writing career began in 1971 with *The Tiger's Daughter*. Her popularity increased doublefold when *The Middleman and Other Stories* bagged the 1988 National Book Critics Award in America. In this collection, she seeks to dramatize the 'immigration experience' in America. In fact, between 1972 and 1980, the years she spent in Canada, she felt herself to be an alien caught between two

conflicting cultures and a victim of racial discrimination. She overcame both crises, which brought her a sense of elation and confidence. Mukherjee's early experiences greatly influenced her writing and outlook on life.

In 1980, Mukherjee left Canada. During that time, she was living in Montreal. She resigned as a professor at McGill University and migrated to the United States with her family. She felt guilty about uprooting her husband and sons from what was their home. However, this was a question of her self-preservation. Leaving Canada, she felt, was the only way to retrieve her creativity. Having joined as faculty at Berkeley, California, she finds that her writing has been touched by all these happenings, assuming a novel relationship with her new interests.

When she settled down in America, she experienced a great sense of relief. A feeling of freedom in putting down the numerous stories that cropped up in her brain seemed a possible reality. She quickly adapted to the new environment and merged her life with those around her. She realized that America, with all its thoughts of liberation, has a healthier attitude towards Indian immigrants than Canada. Though America has its share of racial problems, they could be legally redressed in courts. To Mukherjee, this situation was quite acceptable.

Moreover, the Americans enthusiastically received Mukherjee's writings. Their healthy curiosity about new writers and ideas paved the way for American publishing houses to accept her writings for publication, unlike those in Canada. During the 1960s and 1970s in Canada, the attitude was that if one had not played in the snow and grown up eating oatmeal, one needed something relevant to say to Canadian readers. This attitude was absent in the U.S.A. Novel ideas, interrogating mindsets, and innovative styles were all welcomed.

Mukherjee's shrewd manner in coping with the diaspora is evident in her novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971). *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1990) may primarily be due to her first-hand knowledge of the 'contrary awareness it perpetuates. Two contradictory forces yanking at her life, urban westernized nurture affixed with an orientation to Hindu religion and values made it difficult for her to identify with her native culture, metaphorically making her an 'expatriate' in her own country. The feeling of Indianness undermined by a Macaulay brand of colonial education bent upon producing "a class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions in morals and intellect" (Macaulay, 1952) turned her curiously bitter to the sense of 'otherness. She speaks of feelings during her stay in Canada and the oneness of spirit she admits to feeling amid Americans.

"In Canada, I was frequently taken for a shoplifter, frequently assumed to be domestic and praised by astonished auditors that I did not have a sing-song accent" (Mukherjee, *Darkness* 2) offers a glaring contrast to her warm praise of America as a land devoid of planned persecutions originating from racial discrimination vibrant with a kind of curiosity and immigrant exuberance; a land ensuring transcendence into power and passion.

Solemnizing America as the land of emancipation and realism establishes the motivation of the diasporic designs fostered by her fictional characters. However, Mukherjee's singularity lies in balancing this with the sordid side of American life on

the one hand and vignettes of change brought about in the majority culture through disparate customs of the immigrants hailing from different socioeconomic backgrounds on the other.

Thus, the characters in Mukherjee's fiction are more or less her inventors of the India-American unity and must understand "the strange phenomenon of having too many roots, too many locations both belong and unbelong in" (Katrak 649). This encouraged Mukherjee to make a trial in order to provide the much-needed newness to the prosaic, fragile, polished American fiction and also to acquire her long-cherished desire to win identification as a conventional, mainstream American writer

According to Mukherjee, there are two kinds of writers - those who conform to what the public wants to know and those who disturb and interrogate the existing systems and patterns. She claims to belong to the latter group. Thus, she is more like Shashi Deshpande than R.K. Narayan. She is creative but highly critical of postcolonial theory and criticism. According to her, critics like Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said are 'assassins' of imagination.

Upon close examination, Mukherjee's fiction reveals a sense of direction, growth, and evolution. Commenting on her writing, she says she appropriately moved away from specific autobiographical concerns. She claims that her themes are larger and strategies more complex, and "I have put together my aesthetic manifesto; multiculturalism/diversity are the "keywords (Dhawan 6).

The conflicting tone of her fiction, which is reciprocally reflective, sarcastic, humorous, and annoyed, is due to the curious uncertainty of her literary endeavor to project her protagonists as "semi-assimilated Indians with a sentimental attachment to a "distant homeland" but no real desire for a permanent return" (Mukherjee, *Darkness* 3). In this context, Bharati Mukherjee cites Naipaul and Bernard Malamud as her literary models. Naipaul influences her, but the influence is limited. Unlike Naipaul, she refuses to state that Indians are foolish. Her realization of the dark areas of Indian life has not made her feel insecure or fidgety about her 'roots.' Her aloofness from ridiculing, romanticizing, or strictly safeguarding the 'fragileness' of her Indian identity reflects her approach to the question of expatriation. Her outlook toward these immigration complexities is different from that of Naipaul.

Bharati Mukherjee's indebtedness to Malamud is more profound and significant. Malamud, a friend, philosopher, and guide of Clark Blaise, Bharati Mukherjee's husband, gained her initial respect, which blossomed into unstinted admiration for his recreation of historical novels of Jewish background. Influenced by his example of projecting Jewish demand for justice, Bharati Mukherjee also crowds her literary canvas "with broken identities, discarded languages and the will to bond oneself to a new community against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal" (Mukherjee, *Darkness* 3).

The protagonists in all her novels are women and expatriates. The construction of the plot and its furtherance is gained by the device of "journey from one country and cultural milieu to another" (Padma 4). The protagonists' experiences are used in all these novels as testing grounds for understanding the crux of all expatriate agony: "estrangement from one's essential being" (Padma 5). Mukherjee's

complex politics reveal the imprint of a complicated perspective simultaneously shaped by her ethnicity, postcoloniality, gender, and migration. All these complexities are nothing new. Many colored, immigrant women writers share Mukherjee's predicament. Mukherjee's firm refusal to become a victim of emotional disturbance and her zeal in accepting the immigrant condition enthuses a coherent vision. The confusion that prevails from the chaos of her multiple displacements and her subtlety in articulating them gracefully is insistently observable.

The period between *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, and *Darkness* shows a drastic change in the innate world of Bharati Mukherjee and her consciousness. In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the 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 survived the alienation in an alien country, falls victim to her native soil. Moreover, she realizes that she finds more security in the arms of her American husband, as is evident 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.

The evolution of the characterization, story, plot, and pace improves with time, and Bharati Mukherjee's novels offer a spectrum of thoughts and truths to be delved into. The heroines in *Wife*, *Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World*, and *Leave It To Me* keep adding their touch of modernity and change. In the first three novels, i.e. *The Daughter*, *Wife*, and *Jasmine*, the protagonist is an Indian woman who goes abroad for various reasons and settles down there, invariably fighting against the odds. 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 willpower. In *The Holder of the World*, the immigration path is reversed, and the protagonist feels at home in her adopted land, India. In *Leave It To Me*, though there is no immigration across countries and continents, it is the immigration of ideals and principles. It is immigration to a different world from the prevailing one to seek revenge. The protagonist, happily adopted and possessing a chance of an excellently designed future, forgoes it to seek her estranged mother, only to seek revenge. The protagonist successfully attempts to adapt herself from a well-established and manicured lifestyle to the strange—adventurous land and practices of her supposed parents.

Bharati Mukherjee and the characters who fill in her narratives are sometimes at the center of the story and sometimes at the periphery. Portrayed as an observer and recorder of the events of life all around her, the author sometimes becomes the "other" and sometimes the participant. This confusing state of action increases the problem of narration. Living on the cultural divide, Bharati Mukherjee feels absorbed by the elasticity of Hindu culture and, at the same time, alienated by its rigidity and hierarchy. In a way, she is an Indian in outlook, just as other Indians live inside and outside the definitions and communities they create. Irrespective of the methods

adopted, Bharati Mukherjee has gained a renowned place in the canons of Commonwealth and American literature through her firmness and belief.

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