

An Exploration of Diasporic Voices in Bharati Mukherjee's Works

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Abstract: *Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian American-Canadian writer, is a well-established diasporic writer. She explores the themes of socio-culture, rootlessness, and Indian immigrants. Her novels generally narrate about Indian immigrants who struggle to survive in an alien land. Focusing on her novels, the protagonists are immigrants who face identity crisis, alienation, and nostalgia in a foreign land. Immigration leads them to face cultural shock in an alien country. She was prominently concerned with the problem of women and their quest for identity. She highlights the voices of exile through her novels. This paper will be a modest attempt to analyse the diasporic crises in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee.*

Keywords: Diaspora, Immigration, Identity, Alienation

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharati Mukherjee belongs to a group of Indian diasporic writers who depict the diasporic issues faced by Indian immigrants. Being an Indian diaspora, she shares her own experience of diasporic crises through her novels. The protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee are immigrants who move from one country to another for jobs, education, and for various reasons. Displacement leads them to experience marginalization. They can't easily adapt their lives to a new land with a new culture. They can't even get any recognition in their alien country. This led them to long for their home land. Bharati Mukherjee built a bridge to connect home and exile through her novels.

Immigration leads a person to face language barrier, adapting a new culture and traditions, feeling of alienation and nostalgia towards their home land. The diasporic crises faced by the immigrants are distinctly focused in her novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989), and *Desirable Daughters* (2002).

The novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee's debut autobiographical book, explores the disappointment of returning home. It tells the moving story of Tara Banerjee Cartwright's exile and visit to Calcutta. An Indian immigrant named Tara comes home with nostalgic aspirations only to discover a chaotic Calcutta where political turmoil and violent outbursts are commonplace and where even her relatives regard her as an outsider because she married a foreigner. In Calcutta, Tara feels caught between the two Indias she has known—the childhood India and the modern nation she also likes to call home—and this third, more vividly shown India in Tara's story. Tara feels very isolated and unable to interact with people when she is with family and friends. Despite her frequent memories of praying with her mother back home in America, she discovers that she is unable to recall the next stage of the routine when she prays. Tara is still getting used to American culture, but she also feels cut off from the ethics and ideals of her home country. Tara's foreignness caused her to forget Bengali, her mother tongue. Along with some Indian-English vocabulary, she has also forgotten several of her friends' colloquialisms. Communication breaks down as a result of this. Since Tara does not speak their language, she feels like an outsider in her own group. Tara believed that her marriage to a foreigner was the reason behind her animosity towards her country. Tara thinks everything in India is ridiculous. Every time she sets out to learn and comprehend, Calcutta inevitably devolves into chaos. Finally, for not behaving according to Hindu norms, Tara is raped and assaulted. As a result, Tara finds Calcutta disappointing and experiences a sense of immigration that is shattered by the culture and social shock. The shattered Tara plans her departure from India. Tara herself, misfit everywhere she goes. She is made to examine her inner world, which consists of two very distinct cultures and ideas. Tara finds herself longing to go back to David after realising that a reconciliation is not possible. Tara finds herself torn between the American and Indian cultures, and she knows that there is no way to cross that divide. Tara finds no place

to call home. Finally, she becomes an outsider in her own country because she is unable to deal with the altered situation and cultural differences.

In the novel, *Jasmine* Bharati Mukherjee portrays an Indian woman who is driven to the brink and desperately tries to keep her Indian identity alive. The author of *Jasmine* paints a realistic picture of the lives of the migrants in this tale of cultural assimilation and change. The narrative shows how her numerous identities have changed as a result of the weaving together of her memories from the past and present. As the submissive wife of Prakash in Punjab and the widow of a terrorist explosion, Jasmine has a prehistoric past and is susceptible. She also totally gives up her identity, which changes her from Jyoti to Jasmine. Her life becomes chaotic after his death, so she makes the decision to leave for New York, the place of happiness and dreams. Jasmine explores her changes as a woman and an American during her numerous incarnations during this process. Jasmine defies the traditional values of India; Jazzy is an optimistic, self-imposed American girl; and Jase is an American woman who takes charge of her life and makes daring, nontraditional decisions. Jasmine tends to progress towards self-actualization and self-discovery with each new identity. Jasmine embodies all that is typical of an Indian woman—a reliance on men that is fundamental to a patriarchal society—and she never lets go of her Indianness. She gets different titles at different times because she is in some ways idealistic, superficial, eager, and yet disgusting. Several names have been given to her along the way. Depending on the circumstance, Jasmine has changed dramatically from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jase, and finally Jane. The novel's constant sense of mobility suggests that she must undergo change and metamorphosis in order to survive. She recounts the tale of Nachiketa and Yama and about gods and demons, even though she has ingested American culture. She also has roots in Indian culture, beliefs, and traditions. She now knows how to turn feelings of unease and powerlessness into a sense of empowerment and belonging.

The narrative of Jyoti as she goes through many stages of development as Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane unravels the complex concerns of self-identification and culture as well as the multicultural and multiracial fabric of the globalized society. Maybe the choice to accompany the professor at the end illustrates the need for comfort, protection, and security. Jasmine develops into a changed and evolving person who personifies the evolving American consciousness blended with a variety of cultures and voices. In addition to being Jasmine's tale, it is also the story of a woman who, via her experiences, is empowered and turned into a changed, significant woman. In the end, she develops into a self-reliant woman who chooses to live with the guy she loves. Her inner self is given fresh expression and meaning by the freedom of choice, and it also reveals that she is a formidable fighter—an embodiment of her inner self. Jyoti has struggled her entire path; she is a warrior, survivor, and adapter. The brilliant writer Bharati Mukherjee's literary exuberance is reflected in Jasmine's final transformation from a submissive rural girl to an independent American girl, marking the end of her sense of exile.

The novel *Desirable Daughters* is a story of three sisters who are the immigrants and their attitude towards the alien country. In the novel, Mukherjee has penned three distinct texts that explore and complicate the politics of three women's diasporic consciousness. The three sisters' responses to the confrontation differ despite the fact that each had a different opportunity to integrate into American society while maintaining her Indian identity. While Padma moves at her own pace, following her own cultural poetics, Tara searches for her roots in an effort to reconcile her fractured and occasionally disoriented sense of self. In that Tara is positioned differently than Padma—Padma is an immigrant who is hyphenated. With an American education and an Indian husband schooled in the United States, Parvati, the middle sister, leads the life of an affluent and fortunate wife in India. She represents the conventional way of life for an Indian woman with western orientation. Tara contemplates her own identity dilemma as an immigrant and conveys her wish to find solace in her home traditions via the lives of her two other sisters, Parvati and Padma, her husband Bish, and her illegitimate nephew, Mr. Christopher Dey.

The novel unveils, in Tara's eyes, the spaces of tradition, individual recollections, locations and lifestyles that combine tradition and modernity, romanticism from bygone eras, and the inverted tale of mobility, existential suffering, hybrid subjectivity, and plurality in her physical and psychic division between rejection of her nativity and helplessness in the face of a novel circumstance that intensifies and poignantly addresses the theme of identity in mainstream American life. Tara experiences increased isolation and a sense of alienation from American society as a result of loneliness. She looks for comfort outside of the conventional realm of self-preservation and austerity. Tara, on the other hand, suffers from relational diaspora agony since she is unable to fully integrate into American society or affirm her true Indian

identity. She felt restricted in her marriage and had left her attractive, affluent husband. Tara sought solace in this discourse as a break from the conventions of the Bengali Brahmin culture, as she, unlike Padma, had accepted the American ideas of freedom and self-fulfillment as being of major significance in her life. Parvati, the middle sister, had also rebelled when she was little. Despite her choice to marry Aurobino Banerji, a Bengali Brahmin, her disobedience was not subversive. After moving to India, Parvati and her husband created a conventional upper-class environment for their two sons to grow up in.

According to Bharati Mukherjee, India is a country with spiritual values, stability, a wide range of languages, and traditions that American society will never be able to understand. She says: 'I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien.' [35] Her attempts to uphold her dual identities—half Indian, part American—make her a hybrid of a new society, raising doubts about who she really is. As a result, Bharati Mukherjee portrays the protagonist's identity crisis—a yearning for her new identity—throughout the entire novel. The three female protagonists in *Desirable Daughters* are individualistic and respond differently to various situations, but they also go through a slow process of self-actualization that enables them to fulfil their ambitions and get over feelings of loneliness and disappointment.

Bharati Mukherjee, being a diasporic writer tells about the conflicts and suffering of the immigrants transparently. She clearly tells how the Indian immigrants led their life in an alien land as well as how they lose their roots and identity. She even explains how the immigrants' homecoming is fruitless. Through her works she expressed her own experience of struggles as an immigrant.

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