

GENDER PARITY AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN PRESENT SCENARIO BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S WOMEN AND GENDER IN TREE BRIDLE

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Abstract

We need another time of writing that will be able to write the unsure and gender intersections of time and place that comprise the difficult "modern" knowledge of the western nation. How does one write the nation' cultural in gender as the event of the everyday and the advent of the gender studies .A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman," Bharati Mukherjee writes my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show how I and the hundreds of thousands like me have transformed America". Mukherjee's stories of American transformations create an unsettled "time of writing" that links "the event of the everyday and the advent of the gender in women studies.

Women in Gender

American narratives of women in gender. In her tales, people and nations scatter and gather. Integration is cultural looting, cultural gender, or a willful and sometimes costly negotiation: an eye for an eye, a self for a self. People mix with gods and goddesses, or become gods and goddesses, reincarnating, translating narratives of coherence. Translated men and women make nations metaphorical, imagining homes in the cracks between nostalgia and frontier dreams. Violence roams Kali's bloody tongue. Mayflower claims can't save anyone; we're all immigrants, strangers in a strange land. Mukherjee employs familiar American narratives in order to transform them, and to make them transformative, her representations of America and Americans are easily misread. For example, Victoria Carchidi sidesteps the violence and anxiety in Mukherjee's fiction to read Mukherjee as insisting "that when such multiple worlds meet, the result can be a glorious freeing of the leaves of the kaleidoscope, that complexly intermix and produce a new pattern"(98). Susan Koshy suggests that Mukherjee's stories themselves elide the question of violence, arguing, and "Mukherjee's celebration of assimilation is an insufficient confrontation of the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States and of the complexities of diasporic subject-formation" (69).

Mukherjee's stories do not simply promote American multicultural or celebrate assimilation; rather, precisely in order to confront "the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States" and "the complexities of diasporic subject-formation," Mukherjee fabulizes America, Hinduizes assimilation, and represents the real pleasures and violences of cultural exchange. Representing immigration through the logic of transformation, Mukherjee's project involves, as David Mura puts it, "a discovery and a creation, as well as a retrieval, of a new set of myths, heroes, and gods, and a history that has been occluded or ignored.

To discover, create, and retrieve America's multicultural myths and histories, Mukherjee rejects the expatriate's nostalgia. She rejects the hyphen and the acceptable stories it generates--stories about immigrants struggling between two incommensurable worlds, finally choosing one or the other. Her immigrant characters are settlers, Americans not sojourners, tourists, guest workers, foreigners. Arguing that wherever I travel in the Old World, I find 'Americans' in the making, whether or not they ever make it to these shores. Dreamers and conquerors, not afraid of transforming themselves, not afraid of abandoning some of their principles along the way" Four Hundred-Year-Old Woman, Mukherjee holds America accountable for its promises and favorite myths

about itself: this nation and its people are diverse dreamers, generous, heroic, hard-working, democratic, lovers of truth and defenders of equal opportunity for all. This American Dream offers possible worlds, unleashes the imagination. Despite its actual failures, this is its transformative power, and Mukherjee's work engages this most generous aspect. In her stories, hope's transformative violence—a gritty leap toward "freedom" dialogues with the false hope offered by an American Dream premised on white supremacy and disseminated by global capitalism's exploitations.

How Society Treats Women in Gender

Mukherjee's appropriation of powerful American myths and transnational American dreams to the rewriting of hyphenated "Americans" as Americans thus walks a critical tightrope. I understand this aspect of her project as aligned with Arjun Appadurai's view that "the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images, but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes. The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life.

The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures, no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency individuals and globally defined fields of possibility. It is this unleashing of the imagination which links the play of pastiche in some settings to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors.

The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of

the new global order. The imagination as social practice and social fact works where myth logic meets fractals, chaos, fuzzy set theory; globalization is ineffectually understood purely in terms of Western or U.S. hegemony; narratives of Americanization here and abroad must be interrupted by narratives of indigenization; neither the center nor the periphery can hold, or hold on. How else to explain the people we meet and become, "individuals" living out complex collective histories? How to live as we have to live in the midst of everyday epochal violence, instantaneous change? As the main character of Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* passionately argues I do believe that extraordinary events can jar the needle arm, jump tracks, rip across incarnations, and deposit a life into a groove that was not prepared to receive it. I should never have been Jane Ripplemeyer of Baden, Iowa. I should have lived and died in that feudal village, perhaps making a monumental leap to modern Jullundhar. When Jyoti's future was blocked after the death of Prakash, Lord Yama should have taken her.

"Yes," I say, "I do believe you. We do keep revisiting the world. I have also traveled in time and space. It is possible." Jyoti of Hasnapur was not *Jasmine*, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that *Jasmine* isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? David Mura's call for "a new set of myths, heroes, and gods, and a history that has been occluded or ignored" transforms, in Mukherjee's imagination, into stories of immigrants as active agents of change. These stories join, rather than replace, the histories of economic and physical violence that fuel immigration and that immigrant face upon reaching the New World. To bring these stories and histories together, Mukherjee marries the literal and the metaphorical. In *Jasmine* she writes *Jasmine* as "a love goddess" (Interview Connell et al 25) both destroyer and preserver, powerful with want and wanting, facing and

making violent change, moving through lives with tornado force, "in love with the country . Revitalizing it, if it allows itself to be revitalized" (Interview Connell ET al.26). Like Vishnu the Preserver, who contains "our world inside his potbellied stomach," Jasmine "cocoon a cosmos" (Jasmine 224); "Like creatures in fairy tales, we've shrunk and we've swollen and we've swallowed the cosmos whole" (Jasmine 240); like Kali the Destroyer, Jasmine kills to feed cycles of rebirth. Reading Jasmine too literally, or reading her only as an individual human being, ignores the work of metaphor: "The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai 327). To read Jasmine only through the lens of assimilation ignores that when a goddess transforms, she doesn't lose herself: she is no singular self; she contains the cosmos. When a goddess transforms, she takes action, exerts great power. Hence "immigration" is transformation in multiples, "immigration" is a force of nature as transformative as global warming; "immigration" demands myth, imagination, metaphor.

Giving up the India that she was born into, and the India she initially (re)created to anchor her own New World anxiety, Mukherjee-the-writer determined to "invent a more exciting--perhaps a more psychologically accurate a more precisely metaphoric India: many more Indias" (Mukherjee and Blaise 297). As part of this process, she also invents a more precisely metaphoric America, many more Americas-amnesiac, violent, free, and possible. She filters her insistently American stories through what she describes as "a Hindu imagination; everything is a causeless, endless middle" (Mukherjee and Blaise 175). The violence and hope twinned in Mukherjee's writing must be understood in terms of this imaginative "Indianness," where "Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world" (Mukherjee, *Darkness* xv), where Indianness means that "different perceptions of reality converge without embarrassing anyone" (Mukherjee and Blaise 296). This metaphoric, imaginative Indianness fuels her desire, and her struggle, for an equally metaphoric America. Creating this America, she writes:

It is, of course, America that I love. Where history occurs with the dramatic swiftness and interest of half-hour television shows. America is Sheer luxury, being touched more by the presentation of tragedy than by tragedy itself. History can be dealt with in thirty-second episodes; I need not suffer its drabness and continuum.. In India, history is full of uninterrupted episodes; there is no one to create heroes and define our sense of loss, of right and wrong, tragedy and buffoonery. Events have no necessary causes; behavior no inevitable motive. Things simply are, because that is their nature. (Mukherjee and Blaise 168)

In Mukherjee's imagination, America is a place in flux, a metaphor that represents freedom from Indian history-as-fate. She knows she should have ended up a Brahmin wife, privileged, angry, innocent, bored, dutiful, rebellious: "in Calcutta, we are rarely allowed to escape what our hands reveal us to be" (Mukherjee and Blaise 219). However, as Jessica Hagedorn observes, though America can offer a "profound sense of 'freedom' (to) a woman--a freedom of movement and choice. Freedom (also) has its price" (175). For Mukherjee, American freedom costs her the clarity and stability of full-Brahmin status, sacrificed when she marries a white French-Canadian American. And she exchanges racial invisibility in India for "minority" status in North America. She gives up a certain kind of home, home-as-comfort, home-as-talisman, exchanging that stable dash for imagination's portability, its astonishing and insistent demolitions and reinventions, its work. In Mukherjee's America, "home" says "freedom," "home" says "war zone." "Home" is no consolation, no place to rest. There are too many Americas and Indians for that.

In an essay entitled "In a Free State: Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction," Gail Ching-Liang Low describes a seminar she convened on the "politics of speech and representation, the creative ways in which women of colour countered racist and sexist erasure in mainstream white culture by reclaiming the right to tell their own stories" (8). The group emphasized the importance of what Toni Morrison and bell hooks, among others, have

described as "re-memory," "the politicization of memory," and "the struggle of memory against forgetting," exploring the recovery of "lost ancestral and cultural lines" through the use of vernacular forms (8). But when the group turned to Mukherjee's work, Low writes, "we found that we could not fit her writing into the model of post-colonial and diasporic texts that we had collectively mapped out as important ... There was real anger and dismay ... at Mukherjee's easy dismissal of much of what we took to be necessary interventions in the cultural mainstream" (9-10). Low explains:

Mukherjee seemed not to be concerned with preserving cultural identities and did not want to be labeled an "Indian" writer. She is whole-heartedly unapologetic about her celebration of cultural dislocation and opposes Indianans as "a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration. Instead of consolidating cultural specificities against a dominant white urban America, she positively rejects it. the struggle against historic cultural erasure and for collective voice that this group privileges is different from, though related to, Mukherjee's struggle to rewrite normative narratives of American identity through writing immigration stories about personal and cultural transformations. I would like to make two key points here to account for the differences between these projects.

First, Mukherjee's work resists a particular form of racist logic and practice that she associates with Canadian racial and national discourses, particularly in the 1970s. She describes "making a choice between two distinct New World myths of nationhood "the Canadian ethnic mosaic and the American melting pot after experiencing "racial harassment in increasingly crude forms including removal to a seat in the back of an inter-city bus" and witnessing Canada's creation of "new official phrases visible minority, absorptive capacity among others to marginalize its non-white citizens exclusively on the basis of race" (Mukherjee and Blaise 302). Mukherjee also associates Canada, literally and metaphorically, with Britain, so that moving to Canada felt like "going to England, a step backward to an old world" (Interview Connell et al.11), and taking Canadian

citizenship meant undoing "the work of generations of martyred freedom fighters, pledging loyalty to the British Queen" (Mukherjee and Blaise 169). So even though Canada's ethnic mosaic model and its emphasis on cultural difference and racial tolerance sounds good to liberal ears, Mukherjee's move to Canada meant replaying Old World colonial oppression, updated for a postcolonial world. In his essay "Is There a Neo-Racism?" Etienne Balibar theorizes what he calls "the new racism," a concept that helps to clarify Mukherjee's position. The new racism is racism of the era of "decolonization," of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a singular political sphere.

Ideologically, current racism, which in France centers upon the immigration complex, fits into a framework of "racism without races" which is already widely developed in other countries, particularly the Anglo-Saxon ones. It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountable ability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but "only" the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions . We now move from the theory of races or the struggle between the races in human history, whether based on biological or psychological principles, to a theory of "race relations" within society, which naturalizes not racial belonging but racist conduct.

Discourses that emphasize the insurmountability of cultural differences, then, naturalize racist conduct. Mukherjee's fictions, and her discussions of them, emphasize resistance to discourses of difference put to this use. Balibar argues that discourses of differential racism, mimicking (and sometimes confusing) more emancipatory takes on "difference," effectively cover over the fact that the dominant culture still demands assimilation before integration, and that this assimilation "is presented as progress, as an emancipation, a conceding of rights.

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