

## Migration is Incarnation-Immigrant Experiences in Bharati Mukherjee's Novel

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Immigrant experiences are a composite one made up of journeys and border crossings. Migration leads to separation. Separation means rebirth in a country marked by new culture and a new adjustments in an alien land. The immigrant psyche shows the interaction of traditional culture within the culture of an adopted land and brings about a transformation in the inherited tradition and culture of the immigrant. Almost all her novels depict an immigrant looking back to her mother country with pain and nostalgia but an immigrant who shares the common grievances of those who are impelled by an insistent urge to give voice to the aspirations of these new settlers. In the novels *The Tiger's Daughters*, *Desirable Daughters*, *Wife*, *Jasmin*, e *The Holder of the World*, we confront characters that, despite suffering, they are not ready to look back. Their sensibility gets altered under the stress of circumstances while changing the situation around them by fighting: To comment upon A. Sivanandan in his *Alien Gods*:

"On the margin of European culture, and alienated from his own,

the 'colored' [...person] is an artifact of colonial history, marginal

man par excellence. He is a creature of two worlds and none.

Thrown by a specific history, he remains stranded on its shores

even as it recedes; and what he comes into is not so much a

twilight world, as a world of false shadows and false light." (104-18)

It is in this space of confrontation of differently slanting societal accents and of diverse socio-linguistic perceptions that the novel of diasporic awareness is born. It has its being in a co-existence of a plurality of voices which do not combine into a single consciousness but exist on different layers generating dialogic dynamism. The diasporic texts start from a position of arrival, provisional and deferred, with hybridity as an agency interrupting the relation between power and knowledge by questioning the problem of representation of otherness as a contestable site of struggle. It is a hazard to the dominant culture that seeks to ethicize difference and render it exotic or static, rather than seeing it as a condition of culture as a whole.

Migrations have both erased and re-inscribed patterns of being and belonging, producing a self with multiple and partial identifications, which simultaneously both individualized and community-oriented. Thus, the diasporic writer occupies a space of exile and cultural seclusion, which can be called a hybrid location of aggression, uninterrupted tension, and expectant confusion. Fact writing allows individuals to recuperate control over the self, the world, and their life story narrative.

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, is a fine manifestation of cultural conflict. This is an interesting study of an upper-class Bengali Brahmin girl who goes to America for higher studies. She returns to India after seven years, only to find herself a total stranger in the inherited environment. She realizes that she is now neither Indian nor really American.

On landing at Bombay airport, she is greeted lovingly by her relatives, but her response is cold and composed.

Whether relatives address her as Tultul, a nickname that they always use for her, it sounds odd to her Americanized ears. Seven years ago, while on her way to Vassar, 'She has admired the house of marine Drive, had thought them fashionable, but now their shabbiness appalled her' (18). Coming back to India, America looks like dreamland to her. Just a few days passed since she left America, but it seems that she had never been out of India, her old sense of pride comes back to her. "She had not thought that seven years in another country, a husband, a new blue passport could be easily blotted out" (25). Though she was surrounded by relatives, and by vendors ringing bells, beggars begging everything look unreal. For a moment, she thinks that she is going to be mad. Even her father becomes "a symbol for the outside world. He had become a pillar supporting a balcony that had long outlived its beauty and its function" (29).

Her America far from being a land of promise, is a land of violence and atrocity. She breaks her family convention and marries American David. Since she is not able to cope with David and his society, her marriage proves to be a failure because it is an emotional marriage and also an endeavor to get protection in an alien land. In an attempt to Americanize herself, she loses her Indian identity. Thus, she starts a life of duality and conflict since her childhood. After marriage, she undergoes an upsetting predicament joined upon her to belong to an entirely new set up. Thus, Tara Banerjee confronts confusion when she visits India after a gap of seven years. In the deepest core, she is an ordinary Indian, but her re-routed self in America has made such cross-cultural confrontation alien to her. With this thought deeply entrenched in her heart, she aspires is to keep herself from India and go back to the safety of American heritage.

Bharati Mukherjee's Second novel *Wife*, is the psychological study of Dimple Dasgupta, a middle-class Bengali wife who accompanies her husband to New York from Calcutta. Rose to be submissive and reliant according to traditional Indian standards of femininity. She lacks the requisite inner resources to cope with the sense of panic and estrangement in New York. Mukherjee reverts the setting and action in this novel. In the earlier we come across heroin that does everything to recuperate her Indian roots, but here we have a heroine who does

everything to eliminate her roots. She induces a miscarriage by skipping ropes just before emigrating to the states simply because she does not want to carry any remnants from her old world. Her dilemma is that whether she wants to become entirely American or not, but at the same time find the life sickening there. The harsh reality of violence-torn American society shatters her daydream world, and so do her nerves. First, she contemplates the romantic ways to liberate her meaningless survival, but lastly kills Amit, her husband, as the eventual act of self-assertion. Thus, in this novel also Mukherjee highlights the psychic-socio problems that an expatriate faces.

The story of *Jasmine*, the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's novel of the same name, begins as Jyoti, in a small village of Hasnapur in Punjab. Prakash wishes her to become a modern city woman. As he aids her in her conversion from 'Jyoti' to 'Jasmine', she both perceives herself as and eventually becomes the figure that Prakash desires to create. Here Mukherjee is depicting identity formation as a multifaceted process that is dependent not solely upon the agency of the individual but also upon the surrounding milieu. Her renaming is a sign of her initial migration away from traditional India.

Suddenly Prakash is murdered, and Jasmine immigrates to America all alone to accomplish his dreams. Upon her arrival in Florida, she meets Half-Face, the captain of the ship on which she entered the country. His discourteous treatment gives her first taste of American ethnic categorization. Half-Face sees her only as a sexual being, and after the rape, Jasmine finds that she cannot run away from this new perception of her identity. She stabs Half-Face to death, and in this act, she finds the strength to continue living and vows to initiate a new life in America, separate from India and the immature identity of her past. Hence Jasmine's identity is formed not through construction alone but by the devastation of her existing self. Jasmine soon finds herself quiet by the sluggishness of this home, for it was entirely inaccessible from everything American. Considering it to be stasis in her succession towards a new life, she tries to separate herself from all that is Indian and stop thinking about her past completely.

Jasmine creates a new identity for every new situation, her former identities are never fully erased. They

come into view in specific moments in the text and intensify the tension, thereby causing Jasmine to create another more dominant identity, different from all those that came before. While living with the Hayes, Jasmine begins to master the English language, empowering herself to additional appropriate American culture. This act of Jasmine confirms her Americanization. She asserts: I am not choosing between the promise of America and old world dutifulness (240).

Taylor begins to call her 'Jase' symptomatic of that again she does not have an agency in the creation of her new self since Taylor constructs it for her. Also, for the first time in the Hayes household, Jasmine becomes aware of her racial identity because Taylor and his friends understood that she was from South Asia and tried to correlate her with that community. Taylor's friends essentialize Jasmine, falling as victim to the Orientalist habit of presumptuous knowledge of the other and expecting an essence from her because of her background. Thus, she is discriminated against but on a much subtler level, as her ethnic identity is now subject to the discrimination of incorrect distinction.

Before long, Taylor gets passionately involved with Jasmine and embraces her different ethnicity without orientaling her into an alien fantasy. In becoming Jase, Jasmine gets gradually more comfortable with her sexuality which she always tried to suppress earlier, more so, after her upsetting experience. But the relationship between Taylor and Jasmine ends, unexpectedly when the past creeps up on her once again manifested in the form of Sukhwinder, the murderer of her husband. The predictability of memory and the unlimited nature of time and space are strained once again, and Jasmine finds her life unclear by the different consciousness through which she now experiences the world. She loses even her sense of self-expression. Unable to live with this embarrassment of contradictory identities, she flees to Baden County, Iowa, to give her life a fresh start.

The end of the novel finds Jasmine poignant to California with Taylor, vague of what the prospect will carry but yet persuaded in her choice to depart. This sense of movement further reinforces the concept that her identity is forever embryonic; she cannot remain in a constant life because tumult and change are the means of her

continued existence. The adjacent environments influence the formation of her identities, and she navigates between chronological and spatial locations; her observation of herself changes, thereby ensuing in a diversity of consciousness. These create a strain within her, and she feels the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions so that they do not wage an emotional war within her. Thereby we see her reinvent her identity entirely.

*The Holder of the World* Mukherjee's fifth novel is again an endless saga of an immigrant. Here we find a seventeenth-century puritan American woman Hannah Easton who makes a journey of India and is completely distorted by the emotional love of the east. Like Jasmine, she also find contentment and joy in the adopted land, and it is the morality of this land, which she carries along with her when she returns.

In Mukherjee's latest novel, *Desirable Daughters*, the formation of individuality emerges as an incessant process, forever transforming and never in fact absolute. Tara is a savvy, cosmopolitan world-traveler having beauty, brain, wealth, and privileged life as the wife of a Silicon Valley magnate. She emigrates after marrying Bishwapiya Chatterjee and arrives in America steeped in Indian culture, exhibiting the behavior of the paradigmatic Indian wife. Back at home, had led a sheltered life where she was swamped with culture, tradition, and values through inculcated with education by the Catholic nuns. Thus, when Tara reaches America, she feels the haul between convention and autonomy as she tries to meet expectations that are often passionately incongruous. But then she immediately tries to embrace American culture taking advantage of the opportunities it affords, and attempts to assimilate as best as possible to the new society. Yet how much ever ventures to mix with the cosmopolitan population of San Francisco, she is constantly aware of being different. She finds it impossible to convey to her American friends concerning the people of moderately equal, movable culture how unnatural and static Indian identity is.

The characters in Mukherjee's novel develop manifold consciousness, resulting in neither self that is neither amalgamated nor cross, but quite disjointed. As the protagonists perceive both their race and sexuality through new and different lenses throughout the text, they come to

realize that the notion of singular identity is an erroneous belief, and the reality of the diasporic experience is the indeterminacy of multiplicity. This variety becomes a noteworthy plight for the characters, for as their different consciousnesses contradict each other, the characters are left doubtful as to the nature of their identities, not knowing where they fit in the American society. Finally, they become competent of living in a world where individuals exist not as an integrated one, but as many, bound by no borders and infinite in the possibility of inventing identities.

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