

EXPERIENCE OF DIASPORA IN THE NOVELS OF
BHARATI MUKHERJEE

ANANDI SADASHIV KAMBLE
DEVCHAND COLLEGE, ARJUNNAGAR
KOLHAPUR, INDIA.

VAIJAYANTA VIJAY PATIL
JAYWANT MAHAVIDYALAYA,
KOLHAPUR, INDIA.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 27, 1940 to an upper-middle class Hindu Brahmin family in Calcutta, India. Born into an extraordinary close-knit and intelligent family, along with her sisters Bharati Mukherjee got ample academic opportunities. Having educated from different places like England, Calcutta and Baroda in India, Iowa, etc., she planned to be a writer from her childhood. By marrying Clark Blaise, a Canadian writer, Mukherjee transferred into a split world, a transient with loyalties to two cultures. In 1968, Mukherjee immigrated to Canada with her husband. Her stay in Canada was the hardest period in her life because she found herself discriminated against and treated as a member of the visible minority. To her, Canada is the hostile country to its immigrants and that opposes the concept of cultural assimilation. As a result, Mukherjee, with her family, moved to United States and became the permanent resident there. Mukherjee is currently a distinguished Professor of English at the University of California-Berkeley. She has established herself as a powerful member of the American literary scene, one whose most memorable works reflect her pride in her Indian heritage, but also her celebration of embracing America.

As an author of many novels, short-stories and some non-fictional works, Bharati Mukherjee has deliberately fused her many impulses, backgrounds, and selves to create a new immigrant literature that embodies her sense of to be a woman writer of Bengali-Indian origin who has lived in both Canada and the United States. She sees herself as a pioneer of new territories, experiences, and literatures.

Though Mukherjee denies to be classified her as a “Postcolonial” writer, both Mukherjee and the postcolonial studies community is vested in proliferating discussion on matters involving race, class, gender, and nation in national and transnational contexts. She construes immigration and displacement as a condition of terminal loss and dispossession involving the erasure of history and the dissolution of an original culture.

Mukherjee’s differing experiences in Canada and the US have influenced her and her literary productions, leading to imaginative, textual and cultural negotiations with and interpretations of dominant narratives which exemplify, though her stance on the discourse of national identity formation in both nations, an engagement beyond simplistic ways of dealing with or responding to multiracialism. Mukherjee’s fictions construct their central material around the reality of transplantation and psychological metamorphosis brought about by the crossing into North America of Characters from divergent ethnic backgrounds and national origins: economic and political refugees from Afghanistan, Uganda, Iraq and Bangladesh, illegal stowaways from Ludhiana; professionals from Bombay and Calcutta; mail-order brides from Nepal; and domestic caregivers from Trinidad. Despite their disparate cultural histories and social differences, Mukherjee’s characters share the experience of Diaspora as they explore cultural histories and social differences, her characters share the experience of Diaspora as they explore new ways of belonging and becoming America.

In this regard, it should be noted that the ideological significance of her writings does not much depend on her representation of Diaspora as an emancipatory narrative of self-reinvention, although her poetics is certainly committed to foregrounding the positive transformative potential of immigration. The distinctiveness of her work in the tradition of Diaspora literature in general and American literature in particular lies in Mukherjee’s ability to mine the tension that hold in balance her awareness of Diaspora as a condition of loss or ‘unhousement’ involving a break in that link between cultures, peoples or identities and places, on the other hand, and her acknowledgement of it as a condition of gain or ‘rehousement’ of recreation, re-imagination and regeneration in new social, political, cultural and geographical

landscapes, on the other. Truly, it is innovation and energy with which Mukherjee's fictions resilient and enabling responses to Diaspora in the face of its spatial, cultural and temporal disruptions that invest her identity as a writer and her writing with changed significance.

Known for her playful and developed language, Mukherjee rejects the concept of minimalism which, she says, is "designed to keep anyone out with too much story to tell." (*New York Times Book Review*). She considers her work a celebration of her emotions, and herself a writer of the Indian Diaspora. Her main theme throughout her writing discusses the condition of Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention to the changes taking place in South Asian women in a new world. The characters in all her works are aware of the brutalities and violence that surround them and are often victimized by various forms of social oppression, even though she generally draws them as survivors. Her understated prose style, ironic plot developments and witty observations are praiseworthy. As a writer, she has a sly eye to view the world, and her characters share that quality. Although she is often racially categorized by her thematic focus and cultural origin, she has often said that she strongly opposes the use of hyphenation when discussing her origin, in order to avoid otherization and the self-imposed marginalization that comes with hyphenation. She prefers to refer herself as an American of Bengali – Indian origin.

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel '*The Tiger's Daughter*', a fictionalized story, addresses her personal difficulties of being caught between two worlds, homes, and cultures and is an examination of who she is and where she belongs. Her second novel, "*Wife*", is the story of a young naive Indian woman trying to reconcile the Bengali ideal of the perfect, passive wife with the demands of her new American life. In this novel, Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and ultimately live.

"*Jasmine*" is Mukherjee's most popular novel. In it, she rejoices in the idea of assimilation and makes it clear that the protagonist needs to travel to America to make something of her life, because in the third world she faced

only despair and loss.

“*Desirable Daughters*” is a melting pot of styles. It’s a middlebrow women’s novel; a postcolonial tale life with meditations on belonging and exile, and a thriller, complete with a mysterious stranger and quirky cop. In “*Leave It To Me*” Mukherjee reverts to her earlier obsession with an exile’s agony.

In “*The Holder of the World*” Mukherjee suggests two advantages of Women Liberation. Here she presents social and cultural change in a recursive process and women have to play steering role.

To sum up, to Bharati Mukherjee, postcolonial studies seem an inappropriate category in which to place her works. She doesn’t think herself as a postcolonial person stranded on the outer shores of the collapsed British Empire.

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