

THEME OF IMMIGRATION IN THE WORKS OF BHARTI MUKERJEE

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Abstract

Of Bengali origin, Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta (now called Kolkata), West Bengal on July 27, 1940. She learned how to read and write by the age of three. In 1947, she moved to Britain with her family at the age of eight and lived in Europe for about three and a half years. By the age of ten, Mukherjee knew that she wanted to become a writer, and had written numerous short stories. Mukherjee's career as a professor and her marriage to Blaise Clark has given her opportunities to teach all over the United States and Canada. Currently she is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Her works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates.

Introduction

India has had links with the West from the dawn of her history. As early as 1500 B.C. her first European invaders, the Aryans, came through the north-western passes and settle on the bank of the river Indus to build up a civilization, which in course of time came to dominate and assimilate all the separate culture of the sub-continent. It was inevitable that these early European would look back to their roots, and fact that they did not so almost uninterruptedly till the Middle Age has been established by historians and scholars of antiquity. Political, economical and intellectual connection between India and Europe are evident in several cultural parallels at certain points of history. During the middle Ages, there was little or no direct connection between India and west. It was once again established during the second European invasion of the east.

Common Indians started visiting England and then America in the twentieth century initially for education purposes. Enchanted by the alien culture and the prospects of prosperity, most of them decided to migrate and settle there. Thus like Africa-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and Korean-Americans etc. Indian-Americans have also become an important

part of the multicultural population of America. Migration to a foreign land has many social, cultural, emotional, and domestic consequences. Hence, like other ethnic and cultural minorities, Indian-Americans also witness the clash of cultures and face the problems of assimilation.

These issues have been addressed for more than a century by many writers of foreign and Indian origins. One has only to recall Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, J.G Farrell, Raja Rao, Ruth Paul Scott etc. in this regard. In recent times, writers like Raji Narasimha (*The Sky Changes*, 1991) and Hari Kunzru (*The Impressionist*, 2002) V.S. Naipaul (*A House For Mr. Biswas*,) have also dealt with these issues in their works. However, many of these novels are placed in Indian context and have Indian settings. 'But, lately, the novels also take place in America, where Indians are a minuscule minority and the American culture holds for them a fatal attraction. Naturally, they struggle to assimilate it by going through love affairs, violence, and divorce.'¹

Thus the immigrant narratives by Indian-Americans constitute a significant part of contemporary American literature. It is interesting to note that especially

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women writer of Indian Diaspora have created a big impact on American literary scene. The most reputed and recognized of these women writers include Anita Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Anjana Appachana, Bharti Kirchner, Sujata Massey, Indra Ganesan, Shauna Sign Baldwin, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharti Mukerjee.

India has a strong voice in the world of literature through her writers. The women writers have achieved distinctions through their writing by voicing out the concerns of a woman to create her identity in a male dominated society. One can see immense possibility in of literary exploration in the works Bharti Mukherjee as is the Indian who acclaimed internationally.

Review of Studies

The English poets like Shakespeare to Southey glorified the image of land which they had not seen and this image of India however incompatible with the image of India projected by English men and women who knew India intimately. A new tradition of writing evolved as a consequence of this intimacy. This tradition manifested itself most powerfully in the genre of fiction and come to be called expatriate or Anglo-Indian. The tradition not only survived, but evolved a complementary form in what commonly known as Indo-Anglian fiction or the novels in English by Indians authors. The question of cross-culture communication then continues to occupy a central position in the fiction written by the expatriates. Bharti Mukerjee and is a distinguished voices in contemporary literature. A fairly large number of books, articles, and reviews stand as an irrefutable evidence of their massive creative talents. They have received prestigious literary awards.

Mukherjee's works focus on the 'phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates'2 as well as on Indian women and their struggle. Her own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as a immigrant in the United States has lead to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants. Her earlier works, such as the *The Tiger's Daughter* and parts of *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, are her attempts to find her

identity in her Indian heritage. In *Wife*, Mukherjee writes about a woman named Dimple who has been suppressed by such men and attempts to be the ideal Bengali wife, but out of fear and personal instability, she murders her husband and eventually commits suicide. The stories in *Darkness* further endeavor to tell similar stories of immigrants and women.

Her latest works include *The Holder of the World*, published in 1993, and *Leave It to Me*, published in 1997. *The Holder of the World* is a beautifully written story about Hannah Easton, a woman born in Massachusetts who travels to India. She becomes involved with a few Indian lovers and eventually a king who gives her a diamond known as the Emperor's Tear. The story is told through the detective searching for the diamond and Hannah's viewpoint. Mukherjee's focus continues to be on immigrant women and their freedom from relationships to become individuals. She also uses the female characters to explore the spatiotemporal (Massachusetts to India) connection between different cultures.

Result and Discussion

Mukherjee continues writing about the immigrant experience in most of the stories in *The Middle Man and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories which won her the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Fiction, *Jasmine*, and essays. These stories explore the meeting of East and West through immigrant experiences in the U.S. and Canada along with further describing the idea of the great melting pot of culture in the United States. *Jasmine* develops this idea of the mixing of the East and West with a story telling of a young Hindu woman who leaves India for the U.S. after her husband's murder, only to be raped and eventually returned to the position of a caregiver through a series of jobs. The unity between the First and Third worlds is shown to be in the treatment of women as subordinate in both countries.

Conclusion

Mukherjee's desire to change American literature is inextricable from her contention that the presence and civic and cultural participation of immigrants expands American identity. These attitudes towards her craft and immigrant American identity support a reading of *Jasmine* and the development of its title character

as a metaphor for Mukerjee's writing career. She feels an immigrant must teach us so much about the world and about human beings, things we can't understand if we are born and raised and live our whole life in one place. "The generational differences" of the migrants and their children occupy different spaces in the 'representative' culture but their experiences of feeling rootless and displaced can be similar on nature. Though the children born to migrant peoples enjoy better settlement and place in that country their sense of identity borne from living in a diaspora community is influenced by the past migrant history of their parents or grand parents.

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