

Feminist Perspectives in the Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

Parvaiz Ahmad Bhat

Research Scholar in English at Vikram University, Ujjain.

Abstract: *Bharati Mukherjee is a Third World Feminist writer whose preoccupation is to deal with the problems and issues related with the South Asian Women particularly India. Like her contemporary feminist writers she upholds the cause of women, but she differs from them because her basic concern is to delineate the problems of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants. This is evident by Tara Banerjee in 'The Tiger's Daughter', Dimple in 'Wife', Jyothi in 'Jasmine' and Devi in 'Leave it to me', three sisters-Padma, Parvathi and Tara in 'Desirable Daughters' and Tara in 'The Tree Bride'. Bharathi Mukherjee's heroines are bold and assertive. They have the strong potentiality for adaptability; they live in the firm ground of reality and accept the bitter truth of their life.*

Keywords: *Feminist writer, delineate, immigrant, adaptability, female protagonist*

I. Introduction: The Indian born writer Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most widely known immigrant writers of America. The immigrant writers in America can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the 'Willing Immigrant Writers' who settled in America from Europe and Asia and who have made it their home. The second category consists of the, 'Unwilling Immigrant Writers' with American origin whose forefathers were brought to America in some slave trips. But Bharati Mukherjee considers herself different from other European writers for a variety of reasons. Bharati Mukherjee's female protagonists are immigrants and suffer cultural shock but they are potential women and are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys. That is why; Bharathi Mukherjee has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of just twenty five years. Even though she has been acknowledged as a „voice of expatriate-immigrants“ sensibility, a close observation of her novels reveals that she has written all the novels with predominantly feminist views. Since Bharati Mukherjee's **women characters** are the victims of immigration, all the critics focus her novels as problems and consequences due to immigration but actually the problems are not because they are immigrants but because the women characters fight for their rights as a woman and then as an individual. Bharathi Mukherjee has tried to create a new relationship between man and woman based on equality, non-oppression, non-exploitation so that the creative potentials of both are maximized as individuals and not gender dichotomies. The male, as a representative of the patriarchal society has, at last, being jerked off the center of woman's gravitation. The woman is preparing now to be her own gravitational force, beyond the fullness of patriarchy. Let examine, the novels of Bharathi Mukherjee basing on their concept. In Bharati Mukherjee's first novel „*The Tiger's Daughter*“, the protagonist Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years stay in America. The story is drawn on Mukherjee's own experience and those of her sisters who had gone to study in America. When Tara lands at Bombay airport, she is not comfortable with her relatives. Here, Tara's Bombay relatives cannot accept a woman who not accompanied by her husband, David. According to Indian tradition, a man should lead the woman. He plays a protective role. Travelling alone, living alone and moving alone are part of unfamiliarity in many parts of India. In Indian tradition, one should marry in his own caste. If anyone marries from another caste, he will be treated as an outcast or a sinner. But the protagonist Tara violating these rules and marries a foreign man who is a Jew. She totally forgets her caste and religion through her marriages. Ironically, Mukherjee makes a criticism of the conservative attitude of the Indians who are crazy of foreign things and clothes but they do not

appear of marriage with foreign people. In the presence of her mother, Tara feels alienated. Within herself, Tara becomes mentally turbulent and makes her return to the USA. Thus, in the first novel one finds the feeling of alienation of Tara.

In her second novel "*Wife*", the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple, a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl, is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waits for marriage. She marries Amit Basu. She visualizes a new life for herself in America where Amit is expecting to immigrate. She is expected to play the role of an ideal Indian wife, stay at home and keep the house for the husband. Her frustration is built up gradually by the circumstances. She resents being wife in the Basu family and rebels against wifedom in many ways. One such way is here including a miscarriage by skipping herself free from her pregnancy, which she views as a Basu's property even in her womb. But herself-identity is avoided by marriage. She aspires for self-recognition and dream fulfilment. But Basu behaves in a different way. He wants her to a docile and submissive. So Dimple hates Basu and his behaviour. He needs her only for sexual harassment. She feels it's a sort guilty. Finally in her mentally upset state, she kills Amit in an act of self-liberation and eventually commits suicide. The third and most accomplished novel "*Jasmine*" is an account of adaptation and not a defeat. It is the story of a Punjabi rural girl, Jyothi. Prakash, an energetic and enthusiastic young man enters in Jyothi's life as her husband. When Prakash prepares to go to America, she says, "I'll go with you and if you leave me, I'll jump into a well". A woman has to accept, the path of her husband, Renamed as Jasmine, joyously sharing the ambition of her husband, she looks forward going to America, a land of opportunities even this dream gets shattered by the murder of Prakash on the eve of his departure. She decides to go America and fulfil Prakash's mission and perform "Sati". Having learned to "Walk and Talk" like an American, she grabs every opportunity to become American. Jasmine becomes Jase. At the end she kills Sukhawinder, the Khalsa lion who killed Prakash. After that she goes to Iowa assuming a new name "Jase". The manifold facets or roles played by Jasmine as Jase and Jase assault the power in woman. This power can be equal to Sakthi which is command over quality that destroys and fights against all evils. Jasmine has broken away from the shackles of caste, gender and family. She has learnt to live not for her husband or for her children but herself. Jasmine is a survivor, a fighter and an adaptor. She figures against Unfavourable circumstances, comes out a winner and carves out a new life in an alien country. Bharathi Mukherjee's succeeding novel "*The Holder of the World*" re-inforces expatriation as a Journey of the human mind. Like Jasmine who travels westward, Hannah Estean's „*Voyage to the Orient*’ tell us the protagonist's latest tensions, aspirations and ambitions. Hannah is 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 true „Emperor's Tear“. The story is told the detective's searching for the diamond and Hannah's view point. The physical journey of the female hero not only leads to probing of the self but also makes her recognize the side of herself. She returns to her native land, not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. In her next novel, „*Leave it to me*’, Bharathi Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman sociopath named Debby Dimartino, short name Debi who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents (described as a murderer and a flower child). The novel also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional involvement of the chief character in her quest for revenge. Bharathi Mukherjee's latest novel "*Desirable Daughters*" is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of dealing with situations. "Desirable Daughters" as the title suggests, one kind of daughter, which parents would be proud of and for whom every parent would crave. The three sisters, who are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharya and the great-grand-daughters of Jai Krishna Gangooli, belong to

a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. Padma, Parvathi and Tara are symbolic names of Shakti (Goddess of Hindu) do not flaunt the some ethical values but have the grit to carve a niche for them. They are a blend of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvathi do not regret their choices, the former an immigrant of ethnic origin in New Jersey, and the latter married to a boy of her own choice and settled in the plush locality of Bombay with an encourage of servants to catch her. Tara, the narrator of the novel marries Bishwapriya Chatterjee, goes on arranged marriage. Tara finds that her married life is not fulfilling and she walks out of her traditional life, a typical American divorce settlement follows. Tara works as a volunteer in a pre-school. She enjoys her love life with Andy. Tara sends his son with his father as a divorce settlement. The fluidity of her identity, testifies not only his own but also the fluidity of the immigrants. Finally Tara returns to her father's house for solace. This novel to a certain extent seems to be the autobiography of Bharathi Mukherjee who has two sisters. Bharathi Mukherjee's last novel is "*The Tree Bride*". Here the „root-search“ links the past incidents with the present happenings of Tara's life of "*Desirable Daughters*". The search to find out the identity of her stalker leads to several revelations. The plot of "*The Tree Bird*" moves back and forth from colonial India of the pre-independence times to San Francisco and back.

II. Comment: As women have experienced displacement and dislocations in personal lives, they are better suited for adaptability in an alien culture. A close reading of Mukherjee's novels reveals that her primary aim is to champion the cause of women. Mukherjee's first books weave complex tales but they lack of the art of storytelling. But her later works are more successful at capturing the readers. Thus, Bharathi Mukherjee is a typical feminist writer. Her novels truly adhere to the temperament and mood of the society in which she lived.

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