

Protagonist's Sacrifice and Alien Arrogance in the Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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C.G. Jung prophetically calls the artist a visionary. Being a creator vests them with the power to foresee the future and communicate it to the masses. His conviction in himself is so strong that he could not but convey what he believes; reality explodes from him. Be it the marginalised and the minorities nothing could control them from expressing themselves. Their demand for being recognised as individuals and not as stereotypes gets vehemently articulated in their writings.

They strive to recover their roots and create new group identities which could confer on them a sense of heritage and value. These two are contradictory impulses generating a tension, compelling the minority writer to struggle for self-expression. In the case of women writers this jeopardy is multiplied. Bharti Mukherjee is a representative of such writers; giving her personal version of the plight of the women immigrants especially. The common dilemma that gets valorised is that she is giving her

version of the shared universal reality, distorting the hitherto acknowledged truth or even reinforcing dominant negative aspects.

Contemporary sensibility inevitably is expressed in the contemporary literature. In the diasporic women writers, it is the need for rediscovering women's identity. Women come out with an unexpected vehemence to transform themselves. As Michael Foucault aroused violent ills so far practised on women denied violent curls.

Issues such as cross-culturalisation, revision of identity, reorientation of man-woman relation get represented in the works of the diasporic writers. Multiculturalism is a concomitant phenomenon of diaspora and an inevitable

outcome of the dissemination of people with their cultural imprints. Writers, such as Bharati Mukherjee deal with this issue; their conception of diasporic women offers a very interesting study. How the inherently volatile situations either get portrayed and what kind of details enriches these acutely dangerous and potentially threatening scenarios are worth an independent study. Bharati Mukherjee is a woman writer with first hand experiences of migration. She shares her first hand experience of migration and its impact on women in a multicultural context through her novels.

This paper considers the response of women writers as being as exclusive. They elucidate a solution to the

prevailing situation through their literary imagination. They succeed in turning the axis of the earth tilting it towards them, away from male chauvinistic practices. Being able to regenerate, these women writers see life as a constantly emerging renewing and reborn without any closure; the flux of life for them is the flux of the foetus floating in the amniotic fluid awaiting its birth. This archetypal imagery runs like a thread throughout all their novels. This ability to conceive, carry and deliver helps them regain not only the faith in themselves but validates their faith in their ability to change the world into a world of their own with no strings attached. The expansive discourses of these writers are visions to establish the immigrants in the

mainstream culture with severing the cultural roots.

Aims and Objectives

This paper aims at capturing the struggle of the women writers to overcome the multiple such jeopardies as diasporans, women and writers. Each novel is a search for discovering their hidden, buried self and liberating it from the trammels of tradition, male-domination and in-built constraints of the women themselves. Besides each novel is a birth, ushering in a new kind of perspective offering a new perception. Further their writing signifies liberation of their pent-up creative energy and their confounded inner self. This realisation is hailed by the women as a new lease of life.

An attempt is made to locate womanist power struggle in the

wider context of immigration issues through two select novels of Bharati Mukherjee. She is a writer born in India but settled in America, after a brief stay in Canada by juxtaposing the two novels one written in Canada and the other written in America. Hers is an acknowledged voice of the immigrant sensibility. Her novels depict the immigrant experience of the cross-cultural crisis. She explores this area of modern concern from feminist angle. She succinctly portrays the impact of the cultural shock on her characters.

Bharati Mukherjee is an outstanding writer who immigrated to Canada, marrying a Canadian. Her portrayal of female protagonist reflects her diasporic angst. She exposes the victimisation of the immigrants

due to racism, sexism, and male-chauvinism. This phase captures the travails of border-crossing in the diasporic context, where the inability to cope with the changed situation makes her gloomy and pessimistic. Her female protagonists in their phase turn violent and destructive either killing the men they live with or committing suicide. Women in this period are portrayed as victims due to their frustration and sense of loss unable to cope with the splintered identity.

Later on when she migrates to America she finds a free atmosphere and the self-imposed or self-imagined shackles are loosened. The female protagonists in these novels written in America are masters of their destiny. They overcome

the problems of ethnicity, post-coloniality, gender and migrancy as their experience dispels the fear of the Diaspora and the doubts about their own potential.

Bharati Mukherjee highlights the physical and psychological problems of Indian women immigrants aiming at exposing the difficulties of adjustment faced in the Diaspora. The author contrasts the hurried life and the destabilising prejudices in the adopted nation as against the quiet and reassuring atmosphere of the homeland. The characters their problems and their sufferings are realistic echoing of her inner conflicts and crisis of every female immigrant. They are not only immigrants but also the oppressed sex. The singular difference that Bharati

Mukherjee wishes to ply in is that Indian women are not like the women of the first world clamouring for feminism focusing only on the travails of suppression but fights for valorising womanism which included not only fighting for women's rights against men, but fighting for the liberation of the society from all constrictions and constructions.

The contemporary writers and their popular themes are reviewed in this chapter. Attention is drawn to the diasporic writers. The difference in the themes and treatment of men and women writers are highlighted. Two novels (**Wife** and **Jasmine**) of Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent writer of the Indian Diaspora are chosen for detailed analysis for

capturing the power struggles in the immigration issues. Her female protagonists undergo a personal transformation and that too rather violently. While feminist writers strongly object to this Bharati Mukherjee responds to such criticism as “for some non-white, Asian women, our ways of negotiation power are different. There is no reason why we should have to appropriate wholesale and intact -- the white, upper-middle class women’s’ tools and rhetoric” (Conner, Grearson and Grimes 22). Bharati Mukherjee challenges the American and European feminism performing one phase of the political motives underlying her migrant fiction.

The second is an exposition of one of her novels (**Wife**)

during her stay in Canada.

Bharati Mukherjee reiterates the marginalisation of women by exploring, exposing and exploding the ways in which culture, ideology and social system construct feminine identity. Dimple is an Indian immigrant married to Amit in New York. Dimple a village girl spends her life confined to her apartment. Though she strives with verve to adjust to her new surroundings, she ends up murdering her husband Amit. Bharati Mukherjee insists on reading Dimple’s life as a positive and self-assertive act of transformation.

“**Jasmine**” is taken up for analysis. It is a story of continuous transformation of identity. The protagonist of the novel, Jasmine is a symbol of

diaspora is capable of adopting the new culture and unable to cherish the old one. In both these countries she encounters various difficulties first as a woman and then as an immigrant. Jasmine evolves as an independent being thinking and caring for her own self unlike Jyothi. Bharati Mukherjee has successfully depicted through her heroines, how to find fulfilment from within.

Bharati Mukherjee calls the immigrant state as “a bicultural interstate” (Oh, Isaac 82). This libidinal condition is due to the necessary changes to be made in the physical and psychical being of the protagonist. Bharati Mukherjee drives home the point that it could be wrought about only by and through violence. The idea of transformation of life

being a process of almost constant and radical encounter is her major theme. Her heroines change their names to suite their changed surrounding and bent of mind. Each novel is a process of transformation and a journey, by the end of which the heroine re-discovers her new-identity. Bharati Mukherjee attributes voice and agency to her heroines helping them remaps their fragments of memory to overcome the constructedness of a woman and get liberated.

Bharati Mukherjee’s uniqueness in negotiating the area of darkness between the American, Canadian identity and the post-colonial one artistically is cited. She skilfully renegotiates “the spaces of cultural authority” (81) to arrive at personal identity. Her novels

serve as a platform for Bharati Mukherjee to question the transnational and translational aspects of culture by manipulating the concepts of history, time and space. In fact all her novels are autobiographical in the sense that they serve as rites of passage for the writer to reinvent herself.

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