



BHARATI MUKHERJEE: THE VOICE OF INDIAN WOMEN IN THE LAND OF FOREIGN

P. Rajeswari* Dr.S. Rajarajan**

**Research Scholar, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.*

***Asst. Professor of English, Bharathidasan Arts and Science College for Women, Puducherry.*

Abstract

*Bharati Mukherjee is a well known Diaspora writer in Indian literature. She has won several awards and grants for her elite works of fiction and non-fiction. The diasporic consciousness of the novelist is expressed in such themes as alienation, loss of identity, assimilation, rootlessness etc. Though she settled in America, she has written the inner reactions of Asian women immigrants who immigrate to alien land. Her famous works are *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *Desirable Daughters*. She has realistically portrays the sufferings of women and how they overcome after a long struggle in the new culture. Her women characters have the will power and fiery determination to tackle the problems which they face in the alien land.*

Keywords: *Stressful Immigration, Acculturation, Self Identity, Survivors.*

BHARATI MUKHERJEE: THE INDIAN DIASPORIC WRITER

Bharati Mukherjee is a contemporary American writer of Bengali origin. She is considered to be one of the major novelists of the Indian Diasporic literature or migrant literature to achieve covetable literary status within a short span of time. She focuses particularly on the life and cross cultural experiences of the Asian women immigrants. She has given the live portrait of Asian women who struggle to adapt to the new culture. Her women protagonists are veritable examples of transnational women who adapt and successfully gain a new identity in the process of acculturation, but re-establish and reshape their psyche to suit the new world they are in.

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction brings out plight of 'women caught between two cultures.' Her works are basically autobiographical in nature. Her tales depict the painful and stressful immigration, acculturation, and assimilation experiences her women protagonists undergo.

The constant search for identity forms the central theme of Bharati Mukherjee's fictional works. The major concept in her novel is women protagonists move to the alien land for better prospects in their live. They experienced unfriendly and unfavorable conditions in which they fail to adapt the new milieu. The novelist tells her personal experiences in Canada and America through her character portrayal.

Mukherjee brilliantly brings out the predicament of modern Asian women. A mental strain or pressure dominates the women who try to associate personally as well as culturally to the new land and try to identify their self with the unknown other. There also comes to problems of the new language. The new land with its unique combination of freedom of fear provides the short-lived bliss to the immigrants. The alien world provides plenty of opportunities for these women but it also gives fear for the women and also reduces their emotional security by being so strange and scary.

STAGES OF HER LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER

Bharati Mukherjee's literary career and her creative works directly correspond to the stages in her personal life. Her literary career is divided into three distinct stages as the **Expatriation phase** (1972-79), **Transition phase** (1980-88), and **the Immigration phase** (1989- present). Each phase lasts for a considerable period of time and has distinct literary features.

During the Expatriation phase, the novelist was living in Canada and her mindset was dominated by the immigrant-intolerable climate of the place. She married a Canadian writer, so she stayed in Canada for fourteen years due to her husband's wish. At her home, she felt peaceful but in the outer world she was unable to bear the Canadian racism. She suffered because of racial discrimination and humiliation in the hands of Canadians. She felt she has lost her self-identity in the alien land. In this phase, she wrote about these experiences in her early works. Her novels deal with the theme of the cross cultural experiences and the response of the person who experiences it. Leaving one's native land for the unknown America in search of better career prospects and yearning to get back to their native land only to feel completely disillusioned by the poor conditions existing in the native land forms the theme of the works written in this phase. Their failure to acculturate and adapt makes them feel alienated and more rootless.



In this phase, she has written two well known novels **The Tiger's Daughter** (1972), **Wife** (1975). The Tiger's Daughter is an auto-biographical story about an East Indian immigrant Tara Banerjee, born in an orthodox hindu culture, move to North America to do her higher studies. She married a North American and she was forced to settle down there. But she was unable to adapt to the new culture. But when she moves again to her native country, her perception is entirely different. She finds no opportunity in her home land when compared to the alien land. She doesn't get even due respect in their native land since she married a North American. Now she becomes homeless. Finally, she decided to settle in alien land.

Wife, the story of a young Indian weak minded Bengali woman Dimple Dasgupta, married off to Amit Basu, an ambitious Engineer about to immigrate to the United States. Her move to New York leaves her in a state of shock and despair. She didn't get the expected life in which she aspired for. At one stage, she becomes neurotic and even quit her pregnancy. Finally, she goes mad and kills her husband.

The second phase, **Transition phase** (1980-88), she did not produce any novels, but only two volumes of short stories. Many of the women protagonists in these short stories directly mirror the victimized novelist who suffered racial discrimination in Canada. They also tend to compare Canada with America in terms of the quality of life and the equality with which immigrants are treated. They develop a tendency to fight and they try to adapt and become an immigrant.

The third phase of **Immigration** covers rests of the novelist's life and produced many notable novels. She is mature enough to proclaim a suitable literary as well as personal identity as an immigrant American writer of Indian origin. Her long struggles with racial discrimination in Canada made her strong and the courage to fight everything that comes opposing in her way towards progress. The protagonists reveal themselves as 'fighters' and 'Survivors'. They become bolder and dare to fight against the inner battle. It had also given her the will to fight everything that blocks her way towards progress. Though the women characters suffer from crippling problems they dare to fight and overcome it with all their might.

Thus, it can be seen that not only the personal experiences of the author play a great part in the creation of her literary works but also the geographical shifts that happened in her real life produced remarkable changes in the general tone and treatment of her themes.

Bharati Mukherjee claims to be an immigrant American writer of Indian origin. She adopted an American identity and yet writes predominantly about Asian or Indian born women immigrants. She proudly says that she is an American writer even though she writes about the sufferings of Asian women immigrants. Her immigrant theme helps her to get a reputed fame in her literary career. She relates her American identity with her professional identity as a writer and claims 'her North American English makes her an American writer'.

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