

# Analysing Immigrant sensibility of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine and Desirable Daughters

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**Abstract**— Novels of Bharati Mukherjee reflect its characters and their sensibilities with special reference to women characters. In view of the fact that Bharathi Mukherjee's female characters are the sufferer of immigration, all the critics focus her novels as constraints and consequences due to immigration but in fact the constraints are not because they are immigrants but because the women characters fight for their rights as a woman and then as a human being. Mukherjee has attempted to create a new association between male and female based on equality or impartiality, non-exploitation and nonoppression so that the imaginative potentials of both are maximized as individuals and not gender dichotomies. The woman is preparing now to be her own gravitational force, beyond the completeness of patriarchy. The man, as a representative of the patriarchal society has, at last, being jerked off the centre of woman's gravitation. Mukherjee in her novels handles very sensitively the matters such as racial discriminations, feminine sensibilities and many other feminist perspectives. Woman characters in her novels experience race prejudices and other feminine problems. Immigrants of Mukherjee are subjected to racial discrimination. They live in pitiable and unwanted conditions yet they live there due to their own boundaries. This study deals with all the above aspect in two of her novels Jasmine and Desirable Daughters.

**Keywords**— Bharati Mukherjee, Immigrant Sensibility, Constraints, Jasmine, Desirable Daughters.

## Introduction

Migration from the land of birth to an alien place was a common phenomenon in the twentieth century. People moved towards the prospect of a better life or under severe economic compulsions at home. Desire for knowledge, motivation for better exposure and dream of becoming successful professionals and businessmen can also account as reasons for migration.

The Indian Diaspora is much highlighted in recent literature. Etymologically speaking, the term "Diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb 'Speiro' which means 'To sow' and the preposition 'dia' - meaning 'over', has been used in a broader context.

The word 'diaspora' means the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles after the period of their exile. Bill Ashcroft, et al. defines 'diaspora' as "the voluntary or forcible movements of people from their homelands into new regions...." (Ashcroft 1985, p.68) Native land has become the object of the Indian diasporic writers' imagination. Jasbir Jain throws light on the two aspects of the subject when he says that the diaspora has the "ambiguous status of being both an ambassador and a refugee" (Jain 1998, p.11). Diaspora literature focuses on the dilemma between the two options. It connotes cultural borders and not geographic borders. And it also focuses on the gap between 'home - the culture of origin, and the 'world' - the culture of adoption.

Mukherjee, a renowned author was born in Calcutta in the year 1990 to wealthy Brahmin parents, and was brought up in a large extended household of over fifty family members. Mukherjee's parents and their three daughters moved to London in 1948 to escape the civil unrest brought on by India's independence and partition. There the girls attended school and became fluent in English. In 1951 the family returned to Calcutta, and Mukherjee continued her English language instruction at the Loretto Convent School, a missionary institution run by Irish nuns. In 1959 she received a B.A. in English from the University of Calcutta; two years later she earned a Master's degree in English and Ancient Indian Culture from the University of Baroda.

In 1961 Mukherjee received a scholarship to study writing at the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop, where she first earned a Masters of fine Arts and then a Ph.D. While at Iowa she met the Canadian writer Clark Blaise, whom she married in 1963 against the wishes of her Bengali family, who had arranged for her to be married to an Indian nuclear physicist. In 1966 the couple moved to Montreal, where Mukherjee taught English at McGill University. Three years later they moved to Toronto with their two small children where Mukherjee.

The present study weaves a pattern of various cross-cultural situations and relations. It reflects the cultural diversity in America and in the East in India. It deals with the reflection of Indian culture and past and present encounters with the Indian setting and the culture of the East. The culture of the Orient differs from the culture of the West, the reflection of the changes in the life of the protagonist have the protagonist's experiences of cross-cultural relations. The cross cultural encounters are presented through mirroring of the Western culture. It also brings out the sense of alienation with a desire to find out the cultural roots. The process of acculturation is completed with the phase of assimilation with the target culture.

The phase of assimilation goes on both the ways that is from the East to the West and from the West to the East.

### *Jasmine*

The theme of *Jasmine* is an Indian immigrant's encounter with the New World and her gradual transformation as she thoroughly imbibes the new culture. Jasmine, the protagonist, though widowed at a young age. Casts aside the weeds of a widow and begins her stride towards liberation and empowerment. Ostensibly on the grounds of committing sati on the Florida University campus where her dead husband Prakash wanted to study. Jasmine lands on the Florida Coast. Despite the odds against her. She gets assimilated successfully into the American society. She changes herself in order to change the world around. Jasmine proves Mukherjee's ideology of assimilation. With *Jasmine*, a new phase dawns in Mukherjee's literary career. Though she continues to talk about immigrant lives, her angle of vision has fundamental changed. Mukherjee presents immigration from the third world to North America as a process of uprooting and re-rooting. All along the narrative. Mukherjee's protagonist transforms herself, and in the process transforms America, so immigrant experience, as Mukherjee visualises it is a two-way process.

Bharati Mukherjee insists on being read not as an Indian, or an expatriate writer, but as an immigrant writer, whose literary agenda is to claim the America that is being improvised by newcomers from the Third World. In her essay "Immigrant Writing," Mukherjee poses a challenging question:

"All around me I see the face of America changing .... But where in fiction, do you read of it? Who, in other words, speaks for us, the new Americans from non-traditional immigrant countries?"(Mukherjee, 1988, p.1)

*Jasmine*, the fascinating heroine of her third novel, stands as an example of the "fusion" the author claims is occurring now: "immigration was a two-way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience."(Carb, 1988, p. 648)

Throughout the novel then Mukherjee is involved in presenting immigration from the Third World to North America as a process of "uprooting and rerooting." This work of fiction illustrates that Mukherjee's theme in this phase of her literary career has become "the making of new Americans".<sup>5</sup> In *Jasmine* Mukherjee moves decisively away from: the darkness phase of her writing, where she dealt with expatriates trying to preserve their identities in a hostile world, to immigrants striving to transform their identities and stake out their claims to America.

*Jasmine* is the heroic story of the harrowing odyssey of a poor young and ambitious Punjabi woman who migrates from Hasanpur to the U.S.A. The eponymous heroine of the novel is the narrator of the story, who gives a detailed account of her journey from "unhousement" to "rehousement". Though the main focus of the novel is on the problems of cultural retention and resistance to change and the cultural assimilation of the immigrants, it also deals with the impact they have on the lives of the natives. Through this novel Mrs. Mukherjee tries to prove that America is "the embodiment of openness, liberalism and freedom, a culture of dreamers, a land of transformation, where an individual can reverse omens."(Purewal, 1990)

The lives of the immigrants do not have "straight lines and smooth plains." They live centuries of history in a lifetime and have several lives and roles. For instance, *Jasmine* takes several births namely Jyoti, *Jasmine*, Jess and Jane. Through her character the novelist underlines the propensity to spiritual metamorphosis as a pre-condition to cultural assimilation. Jyoti's transformation into Jane can be divided into three phases. The first phase comes to end when she steps out of flushing and the second begins with her living in the Taylor household. The third phase covers her life with the Ripple Meyers in Baden, Iowa country.

In New York streets *Jasmine* sees "more greed, more people" (p.140) like herself. New York seems to be "an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens" (p.140). Her failure in understanding the intentions of the American beggar is symbolic of confusion that grips an immigrant in an alien land. The American beggar abuses her and calls her a "foreign bitch". *Jasmine*, like the true immigrants is tossed between a desire for remembering her past and an equally pressing urgency to forget it. The freedom loving spirit of *Jasmine* finds it difficult to cope with the conservative India represented by the Vadheras and after spending five frustrating months at Flushing one day, she deserts the Vadheras and sets forth for another adventure.

She thinks that she has got an established home and now she will no longer be haunted by rootlessness, "I had landed and was getting rooted" (p.179). But still her destination is not reached and she is forced to run from New York. She cites the assassin of her husband, Sukhwinder, and runs for life to Iowa. But her escape is not a sign of her cowardice, it is 'life-affirming, "She (*Jasmine*) is running away for life not escaping from life which is a positive step" (Dimri, 1994, p173). Pushpa N. Parekh thinks that *Jasmine*'s stay at Taylor's for two years is the most fruitful period of her life in America:

Again her observation on Taylor-Wylie episode are very minute:

"Wylie's apparent "reasonless" abandoning of Taylor and Duff is a jolt back to the inexplicable and unexplainable nature of human action. Instead of fate or destiny or an unknown power being responsible for a family's break-up, *Jasmine* witnesses an American woman, Wylie, deliberately chooses to leave. *Jasmine*'s inner monologues and silent reflections capture her

deliberations on cultural differences and an immigrant woman's emotional adherence to her traditional beliefs while intellectually exploring the new avenues opened to her by the modern value systems" (Pushpa N, P.113)

Jasmine's restless move from one place to another betrays her gripping alienation and bewilderment. On more than one occasions she realises that she is an "outsider" and "other" in America-an illegal immigrant without passport, living among aliens whose ways she knows nothing about. She is always apprehensive about American being and thinking, suffers humiliation and disappointment. As she mutters: "This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing" (p.29). Again her failure to understand Wylie's decision to leave Taylor testifies to the fact that she is a poor immigrant. She comes from the third world where experiences are always painful and it is sharp contrast to her experience of America. As she says: "For me (or likes), experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill" (p.33). She dresses like an American name but she can trust only Asians: "I trust only Asian doctors, Asian professionals. What we've gone through must count for something" (p.32). She is loved by all for her Indians, which has made her a lovable and caring wife, an affectionate mother.

The novel stands for its stylistic achievement. The meticulousness of Mukherjee, the artist, is manifest in the manner the narrative is structured. Juxtaposing Jasmine's claustrophobic life in India with her life in America emphasizes the exuberance of the new world. Despite the change that occurs in Jasmine the memories of Indian haunt her like the stench of the decomposed carcass of the dog in the Hasanpur pond.

Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine is an ambitious endeavour to outline the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values. Being an issue of widespread contemporary interest, this suggests an important link in the chain of the "new literature" that is written at present by women and about women. In its popularity lies the validity of the struggle it depicts or the convictions that such a literature generates.

### *Desirable Daughters*

Desirable Daughters is the sixth novel of Bharati Mukherjee which was published in 2002. Bharati Mukherjee portrays the different world of three women, who are real sisters. These three sisters represent the women in traditional and modern context. Mukherjee shows trilogy in this novel through an enthusiastic protagonist, Tara Bhattacharjee. Tara questions about her own individuality. The yearning and identity crisis to define one's own identity is generated off when she is tackled with the dishonest son of her much admired sister. Fakeness enters her life by force crushing the images of family principles. The novel is created luminously which reveals the opinions and approaches Calcutta born Brahmin family. In family one can find three sisters belonging to upper-class, who were known for their intellect, beauty, wealth, grace, and fortunate class in the society.

In the novel *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee focuses on the family ties, identity crisis and senses of belonging. Desirable daughters are type of daughters that parents would be proud of, and for whom every parent would desired. These three sisters are the great granddaughters of Jai Krishna Gangooli and daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee, who belong to a conventional Bengali Brahmin family. The second generation and their values in the home land and simple acceptance by the first generation, recognition of the original, new and the values affected by the American culture are many of the themes focused in the novel. *Desirable Daughters* is a story of immigrants and the feelings and thoughts of three sisters and their methods of dealing with circumstances. Tara, Parvati and Padma are representative or symbolic names of Shakti (Goddess of Hindus) not display the same ethical values but have the grit to carve a position for them.

"Just as our mother hoped in naming us after goddesses,

We have survived, even prospered" (DD, P.21)

They are a combination of customary and contemporary outlook. Parvati and Padma do not regret their preferences; the former an immigrant of racial source in New Jersey, and the later married to a boy of her own preference and settled in the luxurious area of Bombay with an entourage of servants to provide her. Tara, the narrator of the novel, takes the readers deep into the details of the new land (USA) and seems to drift rootless with time. The flexibility of her identity confirms not only her own but also the flexibility of the immigrants. She values her customary upbringing but takes pride in moving forward in life.

Tara introduces to her sister's world where she considers a royalty any has her chuck and relationships or affairs, when she goes to meet her sister Padma. Her husband lives under Padma's shade. She runs various type of business with her friend Danny Jagtiani and some others. Tara is asked to have a renovation. She is sleepy and looks fatigued and old by Padma's standard and physically. Padma fails to notice the point why Tara is looking exhausted. Tara's conflict with the imposter leaves her tired. She simply surrenders to her sister's demands. She is treated like a model, where she is made to swathe a luxurious fashionable sari and wear weighty gold jewellery to the party planned by her sister.

Tara is introduced to the South Asian immigrant society and the regulars at these parties. The satire of the condition is that Tara doesn't recognize the objective behind Padma's kindness. She keeps on calculating her budget: if she would be capable to pay for the jewellery and sari, little understanding that she is being utilized like a model on demonstrate for people to look and purchase the product. The disconnected manner and approach of Padma is a setback for Tara. As she has been taken to a corner and asked

to take out the set because it is sold. She feels bereft, undressed and feels grateful that she has not been asked to take out her sari. All these episodes happen in good enthusiasm. Tara, the protagonist meets the new personality of her sister who is away from acknowledgment.

Tara's strategies for survival in a displaced world entail subordination, struggle, restoration, followed by a fear of annihilation and a yearning for revitalisation. Tara's way of life is completely different from her other sisters. She is different from Padma for Tara loves her family and culture but has abstained from the struggle to conserve them. But Padma tries to lead a conventional Bengali life in New Jersey, though her speech has always been inherent in abhorrence for her family and the city of Calcutta. They vary in the manner they negotiate with the host culture. The other sister Parvati believes that Tara's exploration is over with her divorce, but for Tara it is just a beginning. Though the sisters appear close to each other they do not share a similar outlook towards life. The difference of their marriages and the course of immigration they have taken have made them aliens for Tara thinks:

“The gap between youngest and oldest, the disparity of our marriages and the paths our immigration have taken, have made us strangers. Her [Padma's] reaction to my divorce (that I had brought shame to the Battacharjee family had been her refrain) had hurt” (94)

Tara lives in San Francisco enjoying the American idea of potentials and promises. Like many Indian immigrant women in their American position Tara has her anxious effort to explore, classify, and affirm her identity. But to her complete displeasure, she finds that life fails to bring these promises, therefore feels upset and dejected. The surroundings frustrate and dishearten her.

The two sisters and their particular lifestyles signify the two boundaries of the immigrant vision. Padma's husband, Harish Mehta has a doubtful profession as a counsellor. Their house and way of life is representative of the fighting immigrants who flee from the conventions of India, only to struggle on the fringes of American society.

Bharati Mukherjee is extra at peace with herself in *Desirable Daughters*. No longer is there harass to smash out from the conventionalities of her values of native country. Mollify with both her present and the past – she sees on her mother land without any doubts while completely enchanted in her 'fresh' identity of being an immigrant in the USA. *Desirable Daughters* is steeped in the home land which is juxtaposed to foreign land. Indian feminist perspectives are juxtaposed to feminist perspectives of the USA

Tara Bhattacharjee familiarized into the values of new nation. She admits the new transforms in her life and enthusiastically attempts to explain them instead of sitting back. She prays for the whole thing to make itself correct. Bharati Mukherjee states that the Hindu values of Karma yoga as she has done in time and once more in her novels. A gay son would have caused a disturbance in India, but she admits her son's preference as common talking it out with her ex-husband. Character of Rabi might be replicated by Mukherjee from her days of Canada. In those days she was encouraged by the Gay Union and she had supported their basis. Bharati Mukherjee validates their survival. However, the matter of Gay is no more questioned after the implementation of new law in the USA.

Rabi is a usual person with dissimilarity and Tara's approval of her son's preference is that her son is significant. Even Tara's husband Bish was also agreed with her decision regarding her son, Rabi. Her absorption is absolute, yet she is confused to see her sister's immigrant position from a dissimilar perspective.

The idea of house and immigration is very much surrounded in the story that Mukherjee depicts in the novel, *Desirable Daughters*. It is the wisdom of relocation which transports about a transform to the identity of Padma, who has lastly made New York her home. New York (America) is her land of preference. But her unchallengeable affection to her house makes her the sufferer and preserver of Bengali custom in the USA. Thus, the foreign country fails to challenge her customary identity. On the other hand, it only renovates her cultural individuality. Therefore, immigration plays a vital role in confining individual recognizes and cultural approaches and insights.

## Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee seized on immigration as an opportunity to depict the heroic endeavors on the part of her female protagonists to rediscover themselves. She also utilized it to seek for the writer in her a release from constrictive social and cultural restraints in the mother land in custom bound India. Her novels deal with people who have left their nations for various reasons and who have landed in the USA with hopes, ambitions and the resolve to turn over a new leaf.

All the women protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee's novels are immigrants. They all are suffered from cross-cultural conflict, identity crisis and partiality. It is fact that after immigration whole life of a woman has changed. Therefore, it is recommended by this study that before migration one should be prepared psychologically as well as culturally. He/she should adopt the policy of adjustment in life after immigration. It observed that after immigration to foreign country the woman characters of Bharati Mukherjee has forgetter the values of her native country. And, when they come to her mother land after a long gap, they face various problems in adjustment with her family and friends. Therefore, on the basis of the explorative study of Mukherjee's novels, it can be recommended that immigrants even after immigration should maintain the relation with her native country.

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