

Thematic Concernsin the select novels of Bharathi Mukherjee

Prof. Suresh Kumar Madhupalli, Department of English, Acharya
Nagarjuna University, Guntur.

Mr. Veeraiah Motupalli, Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Bapatla Engineering College, Bapatla.

Article Received: 09/12/2023; Article Accepted: 10/01/2024; Published Online: 11/01/2024
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.1.128

Abstract:

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian diasporic writer born on July 27, 1940, in a Bengali Brahmin family in Calcutta. She had written that her works and characters are based upon Indian women who are suffering from racism and sexism and driven to distressed acts of violence when they apprehend that they can fit into neither the culture of the West nor Indian society, which they have left behind. This article explores multicultural concerns in Bharati Mukharjee's works. The researcher has read Bharati Mukherjee's fiction works to pen this article. In this article, the researcher has analyzed women's marginalization, religious problems, gender equality and identity traditions, and social and cultural issues.

Keywords: Multicultural concerns, social issues, women marginalization, expatriates, immigration history.

Introduction:

Bharati Mukherjee was one of the leading Indian diasporic writers. Bharati Mukherjee (born July 27, 1940, Calcutta, India) is an Indian-born American novelist and short-story writer whose work reflects Indian culture and immigrant experience. Mukherjee was born into a wealthy Calcutta family. In her works, the main focus is on the phenomenon of migration, the experiences faced by immigrants, the struggle faced by the female protagonists to achieve autonomous selfhood in the new lands, and the contentment experienced by the immigrants in the country of the immigrants. As a postmodern writer, she spoke of the Indian voices that struggle in a foreign land as an alien, immigrant, expatriate, and whose constant efforts to assimilate into the host culture. She penned many notable novels such as *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife*(1975), *Jasmine*(1989), *The Holder of the World*(1993), *Leave it to Me*(1997), *Desirable Daughters*(2002), *The Tree Bride*(2004) and *Miss New World*(2011). Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most influential literary figures of Indian women writers in English who is honored as the "Grande dame" of diasporic Indian English literature. She was termed as an Asian- American writer, Indo-American writer, Indian Diaspora writer, writer of immigrant fiction and non-fiction, and American writer of mainstream today. As Clark Blaise puts it - "Bharati has become one of America" 's best-known novelists and short-story writers" (Blaise and Mukherjee, "Prologue" to *Days and Nights*, vi). Raj Chetty (2006) opines that American author Bharati Mukherjee could be easily seen as "Lahiri" 's foremother". Her journey from India to England, India to the USA, Canada, and the USA made her an expatriate writer like V. S. Naipaul, an immigrant writer, and an American mainstream writer like Bernard Malamud and Henry Roth. She has developed a

reputation for exploring the meeting of the Third World and the First World from the perspective of an immigrant to North America, Canada, and the USA.

Bharati Mukherjee is a prominent novelist, short-story and non-fiction writer. In her works, the main focus is on the phenomenon of migration, the experiences faced by immigrants, the struggle faced by the female protagonists to achieve autonomous selfhood in the new lands, and the contentment experienced by the immigrants in the country of the immigrants. In her novel, *Jasmine*, its protagonist, encounters various cultural identities, yet she negotiates with every new identity she faces. The present paper depicts the experiences faced by the protagonist, her resistance to the popular dominant culture of two different countries, and her reactions to the existing culture.

She is an activist of civil rights, educator, and author of highly praised novels, two collections of short stories, and non-fiction works. She utilizes her own experiences in crossing cultural boundaries. She is a well-known writer of the Indian diaspora in the USA. However, she expects to be seen as a (North) American Writer and rejects her hyphenated identity as Asian-American or Indo-American (Mukherjee, "American Dreamer"). Her works can undoubtedly be read in the national context of Indian writing in English and the international context of the literature of the Indian diaspora. Also, her work locates her in the American context. She is the strong voice of immigrants from all over the world in the USA because of her determined rejection of the emotional paralysis of exile and her affirmation of the immigrant condition.

Wife: The researcher could observe very clearly that the outstanding work of Bharathi Mukharjee, *Wife* is a sensitive story, portraying the plight of a young woman who striving to be an ideal

wife and finally is unable to endure the suppression of the patriarchal society ultimately kills her husband. The novel opens with Dimple's girlish fantasy about marriage. She is eager to get married and has visions of her prince, Charmin, whose amorous advances and glances would drench her with supreme bliss. In Dimple's imagination, there is no place for mundane responsibilities and struggle with day-to-day existence like water shortage, electricity failure, and adjustment with in-laws. Her husband, Ami, an upcoming young man her parents find suitable for her, fails to feed her fancy. Dimple finds the tedium of marriage a burden. She had not bargained to live in the dark and dingy apartment with her mother-in-law. Dimple cannot see the joy in her married home in Calcutta and longs to go to the U.S. In this connection, the writer Bharathi Mukharjee could pen her views on all women's concerns, problems, and societal issues.

The Tiger's Daughters: This is the first novel of Bharathi Mukharjee and the story of a young girl who, after being away for a long time, returns to India, only to live in dark poverty. Bharathi Mukharjee depicts the Indian culture, influences, and attitudes of men on women in all the ways in this novel. The novel, at the same time, commemorates the novelist's own experience, who was affected by the poverty and chaos when they returned to India.

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukherjee examines the reception of the Indian expatriate who returned home; *Days and Nights in Calcutta* expresses the same practical feeling of disjuncture and dislocation. On her return home, she laments the poor condition of the Bengali-Indian society: What is unforgivable is the lives that have been sacrificed to notions of propriety and obedience. 'Blaise, her husband, however, becomes very much intrigued by the magic of the myth and culture surrounding every part of Bengal. He realizes

that in India, family is all, and in the structure of an Indian joint family, nothing is a more significant issue than going against the family.

Jasmine: "Jasmine" is a novel by Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-born American writer. Published in 1989, the novel explores several thematic concerns that reflect the complexities of the immigrant experience and the search for identity in a new cultural context. Here are some thematic concerns in the novel "Jasmine." In this novel, she experienced Western culture after getting a second marriage to Bud Ripplemeyer. It is the story of a hypersensitive woman who was widowed at the young age of seventeen who finally was bound to earn a living as a health professional. Jasmine, found to be based on the prior short story *In the Middleman* and other stories, narrates the story of a seventeen-year-old girl who became a widow by fate after her husband's brutal assassination in a bomb blast. The novel delves into the theme of identity and self-discovery as Jasmine transforms from a traditional Indian village girl to an independent woman in America. Her journey involves adapting to a new culture and navigating through various identities and roles she assumes to survive and thrive. Her consciousness was shaken after the mishap. She took a more extended period to emerge victorious from this nightmare, the darkest phase of life. In India, man is always considered to be the defining term for a woman.

The Holder of the World: The Holder of the World represents a spatiotemporal connection between the oriental and the Occidental Cultures. The story is told from Hannah's standpoint, who came to India from Massachusetts. Mukherjee often addresses the theme of cultural identity and the sense of displacement experienced by individuals navigating different cultures. The characters in the novel grapple with questions of identity as they move between India

and the Western world. The novel delves into the impact of colonialism and power dynamics between different cultures. It explores how historical events, such as the colonization of India, shape the lives and destinies of the characters. "The Holder of the World" touches upon globalization, examining how the world's interconnectedness affects individuals and societies. The characters experience the consequences of globalization, including cultural clashes and the spread of Western influence. Mukherjee explores the pursuit of wealth and the materialistic aspects of society. The character of Beigh Masters, who has a valuable gem, symbolizes materialism and the consequences of wealth accumulation. Mukherjee addresses issues related to gender roles and feminism. The female characters in the novel confront societal expectations and challenge traditional gender norms, reflecting the changing roles of women in different cultural contexts. The characters in the novel navigate the tension between individual aspirations and the expectations of their communities. This theme is particularly evident in the protagonist's journey as she grapples with her desires and the societal norms of India and the Western world.

Leave it To Me: This novel portrays psychoanalysis, which deals with a young girl seeking vengeance for her parents who abandoned her. Mukherjee" 's fifth novel, *Leave It to Me* (1997), reveals the protagonist "'s ungrateful interaction with her adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. "Leave It to Me" is a novel by Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-American author known for her works exploring the experiences of South Asian immigrants in the United States. Published in 1997, the novel touches upon several thematic concerns characteristic of Mukherjee's broader body of work. Mukherjee often explores the complexities of identity in her works. In "*Leave It to Me*," the protagonist, Debby DiMartino, is

adopted by American parents but discovers her Indian roots. This journey of self-discovery leads to a sense of alienation and confusion as Debby grapples with her dual identity. The clash of cultures and the experience of living in a hybrid identity are recurrent themes in Mukherjee's novels. "Leave It to Me" delves into the challenges faced by individuals who straddle multiple cultural worlds. Debby's attempts to reconcile her American upbringing with her Indian heritage highlight the tensions and richness of cultural hybridity.

Conclusion:

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian-American writer known for her novels and short stories that explore themes of immigration, identity, and the cultural clash between East and West. Mukherjee frequently explores the experiences of immigrants, mainly from India, as they navigate the challenges of adapting to a new culture while preserving aspects of their own identity. The characters in her novels often grapple with questions of assimilation, acculturation, and the tension between their cultural heritage and the demands of the adopted culture. Mukherjee's novels show the change in her work from a primary concern with the Indian expatriate's experience in the new society to a situation where the expatriate becomes an immigrant. The expatriate is slowly assimilated into the host society – at all psychological, sociological, and linguistic levels. Her protagonists break the umbilical cord with the homeland. In *Wife*, Mukherjee dramatizes the opposition between two cultures, the despair of prejudice and the pre-consciousness of immigrant status, but the psychological fragmentation, alienation, and insanity that her protagonist's experiences are viewed not only in terms of culture shock but also as an "intense experience of female biological, sexual and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency." Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* concentrates on the

cultural conflict of the East and West as the protagonists take drastic steps at the end to get away from the cultural maladjustment that enmeshes them. Mukherjee's novels deal with nostalgia for a lost home, the disillusionment of expatriation, fragmentation of the self, the exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation, and negotiation.

References:

- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1975. Print.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *The Tiger's Daughter*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 1990. Print.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. Grove Press Publication, 1989.
- Mukherjee, Bharati. *Leave It To Me*. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- Mukherjee, Bharati, (2004). *The Tree Bride*, Rupa Publications India Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Dhawan, R.K. *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Perspective*. Atlantic Publishers, 1998.
- Kumar, Nagendra. *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001. Print.
- Nelson, Emmanuel. *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993.
- X. Mukherjee, Bharati, 1971. *The Tiger's Daughter*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.