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ISOLATION AND ASSIMILATION IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVELS

Mrs. Upma Rani Sharma

Research Scholar

Jiwaji University (M.P)

Dr. Archana Agarwal

Professor & Head, Department of English

M.L.B. Govt. College Of Excellence, Gwalior (M.P)



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Abstract

Alienation is the problem that almost every other individually who is living abroad, who is living away from his roots faces. The struggle to survive in that alien atmosphere becomes very difficult for these people. Bharati Mukherjee has done a tremendous job in bringing out the concept of isolation in her characters. It through her characters that she is trying to explain the pain of an immigrant. This paper shall read all her novels in a brief manner showing a glimpse of Bharati Mukherjee's treatment of Alienation and Assimilation in her novels.

Keywords: - Alienation, loneliness, cultural conflict.



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Introduction

The concept of alienation belongs to a vast and complex problematic- in forms ranging from Bible to literary works as well as treatises in law, Economy and Philosophy reflect objective trends of European development, from slavery to the age of transition and capitalism to socialism.¹

Alienation may be expressed as one's inner and outer conditions. Outer condition can be arisen from God, name, fame and society in which individual lives. Another condition is inner which is created by an individual's hidden feelings, longingness and depression results in self-alienation. .Bharati Mukherjee's fiction is based on the quest of an immigrant for their livelihood, experienced of life and longingness for homeland. BharatiMukheree shares her experiences as an immigrant in her novels. She depicts the experiences which she gained in India, Canada and America. Her works mainly revolves around immigration, assimilation and expatriation. Her earlier works depicts about exile, than assimilation and later works about immigrants. In all her novel female character plays the role of central character and with the help of her female protagonists she is able to delineate the process of immigration, transformation and alienation.

Thus, one can say that with the changing scenario, cultural alienation has become an integral part today. The vast difference between the life of home land and the life of alien land brings a feeling of fear, anxiety and frustration; this could be stated as cultural shock. When a person migrates to new culture leaving his own tradition, values and culture becomes the victim of cultural conflict. Identity crisis arises when there is a phenomena of migration or 'cultural transplant'. Bharati Mukherjee in all her novels delineate the problem of dislocation in India as well as in America neglecting the immigrant writer's curiosity to adopt the culture of his own land and degraded the culture of alien land.



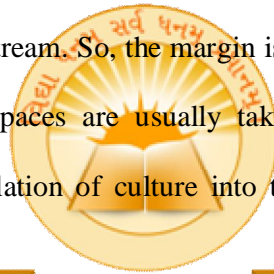
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Assimilation is the result of an expatriate's total adaptation in the alien or new land, either physically or culturally. Though it is feasible for the second generation of expatriates, the spirit of expatriates is rather connected to the cultural identity. Though they adopt the new cultural physically but mentally it takes a longer time to adopt. Thus in diasporic literature identity plays a very vital role. Stuart Hale contends that 'identity' should not be thought of as an accomplished fact, but should be seen as a production which is never complete. This view problematises the authenticity of the term 'cultural identity'. Bharati Mukherjee exhibits the sense of belongingness in her writings. As the migrants suffer feeling of nostalgia and sense of belongingness in their new accepted identity as immigrants in the new land, it is not only a challenge of topographical dislocation but also for transformation of cultural ideologies. Mukherjee delineates the key feature of immigrants i.e. hyphenation and isolation. When a person is in the margin, they are actually in hyphenation and isolation from the mainstream. So, the margin is a centre where hyphenated identities urge for their cultural spaces. The cultural spaces are usually taken by the Diasporas or immigrants who hyphenated from their attempt of assimilation of culture into the culture of new land with their 'hybrid experience'.



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In all the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, she represents these marginalized groups, who leaves their own land for any reason, who go to exile to attain the honour, value, freedom and their identity in the new land. Bharati Mukherjee, being a highly impressive writer, deliberately ignores the adoration of her birth land, she also does not allow to degrade the adopted land though they are often receives criticism on her thinking of dual-culturalism. Mukherjee has come up as a post-modern writer with American citizenship. This viewpoint preserves fundamental Indiannees to be intriguing yet consolidate merrily into American Materialism.

She requests her to get different place from Indian writers of English other than R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai and V.S. Naipaul. She is then able to explore the new vision to define the immigrant sensibilities. She



rejects hyphenation of racial group because it is only applied to non white immigrant. She argues in American Dreamer:

I choose to describe myself ... as an American, rather than as an Asian-American? Rejecting hyphenation is my refusal to categorize the cultural landscape into a centre and its peripheries; it is to demand that the American nation deliver the promises of its constitution to all citizens equally.²

In Mukherjee's first novel *'The Tiger's Daughter'*, there are many incidents delineates the protagonist's psychological situation and feeling of alienation. Tara Banerjee, the protagonist of the novel is now an immigrant returns to India after seven years as she marries and lives in US, feels alienated. When she arrives at the airport where everyone, her relatives and all treats her as a foreigner. She feels herself an outsider rather than native. Tara is caught between the American culture to which she is not fully known with and with the culture of her home land from whose traditions, values and principles she feels alienated. Tara soon realizes that her decision of coming to India was not good. Her arrival at Bombay railway station, makes her aware of the fact that America has changed her. She feels alienated even when her parents meet her at the Howrah railway station. Through this novel Bharati Mukherjee has drawn the picture of her own experience when she returned to India after her marriage and Caught between two cultures. Tara continuously goes to Catelli Continental Hotel to avoid her sense of alienation. She again and again thinks about her life in America. She wants to get rid of the hustle-bustle of Calcutta. Her visit to bustee with Joyonto Roy Chaudhary strengthens her decision go back to America. She was not able see the filthiness of the bustee. One of the child was suffering from leprosy, it was hard for her to forget disease, sufferings and poverty in India. She thinks that she will never come to India now.

Wife, the second novel of Bharati Mukherjee published in 1975 and finalist for Governor General's



Award. It is a story of Dimple Dasgupta who wishes to be an ideal Bengali Wife. But unfortunately she kills her husband because of anxiety and mental imbalance. Dimple delineates a peculiar and intriguing vision to the theme of alienation, isolation and immigration. She lives happy with her family, her father and mother but her life becomes miserable after her marriage, when she married to Amit Basu and migrated to New York.

Dimple feels unhappy after marriage, when her mother-in-law wants to change her name from Dimple to Nandini. Her mother-in-law does not like Dimple at all. Her husband tells her that he wished to marry tall, slim and convent educated girl and Dimple does not possess the requisite qualities desired by her husband, she feels isolated and alienated. Her husband also dreamt of working in America to fulfill his dream they both migrate to New York and lives with an American friend, Jyoti Sen. Dimple faces the cultural shock, the moment she enters to the American culture which is totally different from her native culture. This cultural conflict also gives rise to her sense of alienation.

Mukherjee's third novel *Jasmine*, is a story of an assimilated immigrant. A young Hindu widow from Hasnapur, Punjab migrates to USA to fulfill her husband's dream who was dead. Her husband was murdered by Sukhwinder Singh, a terrorist of the group of Khalsa Lion. She was living with her family in India with two brother. Her destiny already prophesized by an astrologer, saying that she lives as an exile in a strange land, he also prophesized about her widowhood. When she migrated to America, Half-faced raped her, but she was not shattered and in return killed him. She does not know what she will do in America but with her strong will power and courage she goes on.

She was then saved by Lillian Gordon. In the company of Lillian she sensed Americanisation. She desperately wanted to changes her Indian identity. Lillian introduces her to Mr. Vadhera who helped her husband to got the admission in America. But she astonished to know that Mr. Vadhera is not a professor



but a human hair. Though the Vadhera's provides her comfortness but she still feels isolated and alienated and think of life as an immigrant. She also realises that though Vadhera's are living in American but their mind is packed with orthodox dogmas of Indian society because Mr. Vadhera gave her a white saree to wear, because white saree is the symbol of widowhood in Indian society.

To fulfill the dream of her husband and for the quest of her identity she lives with Taylor and Wylie. She feels very happy again but here also her dream has shattered. She then moves with Bud Ripplemayor and lives as a wife of him. Bud has given her an identity of American wife, but she is not able to sustain this identity as well. She feels alienated and isolated once again when Du, adopted Vietnamese refugee son decided to leave the house in search of his identity. She shares a very good relationship with Du and both of them are sailing in the same boat of the feeling assimilation into American culture.

Bharati Mukherjee's *'The Holder of the World'* is a fine amalgamation of all the three cultures- the Christian, the Muslim and the Hindu. Being a white woman, Hannan goes under transformations earlier she was an obedient and dutiful woman but at the end she becomes brave, strong and powerful. Her migration to India helps her to know the Indian values, traditions and culture, love and sacrifice etc. Thus, one can say that the novel is perfect blend of East and the West world. Bharati Mukherjee is able to depict her memory of exile beautifully.

Her third novel *'Jasmine'* symbolises the fluid identity of her protagonist Jyoti to Jasmine, then Jase and finally Jane. The title of her next novel *'Desirable Daughter'* marks an irony that in Indian society daughters are never desirable, on the contrary they are 'curse' as far as Indian society is concerned. *'The Tree Bride'* symbolises the control of over a woman throughout her life.

Bharti Mukhejee is very good at using symbols in her novels. It is through symbols that she is able to depict various things about protagonists and their life. In her interview with Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie,



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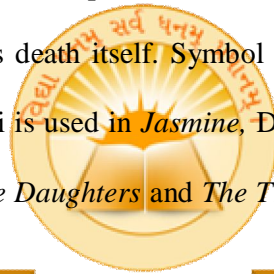
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Bharati Mukherjee says. "Art is about selection, Stylization and metaphoric revelation."³

She also said "Fiction must be metaphor. It is not transcription of real life but it's a distillation and pitching at higher intensification of life. It's always distortion."⁴

The immigrant women portray in her novel are the symbol of all the immigrants who are living in an alien land. Even the titles and name of the female protagonist symbolises something. Side by side imagery of animals are also used to show the mental status of the protagonists. America is used as a symbol of freedom.

Bharati Mukherjee also uses Gods and Goddesses from Hindu Mythology to symbolise something in the novel. She used Goddess Sita, Maa Kali, Devi Manasha and Lord Yama. Goddess Sita symbolises the loyal and dutiful wife, Maa Kali symbolises the power and strength of a woman, Devi Manasha as end of life and fate while Lord Yama symbolises death itself. Symbol of Goddess Sita is used in *Wife and The Holder of The World*, symbol of Maa Kali is used in *Jasmine*, Devi Manasha is used in *Leave It to Me* and Lord Yama and Goddess Sita in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* and MaaDurga in the *The Tiger's Daughter*.



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The main thing that is common in Bharati Mukherjee's novel is the transformation of female protagonists to adjust themselves in the new land. Bharati Mukherjee's protagonists are generally immigrant. The female protagonists mature with the maturity of their story. Actually the female protagonists are the voice of Bharati Mukherjee, what she experienced she expresses with the help of her female protagonists. Mukherjee has pointed out to Russell Schoch that sometimes "to humanize all sides", she gives her "best liens to the villain"⁵ whereas the minor characters of Mukherjee's novels are only meant to show comparisons. They are not flexible.



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