

Diaspora And Challenged Ethnicity: Theory And Performance In Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction.

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The Diasporic studies negotiate with such challenged society and offers adequate substantiation of the fact that diasporic space is imperative on the space of the originating country. Here the centre has not shifted alone; the boundaries have also been lengthened to thrust the home cultures further to superficial space. This inexorably stresses the requirement to understand the implication of the cultural conflict which takes place in diasporic discourses, the bicultural workings as well as the production of a new culture born out of the translucent paraphrasing in a diasporic gap. Thus, the textual construction of the colonial conflict takes shape with the new type of writing, a form which is overt in its assurance to hybridity. Such trans-cultural and inter-cultural narrative has a serious confrontation to the cultural constancy of the global centers. In its change sensitive quality, Diaspora is characteristically a location of hybridity which questions unchanging identities based on uni-polar essentialisms. In response to the literature and question of expatriation Mukherjee explores the elements of immigration, which represents the new cultural euphoria of America.

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In the post globalized space of diaspora there is a procedure of re-building the common identities in the production of a new subjectivity. Instead of being seen as unchanging, becomes a vibrant and multidimensional construction that seeks to adjust repeatedly to the tectonics experienced within and adjoining the self. This is the same kind of spirit is present in Brah's use of the term 'homing desire,'ⁱ concurrently expressing a longing to make a home in the new diasporic locality and leaving the whole concept of 'home' open to investigation and analysis.

This procedure of a 'homing diaspora' does not mean a nostalgic longing for 'roots,' nor 'is it the same as the desire for a 'homeland'; it is realized instead as a construction of 'multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries.'ⁱⁱ Questions of source and Diaspora rise with meticulous pull and push between internationalism and

nationalism; the association between place and distinctiveness; and the behavior cultures and literatures interrelate. In the course of diasporic cross-breeding innovative types of movements are being strained on the recognizable setting of migration and diasporic exclusions. Bhabha projects culture as a type of hybrid from the end of immigrants and the subaltern.

Bhabha's disjunctive temporality is same as Salman Rushdie's view of 'broken mirror'ⁱⁱⁱ about the migrant. Rushdie however generalizes the exhilaration of the 'homeless' when he says: 'But human beings do not perceive things whole. We are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable of fractured perceptions.'^{iv} The migrant's or expatriate's cracked and fractured self have been indicated by Bhabha, using Lacan's notion as 'the twilight existence of the aesthetic images.'^v

Restructuring of self is a terrible punitive fight in Bharati Mukherjee's fictions. The immigrants in an unavoidable cultural politics convert their self to appear with a new individuality like Jasmine, Tara Cartwright, Dimple and Tara Chatterjee. The procedure of re-embodiment once initiated, through several slippages, the women in Bharati Mukherjee's fictions cannot break or miss it. They tend to be re-located into the New World with hostility and resort to root exploration. Mukherjee's comments on her works sums up it all:

Violence is very connected with Diaspora and the trans-planting from one's original culture into a new country, no matter for what reason we've come to the new country, implies or necessitates death of one's former self or mutilation of one's former self and so I want to think that the physical violence in my metaphorical or artistic way of showing the psychic damage that takes place.^{vi}

Bharati Mukherjee cannot be called a feminist in general sense. Feminism is a different kind of implication for Bharati Mukherjee: 'It's certainly not a conscious decision to write as a woman writer but I find that quite naturally my main protagonists are rather strong woman who avert themselves sometimes physically and always very emotionally.'^{vii} Mukherjee here prefers to be viewed as a female writer. She also equates the cultural dislocation and the space of the 'cultural relativism'^{viii} in 'the perplexity of the living.'^{ix} With the harsh experiences of Canada unsullied in mind, she attacks the traditional patriarchy.

Mukherjee finds the liberty of the West friendlier to the restrictive and infuriating reality in India and that demands to re-historicize oneself. Uprooted in Montreal, the racist approach of the Western world seems less frightful, as she experiences a radical change, with brutal attack on her sensibilities. Worried about the conflict in Montreal and being outraged in the subways seems a smaller evil than the evil sprawling free in India. Mukherjee's novels are strong narrative on the same trans-cultural chaos dealing with nostalgia and disenchantment and repatriation through dislodgment and relocation.

The Tiger's Daughter projects the nostalgia and disillusionment together; she here depicts the allegory of the nomad and the theme of the triumphant conquest of the New World. In it she rejects the experience of expatriation and takes on the reality of the immigrant in its place. In response to the literature and archetype of expatriation Mukherjee explores the literature of immigration, representing the new ethnicity that has emerged in America.

She depicts this in geographic stipulations. In Canada she was forced to be a psychosomatic expatriate, in the United States she changes into an immigrant and citizen. To her, one must embrace this conversion from expatriation to immigration, if not, that is a refusal to participate in the New World and accept its citizenship and nationalism.^x She celebrates and considers Rushdie among a number of writers who choose 'exile' and dispossession rather than psychological citizenship.^{xi}

Brewster says that 'Mukherjee's translational narrative invests India with the position of the 'old world' which is oppressive and where opportunities are closed by caste, femininity, or ancestors. The procedure of abandoning the old order is explored most completely in the novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* and her first non-fiction co-authored with Clark Blaise, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*.

Based in the U.S.A. Bharati Mukherjee considers herself as an immigrant writer. In her works she has tried to find out the immigrant awareness, and displacement embracing its dual-nature and elastic uniqueness besides taking into consideration the other ways to belong. In the Introduction to *Darkness* she unleashes her point and inventive priorities-'The transformation as writer and as resident of the new world, occurred with the act of immigration to the U.S.A [...] For me it is movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration.'^{xii}

In her critical transformation from expatriation to immigration she has rejected Naipaul as an inspiration and picked up Bernard Malamud whose dealt with the minorities and their existential anxieties. She is more influenced by Isaac Babel, Conrad, Chekhov and Malamud:

Like Malamud, I write about a minority community which escapes the ghetto, adapts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture. Like Malamud's my work seems to find quite naturally a moral centre. Isaac Babel is another author who is a literary ancestor for me. I also feel a kinship with Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. But Malamud most of all speaks to me as a writer and I admire his work a great deal. Immersing myself in his work gave me the self-confidence to write about my own community.^{xiii}

Malamud's literary creativity helped Mukherjee to shift her fiction from the recurrently changing margin to the unstable and variable centre which has no fixed place.

Thus, Mukherjee's attitude to life and its tribulations is intensely anchored in her Indianness. According to Maya Manju Sharma - 'In her fiction Mukherjee handles Western themes and settings as well as characters who are westernized or bicultural. Yet she is forced to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu, and essentially moral.'^{xiv} Despite being grouped with other Indian writers albeit those who largely foreground their diasporic status, Bharati Mukherjee has asserted Americanness- 'I left India by choice to settle in the U.S.I have adopted this country as my home. I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island.'^{xv}

One can find here a unique discourse of the colonial encounter which is clear in its obligation to hybridity. Such trans-cultural discourse faces a grave face up to to the cultural constancy of the global super points of metropolitan nature. In its translational and trans-cultural eminence, Diaspora is characteristically a position of hybridity which questions unchanging identities based on unipolarity and exclusiveness. Specifically in the context of Caribbean Diaspora, Stuart Hall talks about 'imaginative rediscovery' of 'Caribbeanness.'^{xvi} Here Hall explicitly hints at hybridity:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.^{xvii}

Diaspora also addresses the prominent and explicit city of wisdom of a critical space of *in-betweenness*, which celebrates the meaning of hybridity, *heteroglossia*, mimicry,^{xviii} acculturation, cultural fright, and thrashing of identity. In the essay “Mimicry and Man” Bhabha quotes Lacan while explaining mimicry as ‘an ironic compromise’^{xix} and a ‘desire for a reformed, recognizable Other’^{xx}: ‘The effect of mimicry is camouflage.... It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled-exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.’^{xxi}

Diasporic space lays bare the ordeal of dislocations, relocation and ruptures. It involves trauma as another major contemplation of Diaspora. The whole process is signified by recurrent ripping and slippages which is associated or followed up by trauma. Bharati Mukherjee affirms that in the course of splitting and cultural displacement the migratory beings seem to drop his connotation and reason in life. To quote Bill Ashcroft:

Post colonial culture is inevitably a hybrid phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European culture systems and an indigenous ontology with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity. Such construction or reconstruction occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic and ‘peripheral’ subversion of them.^{xxii}

The broad propensity of the people in the diasporic legroom is to be anchored to key identities – ethnic, territorial, religious, and racial. It is highly interesting that all are engaged with the same mixed phenomena before the rebuilding. Most of Mukherjee’s novels transact with the problem of such hybridity along with conduction of ethnic character. She is concerned with the margins of cultural translation in the postcolonial locality of live moments of struggle, present and future where past looms like a shadow. In Mukherjee’s novels the two conflicting compartments the home and location thus compensate, negotiate and define each other.

In her novels she takes in account of the space and location in connection to their

space of origin. Her characters negotiate the cultural absurdity and the locational dislocation which are expressive of the mixed nature of diasporic space. Such perception of diasporic ideology as a critical knowledge, emerging out of the journey from estrangement to reception needs to be studied from the postcolonial point of heterogeneity, the contemporary parameter and negotiations at the background of a challenged location of culture.

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ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p.197.

ⁱⁱⁱ Salman Rushdie. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Vintage, 2010. p.11

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p.12.

^v Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. NY: Routledge, 1994. p.15.

^{vi} Mukherjee's Works 1 of 2. Her story BBC World. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/womenswriters/mukherjeeework.shtml>

^{vii} Her Story /BBC World Service "Being a Woman writer" 1 of 1 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/womenwrites/mukherjeeework.shtml>

^{viii} Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. *op.cit.*, p. 225.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x *Ibid.*, p.4.

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} Bharati Mukherjee. *Darkness*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1975. p.2-3.

^{xiii} Alison B. Carb. 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee,' *The Massachusetts Review*, Winter 1988, p. 650.

^{xiv} Maya Manju Sharma. "The Inner World of Bharati Mukherjee: From Expatriate to Immigrant." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. Ed.Emmanuel S. Nelson, New York: Garland, 1993. p.18.

^{xv} Alison B. Carb. 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee.' *op.cit.* p.654.

^{xvi} Stuart Hall. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity, Community Culture, and Difference*. Ed.Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishert, 1990.p.393.

^{xvii} *Ibid.*,p. 401-2.

^{xviii} *Ibid.*, p.121.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, p.122.

^{xx} *Ibid.*

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, p.121.

^{xxii} Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*, London: Rutledge, 1989.p.195.