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## CROSS CULTURALISM AND CONFRONTATION IN THE NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE

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### ABSTRACT

Increased internationalization in the economical, political and social arenas has led to interpersonal cross cultural contact. Because much of this contact has not been successful, so many problems have arisen in the two ways of life which lead to a feeling of alienation, pain of exile, depression and frustration. The present paper shows the multiplicity of problems that migrant women confront today and how they fight against them to cope up with this. This study shows how a female identity is constructed through such multiple codes, components, language, myth, history, psychology, gender and race.

**Keywords:** cross culturalism, confrontation, feeling of alienation, pain of exile, depression, frustration, female identity.

### Introduction

Cross-cultural conflict is the clash between two cultures where culture is the prime identity of human life. Cross-cultural conflict is the testimony of painful experiences that are imbibed by immigrants, who have faced several problems as psychological, social, global, economical and emotional on an alien land. Their painful experiences inspire many diasporic writers to share their varied experiences with the world through their words. Cross-cultural conflict explains the problems like psychological, sociological, ideological, religious and so on. Cultural problems are the highest flying distinctiveness of Indian diaspora. Rootlessness is the most significant issue in the life of the immigrant. Cultural differences highlight man in the life of immigrants and they hang between homeland and adopted land, and remain rootless in their entire life. The immigrant lives rootless and dies rootless. Rootlessness becomes the emblem of their life. The

whole life struggle in adjusting alien life and culture with nostalgic feeling for motherland.

Bharati Mukherjee deals with the themes related to Indian women particularly the problem of cross-cultural crisis and ultimate search for identity. She also depicts the cultural clash between the east and the west. She writes how the female protagonist tries to tackle the problem of loss of culture and endeavours to assume a new identity in the U.S. When a person leaves his own culture and enters into another culture, his original culture comes into conflict with the new one he finds in the alien land. This cultural transplant leads to a crisis of identity. This paper will shed light on the identity crisis and cultural conflict of the east and women in opposition to the dominant power of the west and men with references to Mukherjee's novels within the framework of multicultural and feminist perspectives. Bharati Mukherjee, a world acclaimed novelist of post-modern era has taken up the theme of identity crisis as one of the major themes in all

her novels, depicting the psychological, cultural and spiritual stress faced by expatriates migrating to other countries in search of identity. She realized that her transformation was a two-way process because it affected both the individual as well as the cultural identity. While other writers of migration write about a new place with a loss and erosion of original culture.

The main aim of this paper is to show how the protagonists of all her novelstry to adapt to American society and adjusted herself in the newfound society as an immigrant women where she struggle to survive in an alien land. Mukherjee asserted that in an age of diasporas one's native identity may not be one's real identity as emigration brings changes, physical and psychological both which has been seen through all her characters in all her novel to sum up all the characters like Tara, Dimple, and Jasmine face identity crisis. It is self-alienation of her characters that is brought to focus in the novel. The characters we find are forced to manage in accordance with the social demands. Mukherjee places her characters in such a situations from where they begin on self-analysis. They make self-discovery and very often find themselves alienated. Many times they travel through a world of fantasy in order to come to terms with the reality of situations.

Bharati Mukherjee depicts the desires and expectations of immigrant women who want to live their native culture in abroad. Such women are isolated from their families, culture, home and parents and also the communities in which they. Their lives end with a sense of loss. They also feel that they are missing something. In this way the writer depicts the confusing state of mind of Indian woman and how they try to deal with situations. Bharati Mukherjee through her writing suggests two advantages of women liberation, one, it allows them to realise their potential as individuals in the wider society, and two it is the only way by which they could achieve personal recognition and identity.

#### **Cross cultural conflicts in her novels**

Bharati Mukherjee is not only the most commercially successful among women writers of the Indian diaspora, but also the most controversial

narrator of Indian cultural identity in a multicultural context, which has been seen in all her novels. Bharati Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* is a story of Bangali girl Tara Banerjee an immigrant women from India. Like Bharati Mukherjee, who visited India after her marriage with Clark Blaise in 1973, Tara also come back to her home land after staying seven years in America; she comes to India only to witness poverty and political chaos in India. The ill treatment in a new modern life shock her and let her to get back in native land. Unable to feel a sense of belonging in India and in America she feels rootless. She lost her identity too. That's why she is unable to feel herself an Indian or an American. In America she could not acculturate the cultural integration to herself. Uprooted from her native culture and identity, she feels a sense of alienation. Her novel *Wife* is the story of a middle-class Bengali girl Dimple, who is married to Amit an Engineer, after their wedding they go to America, where she understand that life is not as glamorous as she had imagined it to be, cultural shock, Alienation, in capacity to form friendship with her neighbours, continual viewing of violent soap operas and her husband's long stays at office further complicate the mind of Dimple. It makes her psychic to the extent of imaginatively killing her husband in a grotesque manner. Basically Dimple fails to conceive marriage as a life-long bond which needs love as an adhesive to both strong them and ensure a life-long commitment to each other. In her another novel *Jasmine*, which is a feminist novel. The protagonist rebels against the age old superstitions and traditions. Despite the odds against her, she gets assimilated successfully into the American culture/society. She changes herself in order to change the world around. As products of the diaspora, Mukherjee's novels deal with nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of expatriation, fragmentation of the self, exuberance of immigration, assimilation, culture translation and negotiation. Jasmine is Mukherjee's model of an assimilated immigrant. So two of her novels *Wife* and *Jasmine* portrait the Journeys of two young women to the U.S.A. for different reasons, under dissimilar circumstances, both of them pass through physical, mental and emotional agony affecting their

whole being to such an extent that they are driven to violence. Mukherjee herself has experienced the exuberance of immigrant existence. An immigrants ideal is to get assimilated into the mainstream culture. Women characters of Bharati Mukherjee like Tara, Dimple and Jasmine belonging to different cultures are assimilated in the new culture and made efforts to make a new identity for themselves. This scenario is enacted in the new culture where adaptation and assimilation is not so very easy, wearies them down into violence and aggressiveness. This upbringing gives a very strong base to build a future for herself in a foreign land. Mukherjee's early novels *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* explore the conditions of being an Indian expatriate in North America. The protagonists of the novels Tara and Dimple respectively are expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. As any other expatriates, they too are not comfortable in both the native and alien cultures. Here expatriation is not only a major theme but also a metaphor for deeper levels of solitude and alienation. In her two novels *The Holder of The World* and *Leave It to Me*. The former is a documentation of a story of Hannah Easton an imaginary as well as realistic character. The complex pattern of two themes running parallel: The life of the Hannah Easton belonging to the seventeenth century and the life of Beigh Masters of the present century. The novelist wears the mask of scientific biographer and making brilliant use of devices common to the historical novels. She presents the Moghal life and times forever three hundred years on one time scale while on the other she projects the life of Beigh Masters, a young girl in her early twenties. Thus, *The Holder of the World* portrays an entirely different picture of mixing of culture – the Eastern and the Western. Hannah Easton's voyage is mental and 'interior' rather than physical. It seems that the movement of the narrative is circular since the story ends in the same way as it opens but the person (Hannah) does not remain the same. Her whole personality goes under a sea-change during her restless moves from Salem to Stepney, Coromandel to Devgad and then back to Salem: Bharati Mukherjee describes *The Holder of the World*, as a "post-modern historical novel"<sup>11</sup> but

at its most basic level, it is a novel of expatriation, of quest not only to geographically diverse lands but to culturally variant societies as well. Hannah's life succeeds in demanding and discovering new ways of defining reality in a world, which was essentially conventional.

*The Desirable Daughters*, is not something which already exists in time, history and culture. It is the story of being and becoming and widens the horizon of the readers because the writer does not seem to be interested in 'fixed' identity but to be in 'female' identity. It is changeable and undergoes constant transformation. This continuous transformation makes Mukherjee a prospective writer enjoying her foreign cultural passion. Indian inter-relationships and experiences, including those of immigration and how the characters choose to deal with being in a new country - whether accepting or rejecting the new culture. She has characterized a social order in which her protagonists, preoccupied in their struggles of dealing with the new cultural shifts, set aside their own identity, in return for choice of a seemingly easy pace of life in a first world country. The female characters, along with the protagonist, lose the proactive vibrancy, but are also happy with it although there is no inner transformation in them. If *Wife* and *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee were about the recent immigrant to the United States trying to adjust, then *Desirable Daughters* is about an immigrant who found success in the American Dream, but feels that she has lost something irreplaceable in the pursuit of that desire. Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Leave It to Me* demonstrates the cultural plurality of the adopted land. In the novel *The Tree Bride*, Tara encounters and overcomes the physical, cultural, political and historical violence and further constructs a new identity which is fragmented by disruption and assimilation, earns for the truth about the unattainable identity of a diasporic woman. Beside these major themes, some minor themes such as existential sensibility, issues of racism, sexism, political movements, high social expectations, mental pressure, joblessness, cultural adjustments, lack of family supports and presence of historical events. When these minor themes mingle with major themes of immigration sufferings, her

writing becomes more powerful and realistic in the present context. Through her protagonist Mukherjee tries to disentangle the complex layers of cross-cultural reality through a sequence of adventures which she undertakes during her adventurous journey. Her struggle indicates the impatient quest of a rootless person suffering from a depressing sense of isolation. At every step she revolts against her fate and the path drawn for her. Bharati Mukherjee's characters like Jasmine in *Jasmine*, Hannah in *The Holder of the World*, and Debby in *Leave It to Me*, persistently feel alienation in the society they live in and get the answer by refusing cultural images.

Bharati Mukherjee has also explored the positive and negative aspects of multiculturalism faced by expatriates in her writings. She places her protagonists in a variety of cultural settings where they find different races, cultures, traditions and different ethnic backgrounds. In such a multicultural and multi-ethnic setup, she portrays the journey for the quest of identity, along with the challenges and struggles faced by the protagonist. She draws her characters as transnationals who remain connected to their homeland and host land equally. Though her characters in *The Holder of the World*, *Leave it to Me*, *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* migrate to other countries, their roots always remain in their homelands. As a result, they are neither expatriates nor immigrants in their values and attitudes, but transnationals, whose networks cross the borders of the nation. In such a multicultural background, they go through identity crisis which leads them to undertake a quest of their own identity.

### **Conclusion**

This study has dealt with Indian diaspora and its further consequence is cross-cultural conflict. It covers the issues of identity crisis, alienation, isolation, racial hatred, rootlessness, trans-culturalism, and metamorphosis of major victimized and suffered characters, nostalgia for home land, racism, and psychological, social, personal, cultural problems on adopted land. It has also studied how the novelists mark and explore identity problems. It has tried to show human virtues, which are essential for universal peace, humanity and globalization.

Bharati Mukherjee has explored the issues of cultural conflict in her particular era and time. She has explored painful experiences that are the outlet of her emotional violence on the alien land. Although, she has tried to insist the importance of universal brotherhood for universal peace and humanity. It has attempted to make human values, virtues, global to create harmony on this beautiful planet. It has been tried to show that humanity is significant than any other issues in this world.

Mukherjee's contribution to diasporic literature lies in her significant analysis of cultural collision and rootlessness in *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Leave it To Me* and assimilated immigrants in *Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World*, *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*. Mukherjee takes up the varied aspects of immigrant experience as a major theme and creates various models of expatriates and immigrants. In the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, immigrant sensibility becomes an artistic expression of both cultural identity, and a definite change of the American national identity. A critical study of Mukherjee's fiction shows how Mukherjee's protagonists present in a cross-culture situation, face challenges in an alien land, transform themselves according to the situation, to assert their self. Her novels depict women protagonists who are Indian immigrants in America trying to adjust to the western culture, or American women migrating to India in search of self-realization. Mukherjee portrays her protagonists as both Indian and American because she is comfortable in both the cultures and finds it her home. Her novels depict America and India simultaneously through visions, memoirs, letters and recollections of past and present.

The study may serve as a platform for further research related areas. The other works can be studied from the point of view of cross-cultural conflict. It would help to enhance the knowledge regarding the culture, society, religion and politics of the contemporary relevance on the part of the researcher. The same is applicable to the works of other writers.

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