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## Depiction of Febrile Subjectivity: Bharati Mukherjee's World of Diasporic Imagination

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Mukherjee's writing largely reflects her personal experience of such febrile subjectivity in crossing cultural boundaries. In novels such as *Jasmine*, *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife* and *The Desirable Daughters*, as well as in her award winning short stories, Indian born Mukherjee adds to her character's multicultural background a delicate undercurrent of translational upsurge which sometimes expresses itself through violence and existential disorderliness. Mukherjee's women characters such as Tara Cartwright, Dimple, Jasmine or Tara Chatterjee, all quest for a location and show a subaltern dread and anxiety to be visible. They are not concentric to adopt racial stereotype at the cost of identity. They accept a mutative change through displacement and replacement of culture.

She prefers showing them acquiring the power in order to control their fates and neutralize the forces that split her presence. Not a single character can be defined traditionally, because each has a dimensional facet to its personality and each is endowed with some paranoid fantasy to acquire the same *phantasmic space*.<sup>i</sup> Each character, caught in the tension of demand and desire, represents different characteristics of feminism and displacement. The necessity is that one has to step out of the rigid confines of conventional rules and adapt to new environment. The imbalance in personality takes place if one rigidly refuses to walk with changing times while still retaining one's fragile values and tradition in a massive role reversal. According to Lal:

On the subject of threshold, Bharati Mukherjee presents a timely example of how far the Indian Woman's periphery may be extended beyond the home. The outsider/insider dichotomy, the obvious stance in early writing by women, mutated subsequently by metaphoric indeterminacies in the fiction of the 1970s, has now arrived at a statement on negotiable boundaries. Mukherjee's heroines have pushed out the domestic barrier of home/ not home to reach beyond the geographical limits of the country itself. Breaking out of the traditional roles converging upon the known and the knowable in their inherited culture, the protagonists strain at all manner of controlling force.<sup>ii</sup>

Thus, in Mukherjee, the heroines face uncertain interstices of personal history and take to violent acts and encounter the *transgressive and transitional truth*<sup>iii</sup> and tend to become violent as to kill their husband or by other means. This frustration seems to have its seeds in the author herself as she mentioned it in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. The frustrations come out loud and clear at her own helplessness in understanding the old society she had left and the eccentricities of the New World which did not embrace her:

And sometimes in the flickering darkness and heat of our guest room during power cuts, propelled by the same misplaced bitterness, I quarreled with Clark, accusing him of having forced expatriation on me. Could he live out his life in Calcutta where he would have to learn a new language a new way of making friends, where he could not expect his readers to understand too well intents of his fiction?<sup>iv</sup>

Blaise observes in *Days and Nights* that Human relationships are fragile in America. In India the human relations are stable to a large extent, and the stability of these relationships in India is due to the traditional virtues of our culture. In her novels Mukherjee locates the immigrant women protagonists in several 'inside/outside' and 'threshold' positions. Lal remarks further- 'Immigration is a subject freshly supplied by Mukherjee to the repertoire of modern American fiction.'<sup>v</sup> All her major immigrant women protagonists such as Tara, Dimple, Jasmine and Tara Bhattacharjee of *Desirable Daughters* are challenged by unresolved contradiction of culture and negotiate multiple dislocations in the shifting dynamics of transnational globality.

Dimple in *Wife* aborts her child in order to gain freedom in the New World yet does not have the grit to find a foothold for herself because she is always insecure and dependent on Amit Basu to offer freedom on the platter of marriage in terms of material emancipation. Naturally, the husband becomes an adversary when he is not as per her fantasies. Adverse conditions faced by the female characters in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee are faced with clarity in case of Hannah Easton, with ferocity by Devi and resilience to survive by Jasmine and someone like Dimple ends up in a bloody quagmire and all of them face dislocation and mutation.

Mukherjee's women are constantly combating the unresolved contradiction between culture and location in order to exist in a world of 'othernesses.' This *othernesses* could not be limited to new culture, but in the process of the assimilation of the contraries, they negotiate disjunctions and ruptures. A silent rupture exists within their identity mechanics. It is persistently the negotiation of self and other or the mutation outside that unleashes a split space which consists in the free play of dislocations and politics of polarity. Bhabha quotes W.Harris in *The Location of Culture* :

I have been stressing a certain void or misgiving attending every assimilation of contraries-I have been stressing this in order to expose what seems to me a fantastic mythological congruence of elements..... And if indeed therefore any real sense is to be made of material change it can only occur with an acceptance of a concurrent void and with a willingness to descend into that void wherein, as it were, one may begin to come into confrontation with a spectre of invocation whose freedom to participate in an alien territory and wilderness has become a necessity for one's reason or salvation.<sup>vi</sup>

For Dimple the 'other' is American society and the wilderness is its cultural ethos. America and its open society expedite the hunger in Dimple to refashion her self. Her act in killing Amit is more like relinquishing her 'self' out of her failure to understand the dreadful presence of a concurrent void. Her reincarnation, in a way, exonerates herself from the bondage of repression, the 'self' blending with the 'other.' Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* to Devi in *Leave*

*It to Me*, Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife* to Hannah Easton in *The Holder of the World* are or seem to be, a part of the author's early and late life, first as an expatriate and then as an immigrant. Jasmine, of *Jasmine* in her assimilative urge, situates herself in the adjoining juncture rather than the transit of culture in the postcolonial 'performance of transcription'<sup>vii</sup> through splitting and disjuncture. Tara of *Desirable Daughters* stands in a transgressive moment of history, but hers is a route in to the root. Her split and unhinged identity seeks repossession of balance; she is not a wandering nomad from within nor has salvaged herself totally from the strange contradiction of diasporic condition which rotates between ordinary home and imaginary location. She is a postcolonial subject, negotiating the uncertain and unstable boundaries.

The women characters of Bharati Mukherjee belong to different cultural perspectives and feel marginalized in new culture in their new interstitial role. Their aesthetic image discloses varied gender and ethnic presence in the transitional world. Bharati Mukherjee herself had to face this as an expatriate in Canada. Considered outsider due to her skin color and facing the problem of racism and non acceptance as a writer, made her caustic. The same conditions are faced by three of her characters- Tara, Jasmine and Dimple in the initial stages of expatriation in the New World. All of them face the trauma of dislocation and marginalization. Standing at the historical and discursive boundaries they make efforts to stand the 'trial of cultural translation.'<sup>viii</sup> Apart from the above three women, Tara Chatterjee of *Desirable Daughters* outgrows further from cultural translation to a reconstituted root search in the Tree-Bride's narrative.

Their quest for identity leads them to several dislocations, subsequently emboldening the empowered, emancipated woman on the one hand, and confused undecided characters who resort to violence and mutation in order to self assert in the new geo-political locale and new sexual orientation. The new breed of immigrants negotiates the conflicting components of their ethnicity and Americanism. They emerge triumphant, and some characters dwindling between two cultures- nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal, subsequently become split personalities, and reside in the self-made ghettos negotiating multiple dislocations.

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- <sup>iii</sup> *Ibid., p.57.*
- <sup>iv</sup> Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee. *Days and Nights in Calcutta.* Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday,1977.p.221.
- <sup>v</sup>Malashri Lal. "Bharati Mukherjee: The 'Maximalist' Credo." *op.cit.p.57.*
- <sup>vi</sup> W.Harris.*Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon,1973),pp.60-3qtd in Bhabha. *The Location of Culture.p.56.*
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid., p.331.*
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid., p.303.*