

Reconstructing Nationality In The Global Context: Double Consciousness Of Diaspora In Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* And *Jasmine*

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Since the past few decades, writings of immigrants gain attention in the global literary field. Many diasporic writers like V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Gita Mehta, Arundathi Roy, Bharati Mukherjee express their longing for their ideality through their works. As United States becomes the dominating force in all fields, people of other countries migrate to US to lead a better economical and social life. Beyond their desired upliftment, these immigrants have lost their identity of their nation and so they are forced to assimilate themselves as Americans. Especially Indians who have come from a rich cultural tradition, feeling isolated due to their migration, strive to retain their Indianess and also their American identity. One of the renowned Indian diasporic writers, Bharati Mukherjee brings the double consciousness of Asian Americans, specially Indian Americans to the global arena through her protagonists in her novels *Wife* and *Jasmine*. This paper tends to highlight the struggle of survival of these characters in between "home of origin" and "world of adoption".

I. INTRODUCTION

Immigration becomes the major focus of the modern world that ensures the economic and social upliftment of the individuals. Migration becomes inevitable, and the shift from the homeland towards another represents the globalization of various cultures and societies. Meanwhile, migration also reflects the coercion through which the capitalistic culture of the host country influences the immigrants in various aspects.

Western countries such as United States, Canada and Australia stand as the pioneer in welcoming immigrants. For their better survival, people mainly from Asian countries move towards America. Particularly Indians, fancying for independent western life, migrate towards western for the establishment of money and existence. Beyond their social and economic revival, these immigrants suffer from psychological trauma while searching their identity. Inheriting from the rich cultural tradition Indians feel isolated in the alien land. They strive to come out of their Indianess as they are forced to accommodate themselves on the migrated society.

Many immigrant writers from different origins have emerged to imprint their diasporic experiences of dislocation and mental torments through their works. Salman Rushdie, an eminent Indian diasporic writer says, "Writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). Indian diasporic writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Chitra Banerjee and many others indent these words of Rushdie through the characterization in their novels. They find novel as an effective genre to represent their exiled condition in a striking manner. Their writings surpassingly depict their alliance to the motherland and at the same time, express their alienation and rootlessness in the land of migration.

Bharati Mukherjee, a noteworthy Indian diasporic writer has occupied an enviable position in contemporary literary arena. Mukherjee's writings mainly focus on the Indian women expatriates and their multifaceted expatriate life experiences. In her novels *Jasmine* and *Wife*, the protagonists serve as the symbols of duality of culture. As W.E.B. Dubois's double consciousness, these protagonists feel to retain with their culture of origin and in meantime, forced to assimilate the culture of the host land. They consciously splitting their inner selves of Indianess "to create a character that would be accepted into mainstream society" (1). They who want to retain their traditional culture, are expected to see themselves through the eyes of others. So forcibly, these immigrants look at themselves with engrossed contempt and disdain which results in double consciousness – being Indian inside, they live a foreigner's life.

In Mukherjee's *Wife* (), Dimple, the protagonist feels alienated in America where life as an immigrant becomes unbearable, whereas she is forced to make efforts towards the process of economic, social and cultural adjustment. Mukherjee, herself has emphasized in an Interview, that many of her works are about psychological transformation especially about women immigrants from Asia. She states clearly that,

The immigrants in my stories go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they alter the country's appearance and psychological make-up. And so we are given a writer whose voice tells the tales of her own experiences to demonstrate the changing shape of American Society. (645-654)

As an Indian born Canadian/American novelist, she has made a deep impression on the literary canvass. In her novels, she depicts the issues of her own cultural location of West Bengal, her displacement to Canada where she was located as racial minority and an invisible writer and later final relocation to USA, where she was acknowledged. As Fakrul Alam states, "Her struggle with

identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States had led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants"(10).

Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife*, is one of her autobiographical sketches of her experience as an expatriate in Canada. She has come from a well-to-do middle class Bengali family of Calcutta. Her habit of reading novels and film magazines has made her negate the harsh and gruesome realities of life and acquire a romantic disposition towards life. Looking for a neurosurgeon as life-partner, Dimple is even ready to give up her B.A examinations and lives in fantasy. This unrealistic romantic dream leads towards cynicism and misery.

Mukherjee has clearly depicted the condition of an average young Indian woman through Dimple's expectations on marriage life. But soon after the marriage, Dimple understands the discrepancy between premarital dreams and the marital realities. Once after the migration to America, Dimple feels alienated due to the lonely stay in Sen's apartment. In the beginning she is amazed to watch TV but later she is haunted by those violent programmes on American women's lives. Fascinated and fully addicted by TV shows, Dimple believes these unreal stories are the real exposures towards America.

Due to her psychological changes, she makes herself lonely throughout the novel. Though her inner self is longing for love and freedom, she never expresses it. Despite the fact that Dimple can easily be adapted to the new culture, as she has accepted new life after her marriage, it is her Indian psyche troubles her to admit it. Suffering by unreal expectations that she has been developing in the new world that she has entered, Dimple experiences the dislocation due to the relocation.

Being an ordinary Indian woman, Dimple tries to prove her identity as American by various means. She wears Marsha's American clothes and to the extreme and she has a close relationship with Milt Glasses. With the borrowed outfits and flirting with Milt, Dimple enjoys all the Indian prohibited freedom. At one stage, Dimple's Indian consciousness makes her to think over these American behaviours and feels guilty of her extra-marital affair.

There is a cultural conflict as well as a psychological conflict in Dimple's inner space, since she has migrated. Not able to withstand her inner conflict and her increasing liability, she looks for a job in the new land. As Amit Basu, her normal Indian husband does not like his wife to go out for a job. He wants her to stay at home for regular chorus. This subjugation becomes another reason for Dimple to show him that she is capable of doing anything alone.

Threatening multi-faceted surroundings lead her a loss of self-confidence and she is haunted by insomnia. She fends off insecurity by attaching her ideas of America to things that appear controllable and closer to her original ideas of an American life. She wants to identify with immigrant group, to maintain even some social relations and sense of self within the community. Mukherjee has depicted the protagonist Dimple as trapped between two cultures, and aspires to a third, imagined world. She focuses on Dimple's deliberated reproduction of a moral and cultural suicide (Dimple's adultery), murder of her husband, and especially in her self-induced miscarriage in Calcutta on the threshold of her long-awaited migration to the United States.

Jasmine(1989) is one of Mukherjee's best novels, through which the author explicitly pictures Jasmine as an Indian woman who celebrates her new nationality. Unlike Dimple, the protagonist Jyoti who later becomes Jasmine is praised for her successful duality in American society. Narrating the story in Jyoti's first person point of view, Mukherjee makes her speak in more personal and revealing voice.

Starting her life journey in Trinidad as Jyoti Vidh, she has adopted many names at various stages such as Jasmine, Jase, Jane to attain her identity at the time of mobility. Born in a small village, she gets married to Prakash, a modern Indian, who tries to make her a modern woman. She is named as Jasmine and asked to call him by his name. But soon Prakash's demise gives her frustration. Jasmine thought to kill herself and so fly to Florida with illegal passport. In *Wife*, Dimple struggles a lot to set herself in new culture. Whereas in *Jasmine*, Jasmine voluntarily inserts herself in different places to identify herself as American woman. The frequent move from one place to another –from Hasnapur to Florida, then to Flushing, later towards Manhattan reveals the voluntary migration of Jasmine. However, she is torn between traditional and modern, her old and new self, living in motherland and as exile which make her to live a state of duality like Dimple.

In Flushing, she needs to look back her Indian culture, where Indian migrants form an Indian society to protect themselves from alienation. Later when she migrates towards Manhattan she places herself as a caregiver and this makes her to relate with Indian care giver. In Iowa, Jane is again renamed as Jane where she fully looks at herself as American woman. Mukherjee, though portrays Jasmine as an integrated migrant woman, she pictures the psychological state of Jasmine - being Indian in America.

Bharati Mukherjee's portrayal of an Indian-American woman's location in New York in 70s and 80s reveals how women are disrupting the boundaries of their particular social and psychological location. The diasporic movements and the changing concept of the identity of the protagonists clearly spotlighted both the novels.

Through these protagonists, Mukherjee focuses upon the multiculturalism in which they are confronted leads to the struggle for a new life but not a complete break with the past. The bicultural perception of the protagonist explores their double consciousness that creates a deep awareness of the social reality in the Global context. In her own words, "The immigrants in my stories go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they alter the country's appearance and psychological make-up. And so we are given a writer whose voice tells the tales of her own experiences to demonstrate the changing shape of American society".

Primary Source:

- [1] Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. New Delhi: Penguin Books (India) Ltd. 1989.
- [2] Mukherjee, Bharati. *Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin Books (India) Ltd. 1975.

Secondary Source:

- [3] Alam, Fakrul. *Bharati Mukherjee*. New York: Twayne. 1996. Print.
- [4] Carb, Alison.B. An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee, Massachusetts Review (29.4):1998,645-654.
- [5] Green, Ricky. *Double Consciousness*. McNair Scholars Journal (15.1).California State University: Sacramento. Web
- [6] Rushdie, Salman. *Imagining Homelands*.London:Vintage Books,1991. Print.