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Existential Dilemma in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee

Abstract

Many Indian women writers have settled abroad unfolding their experience in the course of their writing. Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American writer who has depicted the experience of the immigrants through varied female protagonists of her novels. Her works represent the exploration of feminine protagonists grappling for her survival. She believes that women are trapped within the instability of custom and creed. Bharati Mukherjee has painted a poignant image of the expatriates in her fiction and has beautifully portrayed her shattered dreams and loneliness.

(Keywords: existence, an immigrant.)

Introduction:-

This paper explores how Bharati Mukherjee's protagonists deal with the problem of existential dilemma in foreign land. She has lived in the varied cultural geographical region and has seen with the stunning impact. She was an ingenious author and her creative sensibility has undergone several changes. She considers herself an "Ellis Island Writer" and deliberately positions herself within the custom, best demonstrated by the physiologist Malmaud. Her works revolve around the lifetime of South-Asian expatriates or immigrants in the U.S.A. and Canada. She has written range of novels, short stories, memoir, and non-fictions. She married a Canadian author, professor and journalist and in 1966 she moved to Canada with her husband and joined the faculty

of Montreal's Mc Gill University; although she was unwilling to shift to Canada, however, lived there as a Canadian citizenship till 1980. She briefly mentioned that the times spent in Canada were the toughest days of her life and she recollects its unpleasant experience with pain and anger.

Nepotism, non-recognition of her writing and Canada's hostility are the major themes that exist quite recurrently in her writing. She considers herself as a psychological expatriate who still clung to her ethnic identity. She supported the civil rights in Canada and wrote the immobilizing effects of racism on the people out there and this hostile atmosphere brought her nearly towards the brink. Her essay *Invisible Women* could be a profound expression of her existence. She explains "Many, including myself left Canada unable to keep our twin halves together. "(*Invisible Women - P. 37*)

A sense of existential dilemma, rootlessness and Indian Diaspora are some of the characteristic features of Mukherjee's novels. Her protagonists cling to their striking roots however most of the protagonists fail to anticipate owing to their innate weakness. Only Jasmine is one said character who is ready to regulate herself positively in conjunction with her new identity. Dimple's rootlessness arises owing to her own inherent psychological attribute. She is unable to adapt herself in the changing encompassing circumstances. It's unbearable for Tara to feel amiable with her shut circle friends once she returns from the U.S. after a long gap of seven years. American culture and experiences makes her feel segregated from her Indian life and culture. Tara wonders: "*How does the foreignness of the spirit begin?*" (*Invisible Women - P. 37*)

The Tiger's Daughter is a classic example of this cultural conflict. The feminine protagonist of the novel, Tara after spending seven years in the foreign country still considers herself as an Indian. It comes as an utter surprise when she comes across the harsh realities that she faces at her native place. Once she returns back to her native place she is treated as an outsider other than a denizen. This changes her perspective towards others and while she notices a Marwari family, she ironically and contumeliously comments:

"The Marwari was indeed very ugly and tiny and insolent. He reminded her of a circus animal who had gotten the better of his master, and the other occupant, a Nepali was a fidgety older man with coarse hair. He kept crossing and re crossing his legs and pinch in the creases of his pants. Both men, Tara decide could effortlessly ruin her journey to Calcutta." (*The Tiger's Daughter - P.20*)

The outside atmosphere appeals to her as an alien and hostile in approach. She observes that she is revered neither by her family nor by her friends. Her aunty Jharna rebukes Tara thus:

“You’ve come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mlecccha husband?” (The Tiger’s Daughter – P. 36)

Tara is unable to ascertain an emotional affinity together with her previous relatives and friends owing to the curiousness of her spirit, which does not enable her to mingle with them. Her friends were more interested in knowing the foreign approach of life and custom being practiced there. However, she observes a huge difference in the thought process in the last seven years. Tara believes that she had committed a sin by marrying to a foreigner. She still feels that it was absolutely her fault to marry a foreigner. David seems strange to her: “In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreigner, and this foreigner ness, was a burden.” (The Tiger’s Daughter – P.62)

In *Wife*, Bharati Mukherjee explores the protagonist’s experiences as a migrant. The story revolves around the feminine protagonist Dimple Das Gupta who migrates from Kolkata to New York after wedding. She wishes to marry a neurosurgeon, and thinks that if the marriage happens with any other person other than the one she had chosen would prove to be a fiasco and as it rightly said man proposes and God disposes, against her wish her father finds another match for her, Amit Kumar Basu who is an advisory engineer and her dreams to marry a neurosurgeon is thus shattered. Her dreams of achieving freedom, fortune, and absolute joy turns exactly opposite to what she had always wanted and blessing in disguise results in an utter compromise.

Dimple arrives in New York to fulfill her dreams and imagination and now she is not disquieted regarding the kinship she has around her. She will no longer be enjoying the role of a standard Indian partner any longer during her stay in this newly exciting world. It’s indicative that Dimple had come to America to be transformed and she has a burning passion to hunt out for an identity that makes her apart from the normal wife like ideals. Dimple’s hunt for an identity in her husband is one the major obstacle she comes across and Amit is unable to grasp these complicated changes in his partner. It’s obvious that the husband and his partner compatibility does not match parallel the new world of North America.

In *Jasmine*, the author illustrates role of a feminine protagonist who is brightly determined her destiny. The author presents a positive approach of the feminine protagonist in the light and view of an immigration perspective. The story begins with the prediction of a village prognosticator who forecasts and predicts Jasmine's widowhood and exile. The heroine named Jyoti is a precocious pretty Hindu girl who finds her way to Florida after the death of her husband who is killed by the Sikh terrorist. Jyoti decides to maneuver to the Florida International Institute of Technology to commit Sati, a Hindu ritual wherein a widow immolates herself for the sake of her husband.

Throughout her journey she is raped by the ocean captain who smuggled her as an alternative illicit immigrant to America. She kills him and is later saved by the benevolent Lillian Gordon. Jasmine's restlessness make her move from one place to a different and this let down her riveting alienation and bemusement. In *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee embodies all the foremost themes that attracted her as an author. She has taken a voyage that has reworked her from a historiographer of exile to a champion of immigration. It is to the credit of Mukherjee that she has given a voice to a bush that conveys one thing of the scabrous of her expertise likewise and also has poured in all her energy and hope that she had gathered throughout her strenuous life.

Through *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee tries to explore the outcome of cultural clash. The story of the novel is regarding dislocation and transformation arising out of the multicultural contact with one another. The structure of the novel focuses on the association between North America and South Asia. The novel presents her superior skill of blending truth and fiction, head and heart, science and faith, East and West, history and imagination along with the older world and newer world. The author creatively travels in time and space, past and present, exotic and known and this lends the novel an unprecedented dimension never seen in her writing before. Her work is a research for an identity, transformation, and translation of protagonist's temperament beneath the strain of circumstances. It can be concluded that Mukherjee emphasizes on the point that bits and items of history can be transported to live solely by the artistic imagination. She has additionally reaffirmed it through her novels of Indian inheritance.

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's works depict the perplexity of women who migrate to the United States and Canada for achieving the higher customary of existence. She was an expatriate author who got her spread of experiences by transiting from one socio cultural to another. Mukherjee's works explore clearly the matter of rootlessness, existential perplexity and a void in thought process and also of the Indian Diaspora which has been faced by several other Indian women migrants as well. The individuality of an immigrant cannot be thought-about in solitude as they are a mirrored image of their fatherland as well as of the country from where they have migrated. They face to seek out a twin identity that makes their existence.

References

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