

# Psychological Conflicts and Immigrant Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels

## Abstract

Bharati mukherjee (1940-2017) was an Indian born American Immigrant writer. Her visualization on expatriation and immigration is incredible in her writings. Her novels throw light on the Psychological conflicts during the process of immigration. Immigration has started mainly due to the fulfillment of high economic desire related to better opportunities and working environment in different job sectors. Mainly through the woman characters, Mukherjee has effectively reflects the notion of psychological conflicts in search for their own identity in terms of expatriation to immigration. One of the main reasons of the psychological conflicts is due to different cultural milieu. Mukherjee's style of writing is special as it differs according to the sensibility she manifests. Immigrant sensibility in her novels becomes an artistic expression of both cultural loss and gain.

**Keywords:** Expatriation, cultural shock, Human psyche, Alienation, Adjustment, Assimilation, Immigration.

## Introduction

Bharati mukherjee was one of the major novelists of Indian diaspora who had achieved great position within a comparatively short creative span. Her writings mainly through the woman characters like Tara, Dimple, and Jasmine reflect the notion of expatriation and finally their settlement as immigrants. During the process of settlement in the new environment characters have to go through the harsh experience due to the cultural differences. She was at her best in the depiction of cultural clash between the east and the west leading to psychological crisis in the inner mind of her protagonists. Her woman protagonist's consequence suffers from sense of alienation, identity crisis, cultural shock and a consequent psychological conflict. Bharati mukherjee had treated to assemble all types of temperament in her work where she had worked out the mental and physical interaction of female mind. The complexities of human feelings have been projected through her characters. Cultural stock is one of the major reflection of the psychological trait imbibe in protagonists behaviour. On cultural alienation Shobha Sinde rightly opines:

Cultural alienation is a world phenomenon today. The tremendous difference between two ways of life, leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called cultural shock. When a person leaves his own values comes into conflicts with the new ones he finds.<sup>1</sup>

## Aim of the Study

The research paper presents in-depth analysis of psychological conflicts faced by Indian immigrants, especially women, in America as depicted in the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee. These issues are associated with expatriate experiences. It also study to what extent these conflicts create psychological imbalances in the characters and how do they strive to adjust themselves in the new environment in an alien land.

## Review of Literature

P. Saleema (2017), in her critical book says about Bharati Mukherjee that she was such an Indian Diasporic writer, who had depicted Immigrant characters in her fiction by exploring the sense of psychological conflicts due to the theme of displacement and their adjustment and assimilation in the alien land. Her two early novels, *The Tiger's daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975) comprises the sense of expatriation written during her stay in Canada. In which writer deals with the problems faced by protagonists Tara Cartwright and Dimple due to their marriage and their coping tendencies. *The Tiger's daughter*, Mukherjee's first novel, is a fine manifestation of cultural conflicts. It is an interesting fiction of an upper



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class Bengali Brahmin girl, who goes to America for higher studies. In the beginning she was afraid due to the unknown ways of America. Later she tries to adjust but ultimately she realizes that she is now neither Indian nor truly American. The book presents autobiographical notes and reflects her own circumstances and personal concerns during her stay in Canada.

In the particular novel 'Wife' writer shows the aspect that a woman, Amit's wife loves with her heart and a husband with his head. In Mukherjee's Dimple has huge expectations from her husband and marriage. But in reality he is not the man of her dreams. The novel 'Wife' centres around the life of a middle-class married Bengali woman who migrates from Calcutta to New York. Dimple, the protagonist, is an aggressive character whose life ends in depression, madness and murder when she finds herself alone in a foreign country in an alien milieu. Particular novel reflects the protagonist's unhappiness due to her unsuccessful marriage life in America.

Another novel Jasmine (1989) is the journey of an immigrant and the various experiences that bring an evolution in her. Jasmine, who achieves self-actualization through her intricate relationships with the men who influence her life at different points of life, Jasmine is one of the most prolific fictions in terms of immigration, basically in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, protagonists are immigrants. The same tendency we find in Jasmine. The main character accepted the notion of adaptability in the last culture.

Linda Leith (May 2018) says that Author Bharati Mukherjee wrote of immigrant lives. In her earlier two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, her autobiographical notes we find very frequently. Bharati Mukherjee says "May my many years in Montreal," she said, "had a profound, permanent effect on me". In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Bharati Mukherjee depicts the premise of adjusting to new culture, trials and traumas that afflict immigrants. It highlights the turmoil faced by protagonist Tara when she refuses to accept Calcutta as her home again. She is caught between the two cultures, Indian cultural and American culture, which lead to her disillusion, depression and ultimately her tragic end in a violent accident. The inner traumas of the character's mind show the difficulties of an immigrant, particularly in America.

Her next novel *Jasmine* (1989) features an immigrant from the Punjab who marries an American. Her protagonist, Jasmine, was close to Ms. Mukherjee herself as was Tara Latta in *The Tree Bride* (2004), another character "who had confronted the kind of racism Bharati encountered". Jasmine is an apt representation of the people of the third world who need to go to America to make something out of their lives in the educational fields or in different job sectors.

In Mukherjee's fiction, Tara is a favorite name. The Tara Banerjee Cartwright of the early novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) finds herself struggling on a visit same to Calcutta while the Tara Chatterjee of *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and the

tree Bride (2004) is a central character in the trilogy. The process of migration to America that started in the mid-nineteenth century has reached a new high in terms of immigrant population within a span of a few hundred years, which moulded our cultural tendencies in terms of cross-cultural identification. Mukherjee's creative world best manifests immigrant experiences and cultural transformation. Leads to cross-cultural psychological conflicts. Her novel projects the difficulties faced by immigrants due to the clash in cultures. Her expatriate immigrant sensibility in her novel projects the deeper aspects of woman psychology which is unique and identical.

Grimes William (Feb, 1, 2017) about the Bharati Mukherjee novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, the most autobiographical of her works. In her fiction she told the story of an American-educated Indian woman who returns home to India. She no longer recognizes the cultural tendencies and inspections of the Indian values. In the other novel *Wife*, the main character a young Bengali woman who rebels against her arranged marriage after moving to New York. In *Wife*, Dimple, the man protagonist who is sado-masochistic. So we find that she leads to a psychopathic path where she mercilessly kills her husband and her own ultimate doom.

In *Jasmine* (1989) Mukherjee tries to unravel the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures which the heroine undertakes during her journey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. Grimes William aptly reviews that: "I think of *Jasmine* and many of my characters as being people who are pulling themselves out of the very traditional world in which their fate is predetermined, their destiny resigned to the stars," she told the magazine *Bomb* in 1989. "Traditionally, a good person accepts this but *Jasmine* says, I am going to reposition the stars." The main character *Jasmine* searches for her own identity and also becomes a victim of psychological crisis. Taking on a new identity and new name she manifests an unchallengeable journey as an immigrant.

Research paper looks forth to investigate the sense of alienation, assimilation and search for identity in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Away from their first home, the women immigrants experience problems in different spheres of their life in the process of making their new home. In spite of hardship, the grim realities of leaving home and the difficulties of trying to orient oneself, sense of adaptability and acculturation in a sometimes hostile, foreign environment, it reflects that the immigrants quite often try their best to forge a workable synthesis between their native culture and that of the new set up, balance between the two is quite possible.

In her first novel *The Tiger's Daughter*'s novelist very clearly shows the cultural conflict. It comprehensively depicts the story of a rich Bengali Brahmin family girl who migrates to America at the age of fifteen for her advanced study. She was alien to American culture and tried to adjust herself. After seven years she returns to India and tries to reconcile herself with traditional Indian customs, rituals,

values. Tara's mind is constantly at conflicting with two personalities one of an Indian and other of an American. During each moment she feels to go back to her husband because she feels that she would be more at ease but she becomes a victim of violence in India. During those moments when she is caught in violence, her mind is preoccupied with her husband David in America. Tara's journey to India is best represented in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Tiger's Daughter*. A psychological conflicts during the journey is represented in between the Indian and the American cultural tendencies and the protagonist unable to adjust in her own Indian culture and its reflection we can find in this particular line.

"It was so vague, so pointless, so defuse, this trip home to India."P<sup>130</sup>

Tara, the protagonist of the novel in the mean time realized that she is not fully Indian due to her marriage with American guy David. She was even not be able to share her feelings to her mother. Blaming her western husband and education for her feeling of rootlessness and lack of identity, M. Sivaram Krishna remarks:

Tara in the *Tiger's Daughter* find it difficult to relate herself to her family, City, Culture in general since her marriage to an American, her western education are enough signs to brand her as an 'alienated' westernized woman. The implicit logic is that since she is expected to the west and has absorbed the values she must be necessarily alienated.

Therefore even when she tries to 'voice' her continuing attachment for and identity with India, the voice doesnot carry conviction for it is at variance with the usual stance of indifference and arrogance one generally associates with the 'westernised' (exiled) Indian.<sup>2</sup>

Immigration has proved to be one of the major concerns of our developing society. But the process of expatriation to immigration affects the human activities and psyche. In the Bharati Mukherjee's novel *'Wife'* (1975) the protagonist Dimple being an immigrant, she was caught between the conflicting cultures to find self identity. 'Wife' is the story of middle class Bengali girl Dimple, who is married to Amit, an engineer. After their marriage they go to America. In the alien land, she understand that life what she was imagined earlier is not as glamorous as she had imagined. Cross culture shock, alienation frustration, loss of identity complicate the basically morbid mind of dimple. It makes her neurotic of killing her husband in a grotesque manner. Dimple called her husband just a robot and not an actual human being for her. She got irritate with American English and American System and even by petty things. Linda Sandler explained:

Dimple emigrate to the electronic age with her traditional values almost intact only partly modified by the pop culture of modern Calcutta, She is unable to

make the transition from before to after and choose violence as a "Problem solving" device .....<sup>3</sup>

But it is very clear in the Bharati Mukherjee's novel *'Wife'* that in the beginning of the story protagonist Dimple was full of excitement due to her newly married life and who went to America. In Queens, Dimple try to learn new American life style, which is different from the one she had been leading in India.

"Dimple felt better than she had since coming to states. She thought she had never really been friends with anyone before this, never stayed with someone for weeks and never discussed important things like love and death. That's what America meant to her."P<sup>77</sup>

In the particular novel *'Wife'* novelist took up the problem of adjustment that the Indians in the west have to face. Novel expresses the impulse of protagonist search for a better life. She felt how unproblematic it was, to live, to communicate and to share with people in Calcutta. She never felt frightened at the sight of the policeman whose faces were so amiable, but the situation changed after entering the new environment.

'She is scared of self-service elevators, of policeman, of gadgets and appliances.

She does not want to wear western clothes as she thinks she would be mistakenly taken for a Puerto Rican. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated and marginalized.'<sup>4</sup>

In *Jasmine* (1989) mukherjee tries to unravel the complicated layers of immigration through a series of adventures which the protagonist under takes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via, Florida, New York and Iowa. The main protagonist Jasmine searches for her own identity and becomes a victim of cross- cultural crisis. She did not have faith in the prevalent conviction that,

'village girls are brought up to be caring and have no minds of their own. Village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them. That is the way they will go'<sup>46</sup>

Jyoti shows that she is not the girl who will follow the traditional rules set up by the Indian society. Further when the marriage set by her grandmother with the widower, she straight forward refused and get married Prakash vij whom she loved. After marriage protagonist Jyoti is transformed herself as Jasmine. Jyoti says: "He gave me a new name: Jasmine." He said: "You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume,"<sup>7</sup>

Jasmine with a life full of hope and happiness with her modern husband. She tried her best to lead her life smooth but at the mean time her husband whose aim was to get admitted in some obscure American Institute of Technology. Both of them planned to get settle down in America but

Prakash fell a victim to the Khalsa Lions. They were demanding a separate province for sikhs. After her husband death she became more courageous and decided to take revenge on her husband's killing. Psychologically she was very strong, her deep connection with her husband, so she has decided to complete the mission of Prakash. A vision formed in her mind strongly she left for America on fake papers without knowing her future there. She thought, " For every fish, there is a fisherman, for every deer a hunter. For every monster a hero, our highest mission is to create a new life."<sup>16</sup>

The pulling between these two opposite forces i.e. the Indian and the American did not frighten her but it made her excited. In spite of her unstable identity Jasmine gave her care and love to those people who needed her and who believed and helped her. Process of migration and immigration effects the human activities and psyche. Jasmine thus is portrayed as woman who is capable of transforming into many selves with new names which signify the new identity. she travels from violence in her native village Hasnapur to the united states, where she is raped, where she murdered, where she marries again, where she adopt children and finally settles with the one whom she loves. In jasmine the heroine exalts the 'exuberance of immigration' rather than the 'aloofness of expatriation'. In jasmine, of course she passes through physical, mental and emotional agony affecting her to such an extent that she is driven to violence.

#### **Conclusion**

Mukherjee has no doubt established herself as a bold immigrant writer. She has dealt with women characters in the most frank and effective psychological way. She has written extensively deep sentiments regarding expatriation and immigration. She feels that psyche of women character mould the

story very emphatically and presents the real situation existing in the process of immigration. Bharati Mukherjee focuses upon sensitive protagonists who lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity and are victimized by racism, Sexism and other forms of social oppressions. In her acclaimed novels, the trials, tribulations and traumas afflict immigrants trying to establish their identities in the new world and adverse conditions.

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