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DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVELS THE TIGER'S DAUGHTER,
JASMINE AND DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to probe into the cross cultural issues occurred due to Diaspora in the writings of Bharati Mukherjee. It highlights the concept of identity, nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of expatriation, fragmentation of the self, exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation and negotiation through the selected novels of the writer. It examines the feelings of rootlessness and alienation. Diasporas try their best at first to keep their own identity in their own community. But outside of community, their social identity is lost due to their migration from their homeland to adopted country. Her novels deal with problematic intercultural relations and hyphenated identities the female characters in their novels count the benefits of gaining privacy, freedom, egalitarianism against the cost of losing the extended family spirituality tradition and status.

Key Words: Identity, Multiculturalism, Hybridity, Post colonialism, Displacement

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The major objective of this research paper is to focus on the Problems of the Indian expatriates and immigrants and to bring in light their diasporic experience in the hostlands. The analysis is of migration experience and life style of Indians in foreign land and this experience is constituted in migration, partition, resettlement and socio-economic assimilations. For diasporic writers, one of the most important themes of their writing is the nostalgia for ancestral home and sense of homelessness with rootlessness. Some writers regret for loss of their homeland while others take it positively by having expanded view of human experience and interaction with and inclusion of diverse cultures. In this research paper I have focused at Bharati Mukherjee's three novels: *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Jasmine* (1989) and *The Desirable Daughters* (2002) .

My purpose is to explore the pleasures and problems associated with being a migrant writer. I would like to start my paper with meaning of home and belonging, nation and identity, from the perspective of diaspora narratives. . My particular objective is to foreground the productive tensions of diaspora which can challenge the reductive processes of homogenization at work in the formation and consolidation of national and cultural identities. What lends particular urgency to my paper is the frequency, and violence, with which 'Third World' ideologies of authenticity and cultural hegemony are now being articulated through the rhetoric of nationalism. . Positioned at the 'in-between' spaces of nations and identities, the product of several interconnecting histories and cultures, writers in diaspora, such as Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Rohinton Mistry reject all appeals to an originary narrative of cultural identity in their attempt to dismantle and reconfigure the dominant narrative of the nation/state.

Research on diaspora is currently conducted from numerous perspectives including anthropology, sociology, human geography, international migration, postcolonialism, political economy and communications. The term diaspora is derived from the Greek *diaspeirein*, meaning “dispersal or scattering of seeds”. A typical example of diaspora is given by the New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus of English language: “the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian Captivity; their dispersion” (New Webster’s Dictionary 264). However, the terms diaspora and diasporic communities, today, are increasingly being used as a metaphoric definition for expatriates, refugees, alien residents, immigrants, displaced communities and ethnic minorities. The term diaspora has also been used to describe the experience of movement / displacement and to analyze the social, cultural and political formations that result from this movement / displacement. The globalized and transnational world of contemporary times is marked by the movement of people, goods and information around the world which is defined by Spivak as —the new diaspora.

Colonial interventions, postcolonial struggles, breakup of the British Empire, civil strife in many countries, intensified world-wide social and economic interdependencies, increasing interactivity between the local and the distant facilitated by digital communication technologies, willed migrations of peoples from their place of origin to other countries in search of greener pastures are some of the reasons which have led to manifold increase in transnational migration. These demographic changes accompanied by concomitant social and psychological processes of fragmentation, cross-fertilization, hybridization, creolization, and creation of new, alternative subjectivities which are difficult to categorize, have really made these shifting forms of human contact, locations and dislocations a fertile field for sociological, psychological and cultural analysis. Since postcolonial theory, cultural theory and postmodernism valorize these very processes, vocabularies and terminologies generated by intense debates in these disciplines have also found their way into migration studies and analyses of diasporic cultural productions. The genreblurring impetus of postmodernism has effaced the subtle distinctions earlier to be posited between terms such as “diaspora,” “immigrants,” “expatriates” and “exiles.”

The Postmodernist position on diaspora/transnational migration is exemplified by Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Salman Rushdie and Nikos Papastergiadis. In their formulations, categories such as hybridity, Palimpsest identities, displacement, decentrement, difference, alterity etc., which have strong affiliations with Post structuralism, postcolonialism and postmodernism, have become celebrated reference points. The migrant experience, because of ludic valorization of fragmentation and nomadism, is understood to have become the central experience of modernity. In an interview with Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, Stuart Hall claims that “in an era of globalization, we are all becoming diasporic” (“culture and power”). Moving away from the definitions based upon the paradigmatic nation-centred models of diaspora, which foreground homogeneity of diasporic identity, Hall declares that the diaspora experience is “defined, not by essence or purity but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” and diaspora identities” are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference “. (Cultural Identity and Diaspora :401_- 402) He also claims that he uses the term the diaspora metaphorically, not literally. To him diaspora does not signify those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must return someday. He rejects this old imperializing, dominant form of ‘ethnicity’. We have seen the fate of people of Palestine at the hands of this backward looking diaspora —and the complicity of the west with it” (cultural identity :401) . Thus Hall’s position indicative of a postmodern skepticism of an essentialist notion of diaspora that emphasizes originary identity and homecoming.

The willy nilly, by design or default, on the move we are on the move, even if physically stay put: immobility is not a realistic option in a world of permanent change”, and then he goes on to add that being local in thrust to treat the state of migrancy as the emblematic condition of globalized modernity also comes from sociology. Talking about the present global moment characterized by mass mass migrations, the Polish born sociologist Zygmunt Bauman foregrounds the fact that diasporic condition has become universal in globalized modernity. In *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998) he says, “all of us are a “globalized

world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation". Thus for Bauman, both literal and metaphorical aspects of migrancy are important.

In critically analyzing the novels of Bharati Mukherjee under the common rubric of Diasporic Consciousness, the Present study does not seek to put her into a homogenizing straitjacket or to erase her differences; their differences obtaining from their locations – geographical, ethnic religious and gender- are as significant as are their similarities as diasporic authors. Infact, the key term "diasporic Consciousness" is itself a Critical metaphor which does not support any conceptual closure .Despite the term being a noun phrase,its mode of existence is a kind of practice or activity which is resistant to containment within the limits of a theory.

The landscape of contemporary literature has been transformed by the rising tide of globalization; texts are now crossing the borders of nations and cultures as newly emerging authors express myriad voices of those once considered the subaltern. Diasporic literature produced by the writers of Indian diaspora exposes problems and diasporic life. Writers like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Chitra Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh, Meena Alexander and many others have tried to present India not of present time but the time they had spent in their native land. They present India of their imagination, its history, identity, culture and religious notions.This paper is an attempt to highlight the love and attachment of the diasporic writers to their 'homeland' even after many years of resettlement. The nostalgia present in their life finds full way through their writings. Bharati Mukherjee presents such feelings in her novels with great precision and skill.

Over the past two decades, the concept of hybridization and hybridity of people has made a significant place in the literary zone. This study of race and hybridity has totally changed the critical analysis of literature. T.S.Eliot(cited in Bhabha, 1996, p.54) states:

"The migrations of modern times...have transplanted themselves according to some social, religious, economic or political determination, or some peculiar mixture of these...The people have taken with them only a part of the total culture...The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original source. In this way, peculiar types of culture sympathy and culture-clash appear".

These incomplete cultures or partial cultures are the "links, the boundary between often different cultures, the hybrids that confound any essentialised notion of purity or nationalism' (Bhabha, 1996, p.57). This migrating experience and expatriation takes a primary place of scrutiny in contemporary literary analysis, precisely because it is fragmented and actually a very complex state of mind which includes a wistful longing for the past, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, and incorporation of elements of both originary and host cultures in the performance of identity.

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian born Canadian/ American novelist, has made a deep impression on the literary canvass. Her novels, honestly, depict the issues of her own cultural location in West Bengal in India, her displacement (alienation) from her land of origin to Canada where she was "simultaneously invisible" as a writer and "overexposed" as a racial minority and her final re-location (assimilation) to USA as a naturalised citizen. For the writer in *The Tiger's Daughter, Jasmine and Desirable Daughter*, the dilemma of belongingness in these novels is a matter of flux and agony, which explores the problem of nationality, location, identity and historical memory in Canada. The "cultural diaspora-isation" what Stuart Mall calls marks the beginning of the desire for the survival in the community of adoption. The novelist explores her sense of alienation in Canada where life as an immigrant was unbearable, that forced her to make an effort towards the process of economic, social and cultural adjustment. Further, she will explore her desire for cultural fusion in the new dwellings, which in fact, is her own inward voyage. Finally, she visualised "assimilation" as on "end-product" which implies in totality "conforming to a national culture" of a "nationalist way of life."

"I am an American citizen" vehemently asserts Bharati Mukherjee from the core of her heart in her short story, *Two ways to Belong in America*, published in New York times in 1996. This story of the two sisters epitomizes a paradigm of becoming accustomed to a conventional American culture and its effects on a

person's individuality. She begins the story with a sanguine note of the cultural milieu of herself and her sister, Mira, "almost identical in appearance and attitude" and their subsequent migration to America for further studies, which inexorably escorts us to ponder and brood over the "two facets". The two sisters made their own choices-regarding their lifestyles, their respective matrimonial alliances and finally their level of association in the host country.

Bharati Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* is a materialization of the diasporic community and hence alienated. Tara Banerjee, the main protagonist, is the 'other', disjointed community who struggles to hook-on to the nationalised community by entering into the wedlock with an American. Tara Banerjee, the key protagonist, is a Brahmin girl who travels to America for advance studies. In order to assimilate herself to her new surroundings she marries an American like Mukherjee did.

Jasmine builds up the proposal of the amalgamation, combination and absorption of the East in the West with a story telling of a young Hindu woman who leaves India for the U.S. following her husband's assassination, merely to be raped and in the long run return to the understanding of a caregiver through a succession of jobs. Jasmine voluntarily undergoes transformation of the self from Jyoti to Jane to Jase to Jasmine. At every conversion of the personality she stands unyielding in resistance to her providence and destiny. It is not the uncertainties of the new continent that challenge her but the uncertainties of her life in an unknown terra ferma. Her journey to the New World is a sort of "regeneration through Violence" and her ultimate realisation in America "that it won't disintegrate".

Desirable Daughters unfolds the story of three sisters, who are settled in different countries, and are suffering to find out their own identities as they come to realize their marginal position as well as substitute role in family and society. The quest of its protagonist Tara for a separate identity in the traditional bound society leads her place to place, but wherever she moves, she finds the spaces of tradition and a fixed sense of identity as an Indian immigrant. Displacement not only leads to separation but it also leads to alienation and rebirth in a new country, new culture, new society and new adjustments in an alien land.

The novel is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of negotiating the multiple dislocations in three different perspectives. The three sisters, who are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the great-grand daughters of Jaikrishna Gangooly, belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. They part ways taking their own course of voyage towards their destiny. They are a blend of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvati have their own trajectories of choices, the former an immigrant of ethnic origin New Jersey, and the latter married to a boy of her own choice and settled in the posh locality of Bombay with an entourage of servants to cater her.

Bharati Mukherjee's work explore notions of diaspora, hybridity and transcultural negotiation with humour and irony. Her novels are a portrayal of the effects of the displacement of peoples—their forced migration, their deportation, their voluntary emigration, their movement to new lands where they made themselves masters over others.

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