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THE CELEBRATION OF THE STRENGTH OF MODERN WOMEN IN BHARATI  
MUKHERJEE'S *LEAVE IT TO ME*

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee is a major instigator of the Indian Writings in English who has suggested the crum of feminism in her writings. She deals with the phenomenon of migration, her emphasis being on her female characters, their struggle for identity, their psychological trauma and their final emergence as self assertive individuals free from the bondages imposed by relationships of the past. She has reacted to the changed psychological and emotional realities of Indian life. Traditionally it was believed that women were essentially different in character from men. A woman's ability to fight back is her biggest strength. Mukherjee's protagonists refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role models laid down by society for women. But they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. Her heroines endeavor for self realization and finally take control over their destinies. *Leave it to Me* is a true example of the celebration of the strength of women. It traces the search of Debbie DiMartino to find her origins and identity. Despite the love and affection of her foster family, Debby grows up with the awareness of being different, the feeling that she is an unwanted obstacle in a world that hurtle on towards its mysterious destinations. Mukherjee captures the moment of justification in the final scene of confrontation when Devi Dee assumes herself as the Goddess and kills Romeo Hawk, her bio-father who is the cause for all her sorrows. Having accomplished her mission, Devi Dee consummates her mission on earth. She finally gets her victory of to be in concrete.

**Keywords:** consummates, endeavor, convenient, phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Mukherjee's female protagonists pass through tortuous physical, mental and emotional agony which affects their entire personality largely turning them into a whole new being. Feminism is a major theme throughout her fiction. Women were homemakers. They nourished their families and kept them safe from the cruel world. They were told that men only asked their opinions out of politeness and not out of a genuine interest in their conclusions. *Leave it to Me* is a true example of the celebration of the strength of modern women. It traces the search of Debbie DiMartino to find her origins and identity. Despite the love and affection of her foster family, she grows up with the awareness of being different, the feeling that she is an unwanted

obstacle in a world that hurtle on towards its mysterious destinations. Her quest for her biological parents turns into an obsession. She explains her situation as follows:

An orphan doesn't know how to ask, afraid of answers, and hopes instead for revelation. Ignorance isn't bliss, but it keeps risky knowledge at bay. I never badgered Mamato tell me all she knew about my toddler days. Mama must have liked it that way too. She kept my origins simple. (p41)

Debby's self-transformation into Devi in the story is of great significance. The story of Devi Dee recounts the story of the Goddess's victory over the buffalo demon Mahishasura. Durga, the other name of Devi, is an embodiment of strength and justice. She destroys evil as an act of protecting good. Mahishasura the buffalo demon is the king of Asuras. In the battle between Gods and Asuras, the Asuras become victorious and Mahishasura becomes the King of Heaven in Indira's place. Subsequently, the God's great rays of light shoot out and unite into one light and take a feminine form, Devi, the potent Goddess. The Goddess is eight armed with a lasso, a trident, a fire tipped spear, a demon splitting disc, bow and arrow, a death-dealing staff, a thunder sparkling axe, a pitcher of water and necklace of blessed head. She beheads Mahishasura. Mukherjee's women protagonists are susceptible, self-conscious, luminous and innovative. Primarily victims of self defiance they are at variance with their inner selves because they ignore their actual feelings.

#### **INDIAN WOMANHOOD**

The awakened minority of Indian women still fight the battle to recast their roles on the basis of equality and justice. It is to this ideal that Mukherjee's heroines move at great cost and even at perilous stakes. Indian's believe that man is superior to woman and that woman should be controlled by man. This belief forms the basis of many of the religious and moral laws, customs and traditions, which confine women to their homes or places of duty assigned to them. Prejudice, discrimination and exploitation are an inherent and inevitable. The so-called ideal Indian womanhood is a very powerful instrument used by the establishment in marginalizing and suppressing women themselves. The ideal woman should be chaste, submissive and should implicitly follow the duties of a 'pativrata'. But the establishment and the role models are so powerful that even the new generation of educated, liberated Indian women find it difficult to effect a radical change.

Mukherjee captures the moment of justification in the final scene of confrontation when Devi Dee assumes herself as the Goddess and kills Romeo Hawk, her bio-father who is the cause for all her sorrows. Having accomplished her mission, Devi Dee consummates her mission on earth. She finally gets her victory of to be in concrete. But to Mukherjee, Devi Dee is a significant character in her fictional world because she views in Devi's struggle to reconcile the adopted self with the real self the beginning of her next creation. The self-transformation process has occurred in Devi Dee's psyche and this has made her take in to any situation. Devi Dee is a bold and strong character that gets adaptable to the secrets of her birth and acceptable to the future. Though she develops powerful relationships with all she finally ends up with broke relationships. The happiness in finding her bio-parents had put her in another orphaned state. Devi Dee's monologues also set an example to prove her loneliness. Through her murder, she re-invents herself once again. The psyche gets new thoughts to reproduce herself. Self-transformation, re-inventing and rebirth show the achievement of her assimilated mind. The qualities inherited through her birth to such parents have paved way to her killer instincts. Devi Dee feels satisfied at the end of the novel as she has lost all but none. These men have not been with her always. They have come in between and have left abruptly. Devi's mind is very consoled by her revengeful deed for the abandoned done to her.

#### **THE STRENGTH OF MODERN WOMAN**

*Leave It to Me* traces the search of Debby DiMartino to find her origins and identity. It is about the story of a young woman sociopath named Debby, who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with her kind, adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parent. The novel also looks at the celebration of the strength of woman and at mother-daughter relationships through political and emotional topics by the main characters in her quest for identity through revenge. In Nguyen's words "But rather than developing into a lyrical exploration of the self, *Leave It to Me* challenges us to sympathize with an angry young woman whose overwhelming sense of entitlement leads her to play judge and jury, devouring all in her quest for a new identity" (36).

Debby is Mukherjee's amazing strong woman. Her quest for her biological parent turns to be an obsession. *Leave It to Me* shows Mukherjee at the peak of her craft which mixes the Greek myth of Electra with the Indian myth of Devi. *Leave It to Me* was quite literally the epitome of anger. Debby is a lie, a person "on loan to the DiMartinos" (p17) a person without weight or substance, who must be tossed out, she feels no joy or comfort when she turns to her past life. She has nothing but bitterness towards her biological parents. "lousy people who'd considered me lousier still and who'd left me to be sniffed at by wild dogs, like a carcass in the mangy shade" (p10). She thinks of herself as just a "garbage sack thrown out on the hippie trail" (p13).

According to Aithal, "Debby's search is motivated by a natural, instinctual desire to uncover facts related to her birth, however unpleasant they are. It is also motivated by the host of other abstract aims and purposes"(101). In one of her ruminations, she confesses: "That unclaimable part of myself is what intrigues me, the part that came to life... That's the part that she wants to remember. But there is another part she tries to keep secret, the part that sings to the moons and dances with the stars" (p10). Debby wants to find out whether she "was someone special or just another misfit" (p16). She considers her search as a mission. Devi does whatever that takes to follow her dreams. The urge to know the exact details becomes irresponsible after she is abandoned by her Asian employer and lover Francis Albert Fong (Frankie), the owner of a multinational company manufacturing fitness equipment. When Debby learns that he wouldn't make her his wife, she acts like the proverbial woman spurned. Knowing only that her real mother was a flower child from Fresno and that she gave birth in India, she heads west. Ending up in San Francisco, she quickly changes her name to Devi and slips easily into that city's street culture. She lives out of her car in Haight Ashbury, befriends the crazy, the strung-out, and the paranoid who populate its streets, and begins her haunt for the woman who gave her life. Mukherjee insists that calling woman the weaker sex is a libel. It is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. She has to be the complement of man. Man should learn to give place to woman and a country or community in which women are not honoured cannot be considered as civilized. It is this individuality, new emerging consciousness that accentuates the orientation of Mukherjee's female characters. She stresses the individuals and individuality. In her novels the protagonists desire and strive for a more authentic way of life than the ones offered to them.

A proper concept of the self will definitely empower women to fight against the discrimination, and will definitely prevent them from falling into the traps set by patriarchal forces. The compelling nature of the so-called Establishment disallows the corrosion of socio-cultural boundaries which historically separate men and women. These boundaries cement the social bonds and bondages which marginalize women. The strength and clarity of women's identity is very vital in breaking these boundaries. Debby in *Leave it to Me* succeeds in tracing her bio-parents, but in contrast she doesn't receive any warmth from them. And she herself doesn't expect any warmth from them. So, the novel ends in vicious mood. Debby does not dream of any happy family reunion, or house made of dawn, when she does meet her biological parents toward the end of the novel, she says, "The man and woman who'd given me life were as strange to me as honeymooners from Mars" (p224). In Debby's words "There was something to nature over nurture, and to the tyranny of genes" (p16). She has really nothing to keep her "on the straight and narrow expect star bursts of longing" (p16). Manju Jadika comments on Mukherjee's women character that, "In most of her fictions, Mukherjee tries to move them from the margin to the centre, toward their empowerment and toward an affirmation of their identities" (p204).

Mukherjee who has given voice to women's feeling and problem in their fictions. They have expressed the feelings of women and their struggle for existence in society. Her novels chart the dramas of entrance into a new land, adapting to a new way of life, in personal, social and historical terms. Her depiction of women and their different relationships portrays the dominance of patriarchal practices in traditional society, as well as the forms of liberation and empowerment which are available to women in their situation. Their situations and the difficulties they face are also realistically portrayed. It was determined that the more virtuous women maintained a more stable home life. He mind assimilates to any violent truth. The root searching consciousness of Devi finally cuts the roots of her parentage. By her upbringing, Debby is a

DiMartino, an American, beneath this identity given her by her nurture lies her 'true', the part of the self she must discover what it is, the endowment of character which helped her survive certain death.

It may seem that Debby is rejecting a taken American identity and embracing a true Asian or Asian American identity. Debby feels "I was quicker and stronger as Devi; my intuitions were sharper, my impulsiveness rowdier. As Devi, I came into possessions of my mystery genes. Thank you, Clear Water. And you, too, thank you, "Asian National" (p64). What she actually does, however, is to try to discover the whole world lying beyond Baby Clear water Irish-Daughter, Faustine, Debby, Devi and ethnicity. She is successful in her mission, as "no force in nature is stronger than a child trying to find her mother" (p88). The novelist has created authentic female characters. They are flesh and blood characters with recognizable credentials. She is subtle in delineating their trials and tribulations, earnings aspirations, failures and foibles. The defining feature of her women characters is that they have strength of their own and in spite of challenges and hostilities they remain uncrushed.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Mukherjee does not think of her novels as a man verses women issue at all. In the light of the statements made arbitrary appellations and dragging her work into the fold of militant feminism of the western variety would be unjust. She has been labeled a feminist for her portrayal of the predicament of middle class educated Indian women their inner conflict and quest for identity, marriage, sex and their exploitation and disillusionment. *Leave it to Me* is her most audacious and powerful novel yet a mercilessly funny and mercurial exploration of the promise and pressure of identities lost and stolen, and of personal and national guilt and responsibility played out within the choke hold of the past.

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