

**SUMMARY OF THE MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT TO BE
SUBMITTED TO
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG
NEW DELHI-110002**

-: Title of the Project :-

***A Study of Cultural and Psychological
Conflicts in Bharati Mukherjee's Women
Protagonists***

Investigator

Prof. Mrs. Suchitra Patne

**M.A., M.Phil (English),
Head of Dept. of English
Lok Mahavidyalaya, Wardha.**

Year - 2014

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee, is one of the major novelists of Indian Diaspora who have achieved enviable position within a comparatively short creative span. As an expatriate in the United States, she has captured evocatively the Indian immigrant experience in her novels as well as two collections of short fiction. As she is an Indian born American novelist, short story writer, non-fiction writer and journalist. She takes up the life of the Indian immigrants in the U.S.A. as the subject-matter of most of her novels. In her novels, she explores the theme of immigration and transformation. The immigrants have one desire in common that is to settle permanently in America. So, as immigrants they undergo a process of adjustment and transformation of their personalities. She journeys through the different phases such as the phases of expatriation, transition and immigration. Her works reveal her embattlements with ethos, cultures and people of the country where she was born (India) and the land of her immigration (America). The quality of cultural conflict leading to psychological crisis in her fiction in all its multiplicity forms the crux of her accomplishment as a creative artist. She is 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. Mukherjee focuses upon sensitive women protagonists who lack stable sense of personal and cultural identity. She is curious about the survival of her protagonist in the new surrounding. She is concerned about making her picture of Indian life intelligible and interesting to the American readers.

Objectives of the Study :

The study aims at exploring the cultural and psychological conflicts in the minds of Bharati Mukherjee's women immigrants while settling down in a foreign country in a new milieu—their problems, anxieties, miserable plights in the light of present socio-political scenario.

One of the significant themes of modern literature is the depiction of the cross-cultural crisis, leading to psychological problems, a subject which has assumed a great significance in present world of globalization. Bharati Mukherjee's writing is undoubtedly one of the best examples of this kind.

Summary :

The major literary works of Bharati Mukherjee have highlighted the immigrant anxiety, their problems and the trauma they suffer due to cultural clash. All immigrants, including men and women, Asian and Europeans became the victims of these cultural conflicts. Transplantation of human beings from one cultural world to another is always painful and it is more painful to the female immigrants. Mukherjee's novels have in general female protagonists as the central characters. She portrays the transformation of women when they pass through the process of immigration. She tries to vivify the image of those women who have tried to assimilate the alien culture and have tried to accept changed identity overthrowing the Indian cultural heritage in which they took their first breath. What is more important in them is their spirit with which they overthrow their old culture and adjust themselves with the new surrounding. In the process of immigration no doubt that her women protagonists find themselves in a cultural dilemma and ultimately they face loneliness, despair, alienation and frustration, many times resulting to psychological imbalances too.

By choosing her protagonists from all walks of life, having divergent ethnic, religious and cultural preoccupations, she has attempted to explore the inner conscious of her protagonists like Dimple, Tara, Jasmine, Angela, Nafeesa, Ratna, Panna Bhatt, Maya, Mrs. Bhave, and many others. All of them suffer a lot and become the victims of cultural and psychological alienation.

Bharati Mukherjee's writings largely reflect her personal experiences she has encountered with as a woman immigrant caught between two cultures. Her first novel *Tiger's Daughter* is a very fine manifestation of cultural conflict, which illustrates the uprooted condition of 'Tara', the protagonist of the novel. She is the autobiographical representation of the author herself who is also married to an American. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her 'home', to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of Bengal Tiger. But to her great dismay she found herself a total stranger in the inherited milieu. She realizes that she is now neither Indian nor truly American. She is totally confused and lost. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* is a psychological study of Dimple, a young woman from Calcutta and of her problems in settling down in New York with her new husband. Brought up to be passive and dependent as per Indian standards of womanhood she lacks the inner resources to cope with fear and challenging situations and ultimately descends into unexpected violence. Dimple as presented here is a neurotic and solipsistic individual who brings an end to the marital conflict in her life by murdering her own husband. Bharati Mukherjee has explored here the inner dimensions of the protagonist and has surrealistically depicted the psyche of Dimple.

Dimple is caught between the stage of expatriation and the stage of immigration: between the 'Ballygunge Ghetto' of expatriates and the "Manhattan Enclave" of immigrants. She is also torn between the traditional role model of a submissive self-effacing Indian wife and the new role model of an assertive, independent wife offered by the West. She eventually succumbs to social / cultural pressures and ultimately not only becomes a disillusioned 'expatriate' but also a victim of neurosis.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee gives us the story of an immigrant from the Third World to the U.S. pushed from one disaster to another. Jasmine emerges not as a tragic character but as one who is determined to change her destiny to explore infinite possibility. Of course she passes through physical, mental and emotional agony affecting her to such an extent that she is driven to violence. Here, Bharati Mukherjee explores female identity through the story of an Indian peasant woman whose path takes her from Punjab to Florida, to New York, New York to Iowa and as the novel draws towards a close she is about to set off for California. With each new move, the protagonist reinvents herself with a new name- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane and with each new name she moves closer to her dream of being an American belonging to the new world. Jasmine's ongoing journey highlights her rootless position and her search for identity.

An immigrant's life is in fact a series of reincarnations. She lives through several lives in a single life-time. This truth explains the condition of the novelist as well as that of Jasmine. Mukherjee, by subjecting her heroine to multiple codes of society and geographical locales seems to send the message that if one has to assimilate oneself to the mainstream culture of the adopted land, one should forget one's past.

Hannah Easton is Mukherjee's model of a 'translated' self. Here, The West meets the East and the New World falls in love with the Old World. In 'Jasmine' the protagonist travels from the East to the West, undergoes a series of transformations and gets assimilated into the American culture. But Hannah Easton, the citizen of the New World, undergoes the process of 'translation' in her journey from the West to the East.

Similarly in the story collection, *Darkness*, we have Ratna, Angela, Nafeesa, all these immigrants are shown for ever shuttling between the old and the new worlds. All of them suffered a lot and paid a heavy price for being immigrants in the U.S.A. The character of Ratna is a fine study of psychological conflicts of an expatriate woman with all the apprehensions and duality that shroud an individual in an alien land. Vinita too is

caught in the horns of the expatriate dilemma of being transfixed between two worlds, heading for a nervous breakdown; she is similar to Dimple in *Wife*, in her inability to cope with the confusion arising from cultural collision. "For survival in America the immigrants have to go through all kinds of trials and tribulations. They have to seal their hearts. They have to forgo all sense of morality, decency and decorum". This is very true about Jasmine, Maya, Panna, Mrs. Bhave from *Middleman and the Other Stories*. They are successful immigrants, no doubt, but they had to encounter physical, mental and emotional struggle in the process of adjusting themselves and earning a livelihood in the alien land. Panna Bhatt is faced with the same dilemma. She has been in America for two years, 'She has broadened her horizons' but still straddling between two cultures.

Bharati Mukherjee's fictional world presents a pathetic picture of the various experiences of women immigrants, their cultural and psychological conflicts, struggles, traumas, trials and tribulations and the heavy price some of them had to pay in their efforts to become successful immigrants in America.

The analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's fictional world from a cultural and psychological perspective demonstrates that she has addressed herself to all the issues associated with expatriate experience. By choosing her protagonists from all parts of the world, she has attempted to explore the multiplicity of this theme which is centered in their struggle to outgrow inherited values. With her evolving creative vision the canvas of her thematic concern enlarges and the complexity of cultural assimilation acquires a new dimension. The beauty of much of her fiction lies in its being informed by her personal experiences. A peculiar sense of identification with her character lends her novels a flavour rarely found among expatriate writers.

It is clearly observed that because of the discrimination of culture, way of thinking and understanding, Bharati Mukherjee's, women characters become victims of cultural and psychological conflicts. In spite of all the unpleasant shadows, she is

hopeful for a harmonious assimilation. She has tried to set harmony between the mainstream majority and the immigrant minority.

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 'Culture Shock' when a person leaves his own culture and enters another; his old values come into conflicts with the new one he finds. The major literary works of Bharati Mukherjee have highlighted the immigrant anxiety. She invariably focuses upon sensitive women protagonists who lack firm sense of cultural identity and are natural victims of racisms, sexism and numerous forms of social oppression.

A major theme in her novel has been the life of South Asian expatriate/immigrants in USA and Canada and the problem of acculturation and assimilation. Her creative world is inhibited by people of various religious faiths, diverse ethnicities and different cultural predilections. In her novels, she has successfully tried to deal with all the issues, problems and anxieties of Asian expatriates.

The theme Bharati Mukherjee deals with in her novels is one of the significant themes of modern literature that is the depiction of cultural clash causing cultural and psychological conflicts. The subject has no doubt assumed great significance in the present world of globalization. Cross-cultural confrontation has received a pronounced impetus since the emergence of the modernist movement in the very opening of the 20th century. The globalization of world economy can be looked upon as a natural offshoot of multiculturalism and intercultural interaction. Bharati Mukherjee has been widely acknowledged as 'Voice' of expatriate-immigrant sensibility. Hence the subject has assumed national and international status.

Achievements from the Project:

During the study, the investigator is familiarized with new frontiers of Diaspora writing. The insightful study has given perception that during painful and unpleasant

process of immigration, harmonious assimilation of foreign culture can be the solution in being successful immigrant. It is also found that human instinct to live life with tremendous zeal excels in any adverse situation.

The Feminist Literary movement was ever ignorant of cultural and psychological traumas involved in the process of immigration especially of women immigrants. The study threw new light on the problem.

The objectives devised during the study are achieved. All human beings adopt their mother culture so it becomes their identity. Immigration poses a new dilemma of cultural identity. There starts a cultural conflict between mother culture and adopted culture. Consequently this process leads to psychological crisis. Bharati Mukherjee's fictional world of women immigrants presents the traumatic experiences in the process of expatriation to immigration. Her women protagonists consequently suffer from sense of alienation, identity crisis, cultural shock and a consequent psychological conflict. Dimple, Tara, Vinita, Angela, Nafeesa become the victims of cultural and psychological conflicts caused in the process of immigration. No doubt, some of her women like Jasmine, Hannah, Panna, Mrs Bhave emerged as successful immigrants.

Principal Investigator

(Prof. Mrs. Suchitra S. Patne)

Principal

(Dr. Mrs. Pushpa S. Tayde)