

Bharati Mukherjee as a Diasporic writer

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Abstract: Diaspora implies the movements of ideas, images and people, who carry mem ' with them. The notion of diaspora as a concept of 'emigration' a voluntary movement away from an original center towards a specific chosen destination, is based on the hope for a better life in that destination rather than 'dispersion' forced removal from a locus, implying lack of choice and resulting in widespread wandering, as in the dispersion of the Jewish peoples. The original diaspora has evolved to signify an identity space that words such as 'exile', 'migrant', 'immigrant', 'alien', 'refugee' and 'foreigner' cannot claim. So, we will discuss about Mukherjee in this paper.

Key Words- diaspora, immigrant, removal

In its contemporary usage, 'diaspora' indicates movement and dynamism, origin and belonging, community and culture, along with loneliness and isolation, collective nostalgia and co-punitive memory. The term 'diaspora' itself refers to the casting of an identity and suggests simultaneously a history and a route into the future in a way that is denied to terms like 'refugee', 'migrant' and foreigner 'or' 'alien'. Immigrants are sources of energy and creativity. They are busy defining their culture in a different land. The concept of "Hybrid" would be favorable for an understanding of the nature of these immigrants. The term 'Hybrid' is well defined in A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory:- The term "Hybrid" is commonly assumed to be anything of mixed origin, of unlike parts... in literary and cultural studies, it refers to the idea of occupying in-between space; that is, of being of many, composite, or synergistic entities, new formations and creoles or intermixed peoples.

In the context of current diaspora discourse, led by scholars such as Bhabha and Vertovec, diaspora can be viewed today as a place which can create multiplicities of cosmopolitanism produced and reproduced through communities of people moving physically or conceptually between spaces, albeit through a chaotic order. In such a context, diaspora may be a socio-cultural label applied to populations that internationally do not occupy conventional territory. They may thus be considered de-territorialized or re-territorialized when they move from an original land to an adopted one and build expatriate or ethnic enclaves in the land of their adoption. Calling for more positive interpretation of diaspora, the process of diaspora identification may not bear about being American or British or whatever one has settled, differently. Clifford suggests that diaspora signals an epistemological shift of focus from an original homeland to the existence of multiple homelands.

Diaspora today illustrates the hybrid and ever-changing nature of identities that are no more dependent on homogeneity, purity and stable localization. There is a diversity of cultures in the Diasporas that co-exist, merge and emerge through hybridity. The cultures of diaspora can be the results of cultural meetings or of suppression, exclusion and domination and yet the diaspora cultures are neither original pure or new impure. Dr. Myria Georgiou suggests that post-modern world can be described by hybridized identity and culture. Georgiou in the article Thinking Diaspora: Why Diaspora is a Key Concept for Understanding Multicultural Europe argues that diaspora should be taken as the only useful concept for understanding cultural hybridity. It emphasizes that communities can extend beyond national boundaries. In the post-modern world, cultural encounters are taking place on equal terms as a mutual acceptance of differences. Recent approaches have acknowledged and accepted the strength of hybridized and synchronized view of the world.

The writers of diaspora give voice to their sense of loss in an alien land and then gradually turn towards the process of reconciliation, assimilation and affirmation. Diaspora writing is gaining tremendous popularity in the wake of globalization and transculturation. It is an important feature of contemporary literary movement called New Literature in English. The word "diaspora" is etymologically derived from the Greek verb "diaspeiro" (dia means over and speiro means to sow). Diaspora literally means scattering or dispersion of a group of people to an alien land, away from their traditional homelands. Khachig Tololyan, the editor of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* has made an extensive study of diaspora. He traces the origins and the historical development of the term diaspora. He has stated that in ancient Greece the word refers to those citizens of a dominant state who immigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization and assimilation of the territory into the empire. The term diaspora first appeared in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The term was described as the Jews living in exile from the homeland of Palestine. Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* defines the Greek term diaspora as the unnatural uprooting and scattering of the Aegean's which resulted from the destruction of their city by the Athenians. The 1989 Oxford English Dictionary traces the etymology of the word 'diaspora' back to its Greek root and to its appearance in the Old Testament. It considers the word as a reference to "God's intentions for the people of Israel to be dispersed across the world". In The 1993 Oxford English Dictionary, 'diaspora' has been defined in

reference to "anybody of people living outside their traditional homeland".

The diasporic writing is the witness of all happenings of social realities, longings and feelings of belonging. About the diasporic writers and the diasporic writing, Rushdie says that they create "Imaginary homelands." Here he states that thought the nostalgia remains, and there is an urge to write about the "homeland", the one in the books would remain fictional or imaginary. As Pramod Nayar opines:

Much of diasporic writing explores the theme of an original home. This original home as now lost due to their exile is constantly. Working into the imagination and myth of the displaced individual / community.

The writers of the diaspora are denied the position of exclusivity in experiencing a sense of loss and longing for the past. The memory of the homeland remains an important part of them. They always try to belong to their past, specifically the first generation immigrants. Many critics have focused on this aspect. Writing about homeland is one of the way to belong to their past. Rushdie's *Midnight Children* is a fine example of this aspect. In *Imaginary Homelands* he writes about *Midnight Children* that he is writing "a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: my India.... I tried to make it as imaginatively true as I could, but imaginative truth is simultaneously honorable and suspect and I knew that my India may only have been one to which I ... was .. willing to admit I belonged: (10). Therefore, thought one remembers the homeland, but is "not gifted with total recall" (11). This becomes evident in the novel when the narrator Saleem makes factual errors, e.g. he makes reference to the old tradition and in his version (which is wrong) Ganesha sat at the feet of the poet Valmiki and took down the Ramayana. The author gives an explanation for the same in the second essay of *Imaginary Homelands*, "Saleem is neither stupid nor unaware, nor is he as a writer unaware of his mistakes and the unintentional mistakes were, on being discovered, not expunged from the text but, rather, emphasized, given more prominence in the story"(23). The reason for this is that Saleem's memory is selective in some ways becomes a representative of the people of the diaspora. The memory is selective, incorrect, fragmented. Therefore Saleem's "wrongness feels right" (23). Memory thus, becomes a tool for the diasporic writers to write about their homeland. Besides their response to the past, they versify their reaction to the alien land where they came as immigrants.

Bharati Mukherjee is an American fiction writer of Bengali Indian origin. She is altogether a novelist and writer of fictional stories of India, South Asian, Caribebean and African diaspora as well. Born in Calcutta in 1940, she was convent-educated from Loreto Public School run by Irish nuns and received her B.A. (with honors) in English from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and completed her M.A. degree in English and Ancient Indian Culture from the University of

Baroda in 1961. Her academic and creative Odyssey began with her joining the creative writing program in the University of Iowa's writer's workshop in 1962 with a P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship. Subsequently, she obtained an MFA in creative writing in 1963 and Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Iowa 1969. She got married to Clark Blaise, a Canadian-American fellow student of the University of Iowa in 1963. She moved with her husband Blaise to Montreal to teach at McGill University in 1966 and lived by turns in Montreal and Toronto as a Canadian citizen. Both Mukherjee and her husband were offered teaching assignment at the University of McGill where she was promoted to an Assistant Professorship in 1969 and later to a full-fledged professorship in 1978. She taught English at McGill University till 1980 and produced during the while her first ever work of fiction *The Tiger's Daughter* in 1972 and while on a sabbatical with her husband in India in 1973, she had begun working on her second volume of fiction *Wife* published in 1975. Her *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, in collaboration with her husband, was published in 1977 to receive Canada Arts Council Grant. She received the Guggenheim Foundation award in 1980 and moved to New York to become a permanent US resident. During the years 1980-84, she taught at Skidmore College, Mountain State College, Queen's College of City University of New York and Columbia University. In 1981, she received the National Magazine Awards second prize for her essay "An Invisible Woman". During the years 1984-87, she served as associate professor at Mountain State College at New Jersey and while as serving writer-in-residence at Emory University, she wrote most of her stories collected in *Darkness* (1985). The stories of *Darkness* present the experiences of Indian immigrants in the USA. *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) focus on immigrants, from various countries that form the American Salad Bowl. Though they are minority voice, they are the vital part of the American mainstream. They contribute to substantively the making of the American culture. And while serving as professor of English at City University of New York, she published *The Sorrow and the Terror* based on an Air India plane crash in collaboration with her husband in 1987. Her *Middleman and other Stories* (1988) won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction and in 1989 she moved to California as a distinguished professor at Berkeley.

Bharati Mukherjee and her husband played supportive roles in each other's Career. They pursued independent writing, but also produced two nonfiction works in collaboration. She has combined a career in creative writing and teaching very successfully. Her choice to settle in the USA has had a liberating effect on her creative career. She embraced the openness of the American culture and its respect for one's individuality with enthusiasm and joy. She has stated emphatically that she would like to be treated as an American writer and not as a hyphenated or ethnic one. She is happily

assimilated in American environment. In fact, her experience as an expatriate forms the main source of her writings. She is also concerned with migrations, dislocations and relocations. Her works also deal with the issues of identity, the notion of belonging, the feeling of alienation and rootlessness. She also questions the biases and prejudices of the two antipodal worlds. In her earlier works, Mukherjee has dealt with cultural encounters between the homeland and the host land. In her later works, she shifts the focus to other multicultural encounters that take place in the USA. *The Tiger's Daughter* has strong autobiographical overtones, it narrates the story of Tara, who gets married to an American and return to India briefing, but finds that she is unable to connect herself to her motherland. At home, she fails to adjust to the things that once she loved and admired in the past. She feels like an alien in the city of her own birth Calcutta. At last, she returns to the USA that is the land of her adoption .

The Holder of the World (1993) focuses on the 17th century colonial America and the Mughal India. The novelist creates a vivid and complex tale of dislocation and transformation that take place in the amalgam of the two cultures. *Leave It To Me* (1997) is the story of a female child abandoned by a hippie other from California. When the girl child becomes a young woman, she engages herself in the search of her roots and true parentage. The revenge story is interwoven with the question of identity presented through the twin motifs of Kali and Electra. Here the novel explores the hyphenated individual's dilemma in the multi-ethnic USA. Set in America and India equally.

In her novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002), the concerns presented are again female identity and re-rooting of the self. *Jasmine* (1990) is the story of a rebellious girl Jyoti who rebels against the conventional set up of the traditional society. She goes to the U.S.A. where she becomes Jamine, a personification of Americanization. In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, the heroine Jasmine undergoes various

transformations in order to fit in the adopted land. *Miss New India* (2011) is the latest addition to her fictional oeuvre. Bharati Mukherjee writes about a minority community which frees itself from ghetto and adapts to the mainstream of American culture and lifestyle. She advocates that through adaptation, adjustment, assimilation and acculturation, the immigrants can overcome the trauma of displacement and alienation. She is a diasporic fiction writer who holds that migratory experiences enrich expatriate literary writings.

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