



From Expatriation to Immigration: A Select Study of Bharati Mukherjee's Darkness

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Abstract: The interval of fourteen years between the publication of *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989) brought out two dozen short stories. This period exhibits a drastic change in Bharati Mukherjee's writing career as well as in her personal life. Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness*, A collection of twelve short stories was published in 1985. This collection details the bitter experience of not only South Asian but from all over the world who lived in Canada and the U.S.A in the 1970's and 1980s. Mukherjee's Canadian experience and hatred for racial discrimination are reflected in the voice of many characters. She does not delimit herself to be an expatriate but shows attachment to being an immigrant.

"Promised both Detachment from and superiority over those well bred post colonials much life myself a drift in the new world, wandering if they would never belong". (Darkness)

This paper attempts to examine the experiences of expatriates and immigrants that are reflected in Mukherjee's short stories published in the volume titled "Darkness".

Keywords: Expatriation, Immigration, Racial discrimination, Nostalgia

Introduction

The life journey of Bharati Mukherjee molded the path of her writing career from expatriation to immigration. Her increasing attachment to the U.S. made her an immigrant. Her bitter experience and racial discrimination in Canada compelled her to be an expatriate. Mukherjee's text expresses that expatriation creates the pain of exile, complaints, repentance, and a search for refuge in solitude. The expatriates always search for comfort both in the native and alien land. The themes of expatriation and immigration both are pre-dominant and vigorous in Bharati Mukherjee's short stories. This is the bipolar bamboo with which one corner connects with expatriation and another ends with immigration. Expatriation reveals the feeling of separation while immigration expresses the feeling of pleasure of opportunities. Bharati Mukherjee shares her bitter experience to be claimed as an anti-Indian attitude in Canada. She expresses herself as a psychological expatriate in Canada. "I remember how bracing it was to cloak myself in my Brahminical elegance." Mukherjee regards expatriation as the root of a self-defeating attitude that affects the writer's personality adversely. Bharati Mukherjee compares expatriation with immigration and expatriates with immigrants. Her characters knit their dreams to soar high in a new country. The feelings of immigrants show their readiness for assimilation. Expatriates become nostalgic for the past while an immigrant involves in the environment enthusiastically, and

shows an inclination to plunge into the present. An immigrant celebrates one's entry into a new world, the happiness of being reborn. Bharati Mukherjee acknowledges that this transition from expatriation to immigration has reflected her selection of writers. Her experience of expatriation directed her to choose Naipaul as her model. A term after discarding being an expatriate, she changed her choice of writer. She selected Bernard Malamud. She accepts:

"Like Malamud, I write about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture. Like Malamud's my work seems to find quite naturally a moral center. Isaac Babel is another author who is literary ancestor for me.

The term expatriation emphasizes the homeland that has been left behind. On the other hand, Immigration focuses on the country that has migrated, and clinginess to the foreign country. George Steiner names the expatriate writer as "The contemporary everyman". Christine Gomez details a more perspective definition of the term expatriation –

"Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotions which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings."

The refusal and rejection both are the embodiment of expatriation. Bharati Mukherjee accepts that racial discrimination and hostility in Canada pulled her to be an immigrant in the U.S. Her potentiality of being a writer was crushed while her husband's creativity flourished because the latter belonged to Canada as reflected in the voice of Dr. Supariwala (Isolated Incidents). Bharati Mukherjee's short stories deal with some touching aspects of expatriation. These stories throw light on the problem of rootlessness, and conflict between individuals and their surroundings. Bharati Mukherjee's first collection of stories "Darkness" came in 1985 that was extremely different from the previous works. She asserts that her protagonists are not only expatriates looking back to their mother country with pain but they are immigrants also who share common grievances like her. She was compelled by the vigorous urge to give voice to the aspirations of these new settlers. Mukherjee exemplifies her migration to America:

"A movement away from the aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration". She admits that her stay in India is also responsible for being an Immigrant. "The year in India had forced me to view myself more as an immigrant than an exile".

The Study of 'Darkness'

In the story "**A Father**", Bharati Mukherjee's presentation of Indian men, and their conflict is a showcase of self-division. The writer presents various conflicts between reason and superstition, Cultural and ethnic, and acquired and preserved attitudes. The foreign country gives them sexual liberation but this liberation is not the source of pleasure but pain, which creates conflict. The individual finds his soul trapped between the two. Mr. Bhowmick's education at Carnegie Tech was supported by his wife's nagging. His daughter's act of artificially inseminated pregnancy brought violence, shame, and madness. He was not willing to live in the U.S. permanently even though having a good job in Ranchi as a government engineer. Mr. Bhowmick's aggression can be seen when he interferes in a physical conflict between his wife and daughter. His aggression and violence were similar to Goddess Kali. Babli replies "Who needs a men? She hissed. The father of my baby is a bottle and syringe. Men louse her your lips. I just *want* a baby." (Darkness 72)

In the "**Lady from Lucknow**", Nafeesa Hafeez, The protagonist is an immigrant from Pakistan. Nafeesa with her husband, Iqbal who was in IBM, made a temporary home in many countries such as Lebanon, Brazil, and Zambia. Now they settle in Atlanta. Despite having a splendor house, Iqbal feels insecure as "Not quiet". Nafeesa married at the early age of 17, it was arranged marriage. She shows her inclination to break taboos or restrictions like Husseina – The girl next door in Pakistan. These characters find themselves entangled between twos. The condition creates tension between the lost and found word.

"at home everywhere because she is never at home anywhere" (pg. 23). To chase her passion, Nafeesa yearns for a white lover with an illicit affair who is older than her. This satiates her illusion that she can identify herself as an American.

In the story **The Word according to Husu** The voice of expatriation is reflected with pain, awe, and a feeling of bearing otherness. This is the story of Ratna, of Indian origin, and her Canadian husband who is a professor of psychology at McGill University. They decide to enjoy a holiday trip on an island off the coast of Africa. The title of the story has been originated from an article by Kenneth J. Husu in The Scientific American. Graem, The Canadian, wishes to move to Toronto where he had been offered a chair in personality development but Ratna decides to stay in Montreal. Ratna does not wish to leave the house because of her bitter experience of Toronto's racism.

"In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian, she was something called after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was Hell". The couple is caught in the curfew on the island. They are not allowed to leave the palace, forced to remain within the confined of the Hotel Papillon. Ratna feels more insecure to move Toronto rather than staying here. She shares the experience of expatriates' discrimination against racism in Toronto.

"A week before their flight, A Bengali woman was beaten and nearly blinded on the street. And week before that an eight years old Punjabi boy was struck by a car announcing on its Bumper KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI ".

Graem consoles her and asserts to her "It won't happen to you". Look violence is everywhere. Ratna replies at once. She said, "For you"(pg. 27).

Angela is the story of an immigrant from Bangladesh. Angela, the protagonist tells the story of a girl who became the victim of tyranny in the past and is now adopted by the Brandons in the U.S.A. Angela dreams of love and domesticity. She thinks about all possible comforts in the new world of dreams. Angela became a well-settled immigrant. She does not long for her native country which gave her agony as Angela recalls "They left you poor babies for dead." (pg. 10)

Angela has no hatred for the expatriate country. She becomes cool and shows a detachment from the previous one. Delia, the daughter of new parents is in a coma, Angela visits Delia in the hospital regularly. She meets with Dr. Vinny Menzies, a doctor from India. Dr. Vinny longs for his marriage with Angela. Menzies, the lover's outlook is different from a doctor.

"In the hospital, he seems a man of circumspect feelings but on Sunday afternoon when we drive (As Angela discloses) around and around in his Scirocco, his manner changes. He seems raw and aimless lost." (pg 13)

Angela also changes her outlook on life. Instead of cherishing the nightmares of 1971 in Bangladesh, Angela decides to serve handicapped children. She will not waste her life. She will fulfill the aim of life as her name suggests Angela, the angel.

Angela, the South Asian immigrant woman expresses no passion or love for Menzies. The immigrant chose the better substitute to stay and serve the needy. She lost her desire for sexuality which was the outcome of cutting off her nipples at the age of six.

Nostalgia, is the story of an immigrant Dr. Manny Patel who is a psychiatrist, working at a state hospital in Queensland, New York. His dream to be a real American come true as he possesses an expensive home, and a red Porsche sports car, and has married an American nurse Camille. Despite having prosperous and blessed life, he asserts himself as "not an expatriate but a patriot". It is difficult for him to hide his feeling for his homeland. He recalls himself his duty to look after his parents in old age is alike to the duty to the goddess.

His feeling of nostalgia is reflected when he is captivated by Padma, a youthful sales girl in an Indian grocery store on that busy afternoon. He indulges himself in romance with Padma. He asserts that the stable marriage with Nurse Camille is the cause that suppressed his romantic emotions.

His Craziess for Padma compels him to have dinner in an expensive Indian hotel and spend a night with her. The narrator emphasizes that Patel was not only a loving husband but a father also, dominated by acquisitiveness. Due to this affair, Patel mingles his acquisitiveness with nostalgia. His romance shatters when he comes to know that Padma is nothing else, she is a prostitute. Dr. Patel is accused of raping the so-called "Underage" (pg. 111) Padma.

He has to pay \$700 and rights a note for immigration officers to assure Padma of immigration. His daydream disintegrates. The failure of nostalgia is visible in his last action of writing 'WHORE' on the mirror and floor of the bathroom. It is like a fissure in Dr. Patel's Immigrant shield in this story.

In the story '**Isolated incident**', the pain and grievance of an expatriate are experienced by the outlook of the Canadian spectacle, Ann Vana, a white Canadian woman whose work is to file complaints from immigrants against problems concerning human rights.

In the story, there are two matters of racial discrimination belonging to Dr. (Miss) Supariwala who is "a stern, stocky woman of forty-three". Mrs. Supariwala declares that being a Canadian citizen she has published many articles, and job research grants also, without any solid ground she is denied of job on flimsy ground. She becomes a victim of racial discrimination.

The interviewers think "Students would not relate easily to her, some might complain of her accent, her methodological stiffness, her lack of humor". (p 79) Anne Vana feels irritated by the fact that having faced so many problems in Canada, these expatriates find a reason to stay here.

The other case belongs to Persawd John Mohan relates to a subway assault, his words express his frustration "Canadian are mean as hell ". When Ann replies "If this had happened in New York you'd have been left for dead". Persawd relatives' lawyer protects him and retorts "In New York, he'd have been mugged for his money, not racially assaulted." (p 84)

Mukherjee accepts the fact that violence exists in America, it may be terrible but no sense of partiality on ethnic grounds exists here. Mukherjee expresses her grief by asserting the statement that they can never "feel at home" there.

This is the ground of discrimination and hostility towards the minority. This is not only racism but they are ignored as isolated incidents.

In the story "Hindu", Leela, the protagonist is a Bengali Brahmin. Lila chose Derek to marry who is a white Canadian. Leela breaks caste etiquette. She was expressed as a rebel who can decide, to marry a white man but she can break at her own will. She accepts her origin from Vishnu's knee. She can live both lives of being an immigrant and an expatriate. She says with high spirit "I am an American citizen" (p 133) but she accepts herself as a Bengali Brahmin. She is different from Patwant Singh of Gotlah who is a typical expatriate. Patwant Singh grudges his grievances against India and represents himself as a victim of negative nostalgia. He is not comfortable with his Indianness. He is not in favor of addressing himself as the "dhoti" wallas of his country:

“The country has changed totally crude rustic types have taken over. The Dhotei Wallahs... they would wrap themselves in loincloths if it got them more votes.” (p 135)

Both Leela and the Maharaj are different from each other. Leela celebrates her new country simultaneously. She accepts marks of Indian sensibility in her. She acknowledges her duality of American sensibility and Hindu imagination. She shares her experience of “trying to treat the city(New York) not as an island of dark immigration but as the vast sea”.(p 136)

She agrees with the fact “An Indian woman is brought up to please” (p 139)

Leela asserts positively. The bonding of bodies with our new country (p 139)

In contrast, Patwant Singh reveals his sense of deprivation. According to him, insulting behavior in India is the root cause of driving him abroad.

“The country has no respect anywhere” (p 135)

Patwant Singh shows his Indianness as the impediment is his assimilation into the new country. These two characters are contrary to each other. One is Leela who welcomes her duality. The other one is Patwant Singh having a grievance for the past and finds the only mean ‘writing’ that saved him.

“Writing is what keeps me from going through death’s gate. (p 138)

Leela becomes aggressive when Lisa comments on her language as ‘Hindu’.

“No matter what language I speak” (p 140)

It is visible that she shows her best attempts for assimilation yet the “other” for the native Canadian.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Mukherjee's characters have a fluidity to reinvent their lives in the new world. These characters of darkness have sour expatriation in their hearts but have an exuberance to be immigrants. They dwindle between two worlds, The new and the old. The process of stretching from expatriation to immigration creates conflicts, disintegration. The protagonists of Mukherjee's short stories are indulged in making them American and searching for their permanent abode. Bharati Mukherjee has done justice to her characters as she reflects in her characters. Her bitter experience of Canada is closely viewed in her stories as Angela in Bangladesh. Mr. Bhowmick's inability to adjust to being an immigrant and his eruption of violence. Nafeesa and her husband Iqbal were shown as prosperous immigrants. They express a grievance for kvetching expatriates. The expatriation is visible in the shattered personality of characters while they strengthen their personality to be immigrants. This movement from expatriation to immigration exhibits a transformation from disintegration to integration.

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