

“DISENCHANTMENT AND ASSIMILATION: A STUDY ON THE SELECT NOVELS OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE”

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Migration is as old as human history. In world History, The dispersal of the Jews in different parts of the world away from their home land is referred to as ‘diaspora’. The term diaspora now refers to displaced communities which have been dislocated from their homeland through migration or immigrations on exile. Diaspora is a dislocation from a geographical location of origin and relocation in another territory or country.

There is so much of cultural mixing in the post-colonial era that it has given birth to ‘hybrid culture’. In every country the highest class (and especially in India) is worse affected by this phenomenon.

The post modern culture is the capitalistic culture. It is so because of American dominance as Jameson convincingly puts it:

Post modern culture is the internal and super structural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror.(5).

The theme of exile, immigration and alienation is common in the 20th century literary scene. Lost, lonely, drifting characters parade before us and their mechanical march points to the absence of meaningful relationship in the era of technological development and global interaction.

Bharati Mukherjee, an India – born American novelist has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short span of just twenty five years. She has been widely acknowledged as a voice of expatriate immigrant sensibility.

Her major concern as a writer has been the life of South – Asian expatriates / immigrants in USA and Canada and the problem of Acculturation and Assimilation. One could clearly visualize the way she distinguishes an expatriate from an immigrant. While the main thrust of expatriation is on the native country and traditions left behind, immigration lays all emphasis on the cultural life of the host country.

Dimple Dasgupta, the protagonist of the novel **wife** shows the symptoms of psychic dislocation. As the novel opens one could see Dimple's desire to marry a neuro – surgeon who could give her a 'different kind of life'. And life to her meant: an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girl, trips to new market for nylon saris (wife – 3).

All her dreams of marriage are fed on the hope that it would: “ bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund- raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love (wife – 3).

Surprisingly that any Indian girl who is an heir to all that long tradition of love of nature, human relationships, art, music, literature, our many festivals, happy home with husband and children and a readiness for suffering and sacrifice, should harp so irresponsibly on “freedom and love” values which might more appropriately be associated with western ethos. While there is no denying that ideally speaking marriage ought to be a means of liberation and not imprisonment, the freedom that this ignorant girl craves for is freedom in the modern, vulgar sense, oblivious to its deeper meanings. Dimple dreams of living in foreign countries. With these dreams, she enters

the wedlock with Amit, an ambitious engineer who is about to migrate to the United States. But Amit's delay in getting a job abroad frustrates her. She feels uneasy at Amit's house. She thinks that all her problems are temporary and with the confirmation for immigration they will eventually come to an end.

Bereft of Indian values, Dimple lands on the land of promise with her dreams and aspirations. In spite of possessing an adventurous spirit, Dimple gets baffled by exposure to American culture. Nagendra kumar explains her condition thus: "How a boorish, an innocent Indian wife can keep her nerves in a country where murder was like flapping the bugs?" (49).

After getting exposed to the alien culture, Amit and Dimple fail to communicate with each other. They experience frustrations at various levels. Dejected Dimple leads a lonely life of assisting Meena Sen, watching television or reading news papers. In the absence of a good facilitator and adequate knowledge to help her to encounter the alien reality, she has access only to the televised version of the alternate reality. Through the media, she is introduced to violence.

With the partially fulfilled dreams, Dimple tries to assimilate with American culture but fails. She feels it is difficult to adjust with the people who do not understand about Durga Puja. Dimple's attachment to rituals shows the throbbing of Indian pulse in her. Moreover, it throws light on the Indian woman's failure to getting assimilated to the foreign culture. As Lakshmi puts it: "..... for a woman, religion is not just something linked to a good but a cultural practice that she is supposed to preserve" (4).

Dimple analyses her smooth Calcutta life and the dangerous New York life thus in terms of Chowdhury:

She is scared of self – service elevators, of police men, of gadget and appliances. She does not want to wear western clothes as she thinks she would be mistakenly taken for a Puerto Rican. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated, marginalised (84).

America has outwitted her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. She is unsure of living there. The narrator comments: “how could she live in a country where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator? (wife – 112). The alien circumstances accentuate her hypertension and drive her to the brink of regression and abnormality. She finds herself ill at odds to suffer the terrible assault of lonely existence in America.

Dimple’s cultural shock turns her into a neurotic. The individual as delineated by Bharati Mukherjee is a disenchanted lonely thinker, searching for ethical significance in the smallest of things, and struggling for identification with races or class or group. As she could not attain any of these, she is thoroughly disappointed and remains fully disenchanted.

Jasmine is an enactment of encounter of two cultures, one ancient and the other modern, each illuminating and enriching the other. Bharati Mukherjee has allowed her Indian protagonist Jasmine to interact freely with American culture so that she not only takes but gives as well and by giving she endows a new perspective to the land she inhabits.

The theme of **Jasmine** is an Indian Immigrant’s encounter with the new world and her gradual transformation as she thoroughly imbibes the new culture. At every stage of her life Jasmine revolts against her fate and the path drawn for her. There is a shift of past and present and vice versa as the novel progresses. The present is her life as Jane in Iowa, where she is a live-in-

companion to Bud Ripple Meyer, a small town banker. The past is Jyoti's childhood in the small village of Hasnapur, Punjab, her marriage to Prakash the young ambitious city man, who always thrashed traditions.

The American experience shocks Jane and she is disgusted many a time, she thinks:

This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake one self. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams (Jas – 29).

Her journey through life leads Jasmine through many transformations. While she was in Manhattan for two years, she learns the ways of American family life, husband helping in the kitchen, wife working for longer hours outside and that the young couple could adopt a child and not wait for the natural child. She loves and admires the American world so well. She also understands that clinging on to one's own culture tenaciously while living in an immigrant locale does not help an immigrant in anyway.

Though she becomes more Americanized, more confident of her proficiency in English, her instinctive Indian values do surface now and then. For instance, when she comes to know that Duff is not a natural child but an adopted one, her reactions are culturally revealing.

“I could not imagine a non – genetic child Adoption was foreign to me as the idea of widow remarriage (Jas – 170).

However, she is not unmindful of the positive side of American ethos. She appreciates the Americans for their democracy of thought and their sense of respect even of those doing menial works. The western civilization has a

“work culture” and in this set up everybody is discharging his duty without complex.

Jasmine has experienced the best moments of stay in America in the company of Taylor and Duff who are like family for her. She thinks that she has got an established home and now she will no longer be haunted by rootlessness. Pushpa N. Parekh thinks that Jasmine’s stay at Taylor’s for two years is the most fruitful period of her life in America:

“This period in Jasmine’s life is the most restful and comforting, emotionally and psychologically, intellectually, however, it is a phase of minute observations of complex inner deliberations on, and keen involvement in her new environment (113).

Jane likes Iowa because it is very much like Hasnapur. The farmers of Iowa are very much like the farmers of her own village. The interaction of two cultures is seen in the way Jasmine tries to explain to Taylor her father’s mission in life in terms of Hindu Philosophy and Taylor’s matter-of-fact western reaction to it.

The interaction between two cultures leads to a gradual transformation in the protagonist: She walks American; she dresses American. She says; In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from every thing Indian, everything Jyoti – like (Jas – 145).

Jasmine’s every movement is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in her personality. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but steady immersion into the mainstream American culture. The Assimilation of Jasmine is not so smooth as it might appear on the surface.

Sara Curtis comments: "By the end of the book she is almost American"(436).

Jasmine has reinvented herself and has forged a new identity in the country of adoption. This kind of tendency in Jasmine is the one that contributes wholly to the optimistic end of the novel. An immigrant is one who is reborn in the adopted culture.

Jasmine's acculturation and assimilation into American culture is certainly better than bunkering in nostalgia on remaining torn between two worlds, two cultures, two ways of life and two faiths for a life time.

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