

## Sense Of Alienation And Cultural Conflict In Diasporic Literature: A Study Of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine

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### **Abstract**

*Diasporic writing, particularly Indian Diasporic literature is a byproduct of colonization and decolonization, a time in Indian history when many Indians moved to other nations either as a result of colonization or because they needed to work. The Indian-born writer Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most broadly known immigrant writers in America. In her novels, she explores the theme of expatriation, alienation, cultural conflict, transformation and displacement. The conflict between cultural values and beliefs develops when these differences collide. Cultural conflict means struggle, and hostility between communities who have trusted several philosophies and paths of living. Jasmine, the female protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine, faces the problem of cultural conflict or loss of culture and the quest for a new identity in the US. The present paper will discuss the sense of alienation and cultural conflict in diasporic literature, especially in the novel 'Jasmine' written by Bharati Mukherjee.*

### **Keywords**

*Cultural conflict, Alienation, Diaspora, Identity, Rootlessness.*

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## **Introduction**

The word 'Diaspora' is derived from the Greek word *Diaspeiro*, which means scattering and dispersion of people from their homeland. Diasporic writing has been receiving academic and disciplinary recognition. It has emerged as a distinct literary genre. Many people from India have moved to various foreign countries as "forced exiles" or "self-imposed exiles." Some of them have made a mark in the field of writing. Bharati Mukherjee has discussed the problems and experiences faced by the Indian immigrants in the United States or the Western world. She reflects, on the one hand, her attachment to her motherland and on the other hand, her feeling of alienation and rootlessness. She is one of the most significant contemporary novelists and short story writers whose writings have received worldwide recognition. Diasporic writers depict how immigrants try to adapt to the western society. In the present age of diaspora, one's biological identity can not be one's real identity because due to immigration both physical and psychological changes come.

Diasporic writings, commonly referred to as "expatriate writings," give expression to the traumatic experiences that writers have when they are put on trial due to the clash of two cultures or the racial prejudice they endure. Only a small percentage of immigrants who are successful in integrating into their new physical, cultural, social, and psychological surroundings report enjoying their immigration experience. They are, consciously or unconsciously, consumed by sentiments of nostalgia, a sense of loss, and a need to reinvent home. Every immigrant experiences injustice, inequality, discrimination, biases, prejudices and a threat to cultural identity in the unfamiliar country. Adjusting to the social, economic, political, psychological and environmental changes is also a challenge.

With a mere 150 years old, Indian English literature is a relatively recent testament. It documents a significant change in the globe. In order to express their rebellious and thought-provoking thoughts, writers use literature as their weapon. From we Indians are recognized as the inventors of storytelling, Indian authors have written in a variety of genres like poetry, essays, theatre, and short stories since the pre-independence era. The diverse facets of living abroad are a focus of the Indian diaspora. Many authors, including Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and others, have worked very hard to highlight the immigrant community. A diasporic text can be investigated in terms of location, dislocation and relocation.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1940 in Calcutta, India, to an upper-middle-class, Hindu Brahmin family. She was the second of three daughters. She received her B.A. degree from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and her M.A. in English and ancient Indian culture from the University of Baroda in 1961. In her

novels, she explores the theme of expatriation, immigration, cultural conflict and transformation. Her creative work comprises six novels: *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2002). Her last novel is *Miss New India* (2011). *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* are two of her collections of short stories (1988). Mukherjee felt great relief in America and merged more easily with the life and people around. In contrast to Canada, she thought, America had a more welcoming attitude toward immigrants from India. Canada is a country that resists cultural fusion. Mukherjee states:

“Canada refuses to renovate its national self-image to include its changing complexion. It is a new world country with old world concepts of a fixed exclusivist national identity.”

*(American Dreamer: An Essay from Mother Jones)*

The present paper is an attempt to explore the sense of alienation and cultural conflict in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Jasmine*. *Jasmine* is Mukherjee's third novel published in 1988. It reveals a more positivistic approach to the problem of immigration. After Mukherjee immigrated to the US, she wrote *Jasmine*, a moving account of survival, cunning, compromises, losses, and changes necessary for acculturation to American culture. *Jasmine*, the female protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is faced with the problem of loss of culture and endeavoring to assume a new identity in the US. The novel focuses on *Jasmine*, an underage village girl from Punjab, who ventures as an undocumented woman and as a widow to the United States, where her fate will be 'rewritten'. The novel has a non-chronological order of events creating a rather cinematic effect, which makes it hard to follow the shifts in location and time. The narration is in first person and the time and setting are Baden.

In *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee tries to unravel the difficult layers of cross-cultural reality, through a series of adventures, which the heroine undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. Her struggle represents the irrational search of a rootless individual who is stirred by an oppressive sense of loneliness all around them. The story opens with the village astrologer, under the banyan tree, foretelling Jyoti's 'widowhood and exile'. Jyoti belongs to a society where “bad luck dogged dowryless wives, rebellions wives, barren wives. They fell into wells, they got run over by trains, they burned to death heating milk on kerosene stoves”. (*Jasmine*, p.4)

In both inner and extrinsic aspects, alienation appears as a natural outcome of the existential dilemma to approach and analyze. A condition of the mind, alienation

is described as such in a dictionary of literary terminology as “the state of being alienated or estranged from something or person.” The English word Alienation is derived from the Latin word alienate, a noun that receives meaning from the verb alienate, which means to make things for others, or to avoid. Alienation is one of the greatest problems in diasporic literature. Its corrosive impact can be seen in the form of generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the absence of meaningful life and so on.

Bharati Mukherjee’s voice has increasingly gained special attention in Contemporary Modern English Literature. She moved from place to place, nation to nation. This has been observed and stated clearly by Fakrul Alam as follows:

“She has produced fiction not only about uprooted individuals, but the anguish of expatriation and the inevitable frustrations felt by immigrants trying to cope with loveliness and an often-hostile culture but also about the excitement of immigration, the sense of rebirth and the expectations of a better that are part of the immigrant experience.” (*Bharati Mukherjee*, p. 9)

Mukherjee had a strong desire to express the shifting tensions and complexities of an immigrant in an alien land. In her fiction, her women characters are seen struggling to obtain a footing in a new world and redefining for their values, the beliefs and the quests for an identity in a world that is rapidly changing. Alienation, identity crisis, and cultural clashes are some of the themes that characterize contemporary fiction. Mukherjee’s women who migrate can not accurately imitate the original. As a consequence, they suffer from ‘culture shock’. When someone relocates to a completely new environment, they often experience uneasiness, which is referred to as culture shock. She has repeatedly asserted in her interviews and essay that America has always been a country of immigrants, which means that any one central dominant culture does not exist.

A leading theme throughout Mukherjee’s novels is the cultural conflict and how it affects identity. Mukherjee states, “Culture clashes and coalescences have always been very important in understanding who we are as people and as individuals. Imperial literature, post-colonial literature, ‘first-contact’ literature in North America- just to name a few sub-genres have spoken about the importance of addressing the process of specific cultural encounters.” (*Harper Collins*)

The novel presents Jasmine as a young girl, in a traditional Indian society in Hasanpur and restricted by patriarchal gender customs. The protagonist, Jyoti in this phase of her life is introduced to readers as follows: “Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasanpur, an astrologer cupped his ears- his satellite dish to the stars- and foretold my widowhood and exile” (*Jasmine*, p.3). In Jasmine’s

initial move, from Hasanpur to Jullundhar after her marriage to Prakash, she is subject to male dominance, and this continues to be the case throughout the novel. Prakash is an educated man with a liberal mind.

Through Jasmine Bharati Mukherjee critiques the American society and exposes the inner reality of American life. Jasmine's voice is the dilemma of an uprooted creature seeking for belongingness in a place where relationships are plastic rather than lasting. Finally, she settles into a live-in-relationship with a middle-aged divorcee, Bud the banker. Here we see a marked change in Jasmine's attitude.

Bharati Mukherjee has also explored the positive and negative aspects of multiculturalism faced by her characters. She places her protagonists in a variety of cultural settings where they find different races, cultures, traditions and different ethnic backgrounds. This study has dealt with the Indian diaspora and its further consequences is cross-cultural conflict and a sense of alienation. She has explored the issues of cultural conflict in her particular era and time.

### Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee, an immigrant writer, made a conscious effort to depict the idea of immigrants in her works as heroic individuals battling valiantly to successfully reestablish themselves in a foreign cultural environment. The home and dislocation appeared again and again as the central themes in the writings of Indian Diasporic writers. The diasporic experience is frequently rooted in memory—a recollection of loss, of leaving one's homeland, of feeling no soul connection to one's new country. As a result, diasporic literature consistently serves as a sort of cultural bridge.

The present paper depicts Bharati Mukherjee's portrayal of different issues of diasporas in her novels. In her novels, Mukherjee presents the disturbed life in the moved land through the characters however they are transiently, culturally removed.

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