

DYNAMICS OF TRANSNATIONAL IMMIGRATION IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVELS**DR. SUSHIL A. DESHMUKH**Assistant Professor,
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Baramati, Dist. Pune, Maharashtra**ABSTRACT:**

Human migration influences the modern world. Immigration means migrating from one's land of birth to a foreign country. Migration is hardly a smooth process in which a person, in order to find a more prospective life. In her novels, Bharati Mukherjee deals with the problems of migrancy and its ensuing ramification on migrant people pertaining to their identity crisis and feeling of estrangement in the adopted country. Bharati Mukherjee is keened to portray the volatile conflicts and complexities of a migrant in an alien land. Mukherjee's heroines have removed the domestic constraints to reach beyond the geographical limits of the country itself. Mukherjee has fused her own experiences as an expatriate and as an immigrant to create a new consciousness for her women characters who face the trauma of dislocation at multiple levels.

Keywords: Migration, Bharati Mukherjee, Expatriate Consciousness, Dislocation)**Introduction:**

It is widely believed that whether desired or not 'human migration' influences the modern world like never before. Millions of people move outside their countries of birth in search of jobs, a new home or simply a secure place to live. Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are subjected to displacement both geographically as well as culturally. Literature of diaspora deals with the narratives of individuals who experience the pain of immigration and dislocation. Immigration roughly speaking, means migrating from one's land of birth to a foreign country. This migration culminates from choice and the intensity of choice rests on the social status of the immigrant. Notwithstanding to the degree of their choice, whether self-imposed or forceful, the immigrants are always at the crossroads in the host country. To simply put, migration is hardly a smooth process in which a person, in order to find a more prospective life, decides to pull up his or her roots in the place of origin and quickly becomes assimilated in the new country. Much more often migration is a tedious process affecting the migrant in many ways (Castles and Miller). More significantly, migration experience varies in accordance with men and women. In her novels, Bharati Mukherjee deals with the problems of migrancy and its ensuing ramification on migrant people pertaining to their identity crisis and feeling of estrangement in the adopted country. The pain of immigration and dislocation and the perennial longing for one's homeland is reflected in her works. Her

writings expose the problematic situation of the immigrants who are deeply rooted in their country of origin. On the flip side, Mukherjee sheds light on the integration of the immigrant in the foreign culture. The present research paper attempts to analyse the novels of Bharati Mukherjee to investigate the transnational dynamics of migration in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. The study aims to explain the forces underlying the individual decision to move from one social setting to another one. The protagonists in her novels are women immigrants enduring extensive trials and tribulations, isolation, alienation, and frustration as they try to create their own space in the newfound world. In most cases, they must get into multiple identities. Mukherjee herself faced difficulties with her identities first as an exile from India, then as an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States. Obviously, her writings highlight this identity crisis resulted from dislocation. Almost all the female protagonists in Mukherjee's novels engaged in the "nuanced process of *rehousement* after the trauma of forced or voluntary *unhousement* (Mukherjee).

Mukherjee's novels imbued with the push-pull theories of migration. The causes of migration in her novels consist in a composition of 'push factors', obliging female protagonists to move out of the place of origin, and 'pull factors', alluring them to a land of plenty. Her characters choose to uproot themselves from their native country. The heroin of her first novel, Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter*, is sent to America for education by her father. The fear for the safety of his daughter and fascination for the Western world acted as the reasons behind Tara's transnational dislocation to Poughkeepsie, in the United States where life is all different. She is unable to find connections with the American culture and she experiences a 'double shock' with her return to India. Here, the immigrant has not submitted to a geographical transition but also endured an internal changeover. *The Tiger's Daughter* graphically recounts Tara's dislocation and cultural in-betweenness. Home, for her, is an elusive place (Huang). In *Wife*, marriage act as a basis for the protagonist's migration to the States. Dimple Basu, the heroine of *Wife*, marries Amit Basu, an engineer who is about to immigrate to the United States. Dimple's family show consideration, while marrying her off, to Amit's prospects of going to America. Dimple who initially does not like to go to North America, agrees to marry Amit as she sees opportunities in her migration. She fancies to live a life of economic success, social freedom, and independence from extended family responsibilities. Her fantasies shift from the glamorous lives of movie stars to her own life as she imagines it will be in the new country (O'Neil).

In *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee exhibits the true assimilation of an immigrant in the American culture. The novel put in a nutshell the spirit of twenty-first-century mass migration and dislocation. Jasmine's dislocation happens due to her husband's unfortunate death in a fire bombing. Only seven years old, Jasmine is introduced as 'fast and venturesome'. The weird village astrologer forecast her widowhood and exile life. After this, she is exposed to a life full of continual movement and transformation. With her marriage to Prakash, a 'city man', who plans to find job in America, Jasmine rejects the barriers of traditions and gender roles assign to a woman. When Prakash is killed before their eventual emigration to America, Jasmine decides to make the journey on her own to fulfill her husband's dream. She undergoes a complete evolution when she enters the alien American culture and moves through an oscillating series of painful and joyful experiences. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist constantly shuttles between her identities ascribed to her dislocation. In the course of the novel, we witness the heroine Jyoti, born in a small village of Hasnapur, transforms into

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Jasmine, (named again by her city based husband), a spilt-tongued Kali (murdering Half-Faced who raped her), Jazzy (illegal immigrant in Florida), Jyoti again (staying in an enclave of Indians in Flushing), Jase (working as the “day mummy” to the adopted daughter of liberal Manhattan couple), and finally Jane (as the mistress of Bud, an Iowan banker).

In *Desirable Daughters*, migrant experience enables the protagonist to cut loose from her Indianness and enjoys complete social, financial, and sexual freedom. Once again, marriage acts as a driving force for the protagonist’s moving out from her place of origin. Tara, the heroine of the novel, leaves India immediately after her marriage with Bishwapriya Chatterjee who goes on to become Bill Gates of South Asian community in Silicon Valley. The novel begins with the wedding scene of Tara Lata, the tree bride. At the age of five, Tara the daughter of Jay Krishna Gangooly has to marry a sundari tree to avoid the ignominy of widowhood. Tara’s gradual Americanization allows her to pursuit happiness and exercise her free will. She not only divorces her husband but also gets into a live-in relationship. Tara embarks on roots retrieval when an imposter poses as her sister’s illegitimate son. To unravel the truth about her lineage, Tara returns to India to visit her ancestral village Mishtigunj. In the process she also comes to know the story of her great grandmother, the Tree Bride.

Mukherjee moves forward the story of *Desirable Daughters* in her next novel, *The Tree Bride*. Tara’s exploration of her heritage and identity leads her to the story of her name sake, Tara Lata Gangooly, the Tree Bride. For Tara, getting back to her roots is an atonement for her discarding cultural conditioning. In this novel Bharati Mukherjee deals with the issues of colonialism and assimilation of white men into Indian culture. Both *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are infused with autobiographical elements of the writer. Mukherjee, like Tara, exhibits strong cultural bonding with her homeland and culture. The novel depicts the cultural dislocation of Indian people attributed to the Macaulayism in India, and the systematic wiping out of traditional and ancient Indian education system (Kampfner). “Homing desire” of a diaspora is another theme of the novel as Tara set herself on “America-styled root-search”.

In her last novel, *Miss New India*, Bharati Mukherjee focuses on the theme of internal migration and transnational migration. Again, like other novels of the novelist, matrimony acts as the motivating force for Anjali’s dislocation. In order to escape from the oppressiveness of arranged marriage Anjali leaves Gauripur. As a consequence of disastrous encounter with her prospective bridegroom, Anjali sets off to Bangalore for shaping her future. The novelist depicts the influence of Western ideals on the young generation in India. Mukherjee also builds up some of the problems raised in her earlier novels, such as the process of “unhousement” and “rehousement,” the reinvention of identities, and the awakening of the female migrant characters to self-empowerment. Anjali, the heroine of *Miss New India*, leaves a city where she was brought up and starts a new live in Bangalore which is way different from her native place. Although set in India, American culture and values plays a decisive role in this novel.

A close analysis of selected novels by Bharati Mukherjee reveal that in her earlier novels, women migrants go through the immigrant experience as ‘dependents’ and subjects of ‘family reunification’. Dimple Basu in *Wife* and Tara Chatterjee in *Desirable Daughters* enter the migration flows merely as ‘passive’, ‘tied’, or associative movers. The novels highlight

the supremacy of patriarchal frameworks present in the process of migration. While accepting the grooms chosen by their parents and moving out to the U.S., Dimple and Tara accept the supposed passive and secondary role of women as migrant. Unlike their husbands, these women have to cope with the social/psychological consequences of migration like the sense of dislocation, alienation, and loss of sense of belonging while attempting to find their way about in the new situation. In their process of migration Dimple in *Wife*, and Tara in *Desirable Daughters* accepts their structural position in the patriarchal society.

Whereas, Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* and the title character in *Jasmine* reject the barriers of tradition as well as patriarchal domination. Most of the women characters in Mukherjee's novels are born and bred in India but they are either sent or choose to live in America. Tara Banerjee in *Tiger's Daughter* is sent by her father for education. Dimple, the protagonist in *Wife*, marries an engineer and moves to New York City. Jasmine fulfills her childhood forecasting by crossing "the black waters" to the United States. The heroine in *Desirable Daughters* is well-educated and from an affluent family. Unlike her two sisters, Tara agrees to the marriage arranged by her patriarchal father. She weds an immigrant Bengali engineer and moves out of India to the United States.

Bharati Mukherjee is keen to portray the volatile conflicts and complexities of a migrant in an alien land. In the process of migration, an immigrant find himself or herself into double jeopardy. He or she not only undergoes the process of physical relocation but also experience at first a sense of loss, dislocation, alienation, and isolation, which, eventually, make possible his or her assimilation into the host country. Tara, in *The Tiger's Daughter* undergoes not just a physical dislocation but also a psychological dislocation. Her marriage to David Cartwright, a foreigner, puts her between two cultures leading to her loneliness and alienation and even after her love marriage "Madison Square was unbearable" because "her husband was after all a foreigner" (*The Tiger's Daughter* 117). Even before her marriage to David, Tara experiences alienation as she has to adjust with the new surroundings and culture. When her roommate refuses to share food with her, Tara thinks she is discriminated for her being an Indian. In order to assimilate into American society, Tara gives up her Indian modes of life. Her marriage to David Cartwright, an American, does not provide her any comforts because of their cultural differences. Slowly she begins to suffer from an identity crisis. Even after seven years of her marriage, Tara fails to integrate fully in the Western ways of life. All this ended with her returning to India after ten years of her marriage. However, this going back home doesn't turn out a simple return to familiarity. She finds herself even more alienated in the country of her birth. Because of her stay in America, Tara fails to see India through the same spectrum that she once used to. On the contrary, she observed India with the keenness of a foreigner. Tara feels like a foreigner in her own country because of her off the grid with people and things back home. Her seven years stay as an American migrant blockaded her the Indian culture and traditions though she is not fully assimilated in the host country i.e. in America.

A close analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's writings along with the personal background of the author also reveal that most of the female protagonists in Mukherjee's novels are very much similar to the writer herself. There are many parallels between Mukherjee's real-life stories and the fictional stories. Exploring immigrant's experience of dislocation, Mukherjee has fused her own experiences as an expatriate and as an immigrant to create a new

consciousness for her women characters who face the trauma of dislocation at multiple levels. Talking about the autobiographical impulse in her works, Mukherjee says, “I feel that I am invested, metaphorically, in every single character in each of the books” (Desai, Barnstone and Mukherjee).

Each of Mukherjee’s novels is a sort of way station in her personal Americanization. The external similarities between protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright in *Tiger’s Daughter* and Bharati Mukherjee Blaise show that she based much of the book on her own experiences. Like Tara, Mukherjee was raised in wealthy Hindu family and was sent abroad for education to the states. Mukherjee’s parents wanted her to marry a boy of their choice which is identical with Tara’s parents wish. However, Tara the narrator in *Tiger’s Daughter* marries a man of her choice just like the author herself, who got married with the fellow students at Iowa. In one of her interviews Mukherjee tells how her father identified himself with the portrait of Tara’s father Tiger Banerjee (Meer). Mukherjee wrote *The Tiger’s Daughter* when she was an expatriate and she found that life in Calcutta has changed enormously. Towards the end of the novel, when she is stranded in a car surrounded by a violent mob, Tara realizes that she is an expatriate who cannot go home again. Even the heroine in *Jasmine* is based loosely on Mukherjee’s life. Both of them had horoscopes that predict their exile. Jasmine’s odyssey to America and her continuous changing the places is drawn on the similar line of the author who lived all over the world before settling down to New York.

To conclude, it has been found from the above study that Bharati Mukherjee’s novels are deeply rooted in the theme of immigration. Her characters found themselves deracinated from a culture of origin and re-rooted in an alien culture. Being uprooted from their home culture and trying to adapt to the new culture is a time consuming and tiresome process. It requires, on the immigrants’ part to be resilient and resourceful at this critical moment of their life. They have to adjust, to adopt and assimilate which by itself is a new experience to them. The characters in Mukherjee’s fiction are people who are dislocated from their native place. They become immigrants in America who like the author have a pre-history. Being an immigrant herself, Mukherjee faithfully records the episodes of assimilation and alliance that resulted from the cultural obligations of immigrants and their intersections with the unknown forces of the new world. Through the female protagonists in her novels, Mukherjee shows how far the sphere of Indian woman’s life may be extended beyond the quiet walls of the house. Mukherjee’s heroines have removed the domestic constraints to reach beyond the geographical limits of the country itself. Beside exposing the complex personal and cultural negotiation that Indian women immigrant face as they struggle to adapt themselves in alien country, Mukherjee also constructs a personal mythology of immigration and assimilation in her writings. As a writer she deliberately presents her characters abandoning the old order and embracing the new. Her characters take risk while entering into new culture by putting aside some of the old customs and the traditional roles. “My characters,” says Bharati Mukherjee, “want to make it the new world. Although they are often hurt or depressed by the setbacks in their new lives and occupations, they do not give up. They take risk they wouldn’t have taken in their old, comfortable worlds to solve their problem. As they change citizenship, they are reborn” (Carb).

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