

Spirituality in the Works of Bharati Mukherjee

Dr. Jyoti Balhara

Assistant Professor, Dronacharya Govt. College, Gurugram

Abstract:

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the popular Indian English writer writing in English. She has been labeled variously. Some critics have called her feminist writer; others are of the opinion that she is a diasporic writer. Basically, she is an Indian born, American novelist who has been widely acknowledged as a voice of expatriate-immigrants sensibility in her personality. We perceive the blending of two cultures that is Indian and the western one. In her style, we find both the Indians and western lifestyle. She has woven her web of writing around religious and spiritual values. India is a land of spiritualism. Spiritual doctrines influence the behavior of people day to day happenings. The vision of spirituality is visible in all the works of Bharati Mukherjee. She spent her childhood and adolescent period in India. She has inherited the spiritual and religious values from her family. The present paper highlights the spirituality and common works of Indian lifestyle.

Keywords: *Expatriate, Immigrants, Sensibility, Spirituality, Doctrines, Vision, Religious*

India is a land of great sheers, saints, gods and goddesses popularly known as 'Devbhumi' where god's love to take birth for the welfare of mankind. So it is but natural that literature of this country is saturated with religious and spiritual lives. Graham Green has well said that 'a man is made by the places in which he lives (Kumar 94)'. So we cannot separate the man from his surroundings and these surroundings play an active role in conditioning his social, political, geographical and spiritual behavior. T.S. Eliot also believes that there is a close relationship between culture and religion. It is religion of people which makes them culturally different from people of other faith. It is faith that matters a lot in all walks of life. We Indians, are brought up with the sounds and chanting mantras with early in the morning and from cradle to grave.

The main objective of this research paper is to examine the profound effects of migration on human life as migration leads to twofold identity where both cultural and religious surroundings exert an influence on the way the individual recognizes himself. The study enquires about the religious spaces that Indian migrants involve in America. A framework of belongings is amalgamated to sort out the complications associated with these spaces that encircles rituals and relationships. Secondly, the paper throws light on the inherent spiritual nature of humans. Diaspora causes Indian migrants to turn inwards and seek meaning in life and from this point, their spiritual journey begins. In addition to this, the paper also interprets how women in Indian diaspora have staged their culture and religion by following rituals and traditions in their lives. The present analysis mirrors the lives of the diasporic Indian women whose lives have a shared root in certain themes like estrangement or identity. The diasporic Indian females live a silenced and torment life under the burden of a patriarchal society.

The vision of spirituality is clear in all the fictional works of Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee spent her childhood and adolescent period in India. She has inherited the spiritual and religious values from her family and society. It is said that creative writer perceives his world in childhood and adolescent and his all career is an effort to his private world in terms of great public world we all share. This exactly applies in case of Bharati Mukherjee. It is a natural aspect of human life that he/she remembers god and goddess not in the hour of joy but especially in the hour of sorrow. James W. Fowler a renowned American Psychologist in his work *Stages of Faith* gave The Positive Religious and Spiritual Development theory which suggests that an individual's religiousness and spirituality is inspired by the need to meet his psychological demands such as acceptance, competency and predictability. Tara, the protagonist of the *Tiger's Daughter*, remembers mother Kali in times of distress and sufferings. She prayed to goddess Kali for strength and stamina so she would not break down before Americans, 'Kali' who was a mother nursing her infant, serene black, exquisite, and Kali, who was a mother devouring her infant furious, black and excellently smiled at her mischievously. From times immemorial the institute of marriage has been running on the unshaken faith and destiny. Tara is in state of dilemma regarding marriage, her father Dr. Amiya Chakravorti wrote a letter: All your mummy and I can say that this opportunity is heaven-sent. We are modern progressive people; we do not in any way wish to force you into marriage. We shall live the rest of this matter in your hands and of course to fate... do not act with any undue haste, or any degree of unnaturalness. Whatever god does is for the best (Mukherjee 126-127). This idea resembles with the idea of Ashvapati, father of Savitri, regarding her marriage. He says to his queen that it is not wise to muddle with high matters; such matters are always guarded by destiny. Tara's mother Aarti was a religious lady. She wished that worship of Mata Kananbalawould benefit and help in solving the problems of Tara, "Devotees came

to see Mata Kananbala Devi not from all over India, but from America and England as well (Mukherjee 168)". American stand for Materialism but in spite of it they visit to holy places of India.

Life in India is guided and protected by Horoscope-telling gurus and swamis. Charles Sanders Pierce, an American Scientist, logician and philosopher gave the theory of Pragmatic Prospection which puts forward the idea that humans essentially think about the future to guide their present ongoing actions and achieve desirable results. Tara's mother insisted on consulting Palmist and horoscopes to determine the most propitious instant for matters related to life and especially when somebody is planning for abroad. She convinced her daughter saying that all faith leads to the same god, faith is all that counts. (Mukherjee 171). The writer also mentions about fate and Hindu deities in this novel. Tara thought a Hindu was always set apart by the god. The icons before her seemed so exuberant on the silk table cloths that she wanted to rely on them. In a letter to Tara, Aarti writes 'I have told your grandmother (Paternal) that I may not have sons like her, but my one daughter is equal to ten sons. I shall pray to Saraswati for success in life, in your exams. On Saraswati Pooja days remember to wear something yellow, she has always looked after you before.' (Mukherjee 52). Now like her mother, she too believed in miracles and religious experiences. She knew man could walk in fire and sleep on beds of nails (Mukherjee 174).

We are obsessed with divine powers that we all feel powerless before god and think that what has to happen will happen. God has decided everything for us. Here, we can quote Robert Browning that god is in his Heaven and all is right with the world. In Jasmine too, the astrologer cackled, "What is to happen will happen". Bharati Mukherjee comments change in the anatomies of nations or continents are easy to perceive but changes by gods or titans are too subtle for measurement. Is first the human mind suffers premonitions, and then it learns to submit (Mukherjee 7). Jasmine, the narrator of *Jasmine* remembers how an astrologist informed her that she will be widowed and exiled one day and she cannot change her destiny. At that time, she ran away from the astrologer. She fell and a twig cut her forehead. This made it appear as if she has what we call it 'third eye' - the way of seeing things that they others could not. In this story, Jasmine marries Prakash Vijh at the age of fourteen who was an engineering student. They lived their life happily but unfortunately her husband died in bomb explosion and she decided to go abroad to fulfill her husband's dream. Thus Jasmine's life become a life of a girl who is in search of her spiritual quest by changing her name Jyoti Vijh. Jasmine, Jase-Jane and even Kali passing through varied, fearful and adventurous experience finally looking forward to a future in the west towards realization of the social and spiritual dimensions of existence.

The novelist highlights the role of fate and prayer in the novel *wife*. The protagonist of the novel Dimple does not cope up with her fate. Dimple's mother advises her, "You must be satisfied what god has given to you." But use it to your best advantage and prayer to lord Shiva to get an ideal husband. When Amit was in search of job in America Dimple told him, "Don't worry, you will get a job (Mukherjee 52). She said, I pray every night so there is no way you can fail." In a letter to Dimple, Mrs. Dass Gupta advised her I hope you still pray every day and isn't picking up any bad habits from all those influences (Mukherjee 60). Ganga, the sacred river of India is an integral part of Indians. They worshipped it as mother Ganga. No religious rights performed without the water of this river and water of this holy river is considered as Amrit and used in Charanamrit as bhog for god and goddesses. It is desirability of every Indian that after their death the ashes must be scattered in Ganga. Our late prime minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru also desired the same that his ashes must be scattered in the fields where a farmer is doing his hard work and in Ganges which is considered the way of life for every Indian. In this novel *wife*, Dimple's husband Amit wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered over the Ganges (Mukherjee 167)."

In Bharati Mukherjee's work, spirituality is a theme that acts a title role in how the characters perceive closure after a tragedy. Majority of characters in the fictional works of Mukherjee have attempted to explore their inner selves and realize motive within the enormity of experience. Swami Vivekanand, an Indian Hindu monk, thinker and an acclaimed writer in his work. *The Real Nature of Man* States that great is the tenaciousness with which a human holds on to senses. Yet, however worthwhile he may think about outside world in which he lives and moves, there comes a time in the lives of humans and of races when, instinctively, they want to know. "Is this real"? the whole of the spiritual hunt begins with this question and ends with this answer. The character in Mukherjee's work have a unique quest for identity and a connection with divine *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee is intrinsically a tale about spiritual transformation. The narrative follows a young widow who achieves success in reshaping her destiny and discovering happiness. Bharati Mukherjee has taken images directly from Hindu mythical stories with religious and spiritual traces, the stories related to Sita from *Ramayana* and the folk tale of Devi, the mother goddess in her various manifestations like Mansa, Durga, Kali hold a vital role in the works of Mukherjee. Myths serve as the anchors of the life expedition of her woman of courage. Jalal-al-Din Muhammad Rumi, the thirteenth century Sufi Mystical Poet once mentioned "wound" in physical body is a place from where the light enters into the soul. Jasmine met with a star shaped wound while hunting for firewood which eventually becomes her third eye giving her a wide and real perspective of existence itself. She comprehends to

examine future with this third eye as a catalyst between two altogether different cultures with suffering and hope.

The excellent attributes of Gods and Goddesses specifically- Kali, Yama, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva restores the flavor of spiritual India in the works of Mukherjee. She has made her works lively by adding exquisite visual imagery of Hindu mythology and its grandeur. Mukherjee has utilized the term “fusion” to elucidate the spiritual experience of immigrants in America where both immigrants and American whites grow into a third entity together. In viewpoint of David Goggin, an eminent American speaker and author – in order to create a whole new identity one has to be willing to go to war with one self. Mukherjee, *Leave it to me*, has examined the origin of Violence and the nature of existence in the grim saga of the young woman Devi whose keen desire is to know her past. The mystical overtone keep the saga worthy of the temperament that created her. The story makes use of the myth of Hindu Goddess Durga who is associated with safety, strength, motherhood, demolition, creation and warfare. In *Desirable Daughters*, the character of Tara experiences a spiritual moment when she goes back to India with her son and embraces her own culture, conventions and rituals, Tara's journey embarks in America but ends in India, Spirituality is the central theme in Bharti Mukherjee's *Leave it to Me*. The central character Devi's journey is a spiritual endeavour to find her roots in reality. Through her convincing narratives, Mukherjee has attempted to delve into the themes of identity her novels take the shape of meditation on the Indian concept of Karma and the Greek notion of destiny.

The process of immigration as a transformation and as a fresh possibility for the humans frequently redefines Mukherjee's work. While America remains the site for the establishment of identity in Mukherjee's writing, it eventually becomes a re-interpreted global space and not the unified nation state which it earlier has professed to be. All Bharti Mukherjee's heroines go through a transformation in their persona, They are not what we know them in the starting of the novel. Mukherjee has exhibited a peculiar fusion of Indianness and Americanness in Tara, her American self and western culture constantly encounter with her native way of life, which leaves her isolated and estranged in her own land. There seems to be an invisible emptiness that cannot be filled, leaving herself disconnect like any other migrant. She has put up a captivating study of complication of the displaced individual in America as well as in India Mukherjee's *Wife* is an extension of *The Tiger's Daughter*, which overturns the role again understandably delineating the cultural shock that an Indian young woman faces on going abroad. The novel again displays the theme of the shift and estrangement for it delineates the psychological claustrophobia.

In a nutshell, we can say that the fictional world of Bharati Mukherjee is very vast and comprehensive. It is not easy to cover all the works here but some works have been covered up and it shows that the canvas of writing is multi colored reflecting the socio-political, economical, religious and spiritual values which help a being to make his life better so he/she can attain great heights by adopting the good values and rejecting the bad ones which can hamper the growth of individual and society so that the earth can be made a better place to live and love. She does not advise her readers to follow the traditions and beliefs blindly rather she keep a very broad vision encompassing the horizon at zenith. Her heroines are all educated and emancipated women who accept religion as boon and asset not a tool to confine with typical taboos. The leading characters of Bharti Mukherjee embark on brave journey on foreign lands, face many hardships and ordeals but they are not sufferers as they do not accuse but fight with the circumstances quite fearlessly. As an author, Bharti Mukherjee is the storehouse and upholder of experiences which were made possible by migration. The twentieth Century has witnessed migrant movements of various people across national and international boundaries. The causes for migration vary, the destinations be different yet all migrant experiences share certain basic characteristic features. The historical events of migration, beyond everything, is essentially a story of estrangement and it is often with disturbing consequences. The migratory experiences always entail pain, for it involves a permanent split from home and tradition. Even when migration offers new forms of personal liberty, an enhanced material well-being, yet the pleasures are destabilized by a sense of loss, broken identity, spiritual Vacuum.

References:

- [1]. Kumar Veena. *The Geo-Spiritual Setting in the Novels of Graham Green*. Atlantic Publisher, 1996.
- [2]. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Tiger's Daughter*. Penguin books, 1990.
- [3]. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Wife*. Penguin Books, 1987.
- [4]. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. Penguin Books, 1990.