

Glocalisation and Cultural Hybridity in Diaspora Writing with Special Reference to Bharti Mukherjee

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ABSTRACT

Glocalisation is an apt term for the contemporary world. Amusingly, the more global we get; the more local we tend to. The term is a portmanteau of globalisation and localisation which refers to the blending of particularities of a local culture into the global culture. Today, one can witness glocalisation everywhere; be it art, culture, lifestyle, food habits, media, academia, economics and this list is ever-growing. Glocalisation is the simultaneous presence of global culture and local culture. Information technology and easy access of information across the globe has somehow proliferated keen interest of people in local languages and culture. Diaspora writing not only celebrates hybridity and multiplicity but also successfully projects the split psyche of the immigrants across the globe. While living on the borders of two nations, the expatriate writers blend local with global and create new identities who glocalise boundaries and create temporary and spatial metaphors. The present paper not only focuses on Bharti Mukherjee as a celebrated women-novelist of Indian Diaspora who tends to re-interpret the local culture through her fiction but also draws attention to the strong interconnection between the world of words and the contemporary reality. The chronological order of Bharti Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989) not only validates the metamorphosis of the novelist, in particular but also offers a testimony towards the acceptance of glocalisation of culture, in general.

Keywords: Glocalisation, hybridity, multiplicity, displacement, violence.

Bharti Mukherjee is an Indian born American novelist of Indian diaspora. She forcefully declines to submit to the state of exile and celebrates transformation of identity in her new home. Not only she portrays uprooting, migration and re-locating of her protagonists through her novels but also projects the cultural clash, physical/mental/emotional struggle and adversities they face in the process. She is a novelist who looks beyond the physical displacement of her characters from their native lands and strives to project their psychological evolution and cultural assimilation in the foreign land through her literary writing. Quest of identity, cultural clash, nostalgia and identity politics form the core of her craft. The present study takes up Mukherjee's works, namely *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989) with an objective to explore, identify and critically examine the overlapping of cultures, blurring of geographical and psychological boundaries, formation of temporary and spatial metaphors and above all, creation of hybrid identities.

Mukherjee's *Wife* is a tragedy and an outcome of disgruntled desires and dreams of the protagonist, named Dimple. The novel unlocks in the very beginning, her fantasy about marriage to her prince charming, her dreamy desires and expectations from her future married life. Her imaginary world neither has a place for everyday responsibilities as a wife/daughter-in-law nor a concern for mundane struggles of day-to-day living. Though she hopes to get married to a neuro-surgeon but eventually gets married to an engineer, Amit Basu who utterly fails to gratify her wishful dreams of a contented married life.

Sharing a dark and dingy apartment with her in-laws is a kind of dreary burden for her. Neither could she experience contentment in Calcutta nor could she achieve cheerfulness in America. Her husband has to devote long hours in his job and hence, could not devote time to his wife. Consequently, she watches films and daily soaps for unlimited hours to kill her time. A compulsive escapist, as she is, finds solace in the content which has murder as an integral motif. One day, when her husband returns home, she murders him with a sharp kitchen knife. Shockingly, after this horrendous act, she feels secure and calm imagining that her crime will never be caught. Amusingly, she gets inspiration for this deadly act from television serials which depict that generally, murders are

not caught. This is perhaps, her final move which showcases the Americanization of her escapist personality.

Let us now, critically examine the character of Dimple with an objective to extract the elements of alienation, glocalisation and hybridity. She feels restless after her arranged marriage to Amit in her native land (India) and yearns for living in a nuclear family. After reaching her host land (America) she feels out of place and alienated. The couple could not acclimatize to the American life-style. Amit sticks to his patriarchal ideology and expects his wife to bear his children and execute all his commands obediently. While Dimple finds herself in a fix and struggles between conservative/traditional values of her native-land, deeply embedded in her psyche and contemporary/ultra-modern lifestyle of the West. Lack of fluency in American English makes her diffident and adds some humiliating and scary episodes in her life's journey. Food preference is yet another point of concern for her. She willingly attempts to adapt to the new atmosphere and food culture but her Indianness somehow dissuades her path. Unquestionably, she intends to keep her Indianness alive in the foreign land.

Her frustration and anxiety turn her into a murderer of her own husband. This very criminal act breaks down the supposition that she has failed to embrace the foreign land because she perceives his death as a liberation and assimilation in the brave new world of America (Ganesan). The novel brings to the surface the overlapping of language and culture of native land and foreign land coupled with nostalgia and desirable urge to negotiate with the cultural space of the adopted land. Generally speaking, America appears as the land of Golden Fleece but the relocation invites unimaginable complications and hardships and the dreams are shattered (Joshi).

Now moving on to Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, the novel presents the conversion of an illiterate, helpless Indian girl into a self-assured, employed, American unwed-mother. Motifs of violence, deconstruction and reconstruction of protagonist's identity are profoundly embedded throughout the text of the novel. Violence enters into the Jasmine's life soon after her birth when her mother tries infanticide on her newly born daughter. Jasmine considers the attempted infanticide as a liberation and exhibition of love and

concern of her mother towards her as her motive was to protect her girl-child from despotism of patriarchy in future. Also, her mother has been herself a prey to male chauvinism all through her life. A born rebel and defiant as she is, keeps on summoning violence in her life. Not only she strives hard to grasp English language but her love for the language prompts her to tie a nuptial knot with Prakash, a progressive young man. It is he who makes Jyoti recognise the fluidity of her identity in India and hence, changes her name from Jyoti to Jasmine so as to equip her to delink from her past.

Apart from adorning her with a new identity Prakash also ignites in her a yearning to relocate to America. He perceives America as a land of dreams, hope and aspirations. A short spell of happiness in Jasmine's life ends with the accidental death of her husband in a bomb explosion. This casualty indicates the recurrence of violence in her life. The devastating experience of losing Prakash, who ignited and empowered her; snatches away the dream of migration to America from Jasmine. Rebel and adventurous as she is, despite of her husband's death, resolves to move to America alone. She dissipates all her savings, acquires a fake passport and lands in America as an illegal migrant. The motif of violence resurfaces with a vengeance for Jasmine as she has not only to reinvent her identity but also has to compromise with her body at her arrival to her dreamland. She is violated by Half-Face in a motel room in Florida. She retaliates as Kali and murders her violator in the same room and commences her journey towards self-liberation.

While adhering to the cautious advice lend by an American lady, Lilian Gordon; Jasmine entombs her past and attempts to accept the American culture. She starts dressing up in western outfits, adopts American accent, acclimatizes herself to American cuisine and above all, she accomplishes financial independence. She now reaches Manhattan as a care-giver in Wylie's home where her solo intention is to gain acceptance from the family, in general and become desirable to Taylor as Jase, in particular. The story then moves to Iowa where Jase re-titles herself as Jane and encounters violence once again. This time violence creeps in as violent social realities around her.

Let's now critically analyse the protagonist, Jasmine who

deliberately rejects her hyphenated identity as an Indian immigrant in America and intentionally opts for cultural assimilation there. It is pertinent to register a fact here that unlearning of one's past, culture and heritage and re-learning of the dominant culture can take place only through conscious and continuous rejection of one's distinctiveness. The process is distressing, violent and dangerous and assuredly affects the physical, emotional and mental health of the migrant. Unquestionably, Jasmine bears a range of violence in the United States but surely, it has offered her a choice to re-invent herself which could not have happened in India. (Grewal)

Mukherjee passionately believes that people continue to exhibit frozen identities in countries like India whereas the United States offers a fluidity and flexibility on this count. She claims that Jasmine acquires a new identity by consciously deracinating herself (Connell). Each attempt of re-naming herself signifies death of her previous identity and resurrection of a new one. Apart from that she demarcates America as the New world of hope and evolution in contrast to the Old World which indicates stasis and subjugation (Banerjee). Further, the narrative tries to persuade the reader that Jasmine acutely requires America to liberate herself, the thought which is perhaps, not in a good taste in the present perspective.

While comparing the protagonists of the successive novels namely *Wife* and *Jasmine*, we can perceive an upsurge in the metamorphosis in the characters of Dimple and Jasmine successively crafted by Mukherjee. Dimple perhaps, feels like a misfit in the American culture, she experiences insider/outsider syndrome, experiences regression and nostalgia and at the same time strives hard to sustain herself in the alien land. On the contrary, Jasmine not only strangulates her own identity, revives herself in a new incarnation but also moves on in her life without any guilt or burden. Amusingly, Dimple attempts murder of her husband to liberate herself while Jasmine kills her own identity and builds a new one and evolves herself with the passing time.

Let us now pull all the threads together, when local turns global, it necessarily transforms into glocal, a hybrid form which necessarily rests on the blending, amalgamation and merger of two distinct forms. This glocalisation is essentially an outcome of blending of culture, life style, language and literature which eventually

culminates into universal brotherhood and peace. The diasporic literature necessarily brings a deep insight into language, culture and social constructs of the nations and culminates into aesthetic, sensible evaluation and deep understanding of the text. Undoubtedly, Mukherjee's novels, *Wife* and *Jasmine* attempt to break the geographical, political, physical and psychological barriers and bring India/Oriental and America/Occidental closer to each other.

Diasporic writing in the contemporary times commands boundless worth because not only it constructs hybrid identities but also create temporary spatial metaphors during negotiation with the adopted nation. While being engaged with nostalgia for their home land, the migrants struggle to establish themselves in the adopted land. The process of settling down in foreign land is complex because adoption and negotiation with the cultural space happens simultaneously. Dimple and Jasmine through their stories offer their readers a peep into their states namely West Bengal and Punjab respectively and hence, strengthen the unity in diversity of our nation, in particular and India's ties with the other nations, in general. Quite convincingly, Mukherjee not only reflects the multiplicity of culture, language, calamities, opportunities, social paradigms of India through her craft but also attempts to invite a world-wide readership.

Fascinatingly, Dimple and Jasmine experience duality and ambiguity in their lives. They lead complex lives while playing roles of refugees and ambassadors simultaneously in their adopted countries. As refugees, they hunt for security and safety and as ambassadors they desire to project the culture of their native country. The contest and struggle of the characters gives birth to hybrid identities, blended language/culture and diaspora literature. The two roles are in sharp contrast to each other and the act of dual role-play culminates into physical, emotional, psychological and financial struggle for these women and Mukherjee weaves an engaging narrative out of them.

Dimple's identity shows duality and hybridity but it is less intense than Jasmine's. Jasmine's character is intense and complicated as she exhibits multiplicity of identity. Talking specifically about Jasmine, we witness that she endorses the expectations of others (specifically, men) and re-fashions her identity accordingly. Framing new identities, namely, Jasmine/Jase/Jane bears a

testimony to the fact that she owns emotional violence as a compulsive component in her identity. Her act of modifying her identity rests on her Otherness which she employs to create power in her relationship with men (Banerjee). Not only she juggles between identities but also mimics the role of a desirable immigrant. Hence, she plays role within various roles and exploits her oriental exotic appeal for her sustenance.

Through her diasporic writing, Mukherjee discourages past alienation and seclusion and promotes global citizenship through glocalisation of culture and literature. She artistically brings to the surface, the desires, feelings, crisis, worries, fears, struggles, expectations, dreams of her protagonists, in particular and lends voice to the grievances and grudges of all the migrants, in general. With the portrayal of almost real experiences of migrants through her novels, Mukherjee definitely earns catharsis for herself and for her readers. Through her creativity coupled with fertile imagination, she embeds the ancient legends, myths and folklore of her homeland in her texts and transforms local culture into global culture and therefore, accomplishes glocalisation in her writing.

To sum up, Mukherjee's novels scrutinized in this study are creative and engaging documentations of displacement, reformation and cultural hybridity. Unquestionably, diaspora is a complex journey of self-recognition, self-sustainment, self-awareness and self-fulfillment. Cultural hybridity, glocalisation and assimilation emerge only after a series of physical, emotional, social, psychological sufferings and losses.

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