

Diasporic Sensibility In Bharati Mukherjee's Short Story "The World According To Hsu"

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<p>Key Words: Acculturation, Alienation, Assimilation, Diaspora, Discrimination, Expatriation, Immigration, and Racism.</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>The term diaspora means the movement or migration of people from one place to another in search of food, shelter and other essential aspects of life. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the prolific writers in Indian English Literature. She has contributed immensely to the Indian Diasporic Literature. Her literary works reflect the sensibility of the expatriates. Many of her works have revolved around the themes of immigration, alienation, acculturation, identity crisis and so on. Darkness is a collection of short stories in which she portrays the life of immigrants who live in North America. Four of the stories "The World According to Hsu," "Isolated Incidents," "Courtly Vision," and "Hindus" from this collection were written during her stay in Canada. These stories clearly bring out the predicament faced by the expatriates in Canada. From her experience of living both in Canada and U.S.A, she has learnt that America is more favourable destination to Indians. This study aims at an analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's short story "The World According to Hsu," so as to bring out the painful experiences of expatriates in an alien land. She highlights the racial discrimination faced by Indians in Toronto. Ratna, the protagonist has felt the alienation in Toronto. Even before she has settled in Toronto, the fear of discrimination is deeply embedded in her mind. She is willing to live as a foreigner in a small island off the coast of Africa rather than living as an outsider in Toronto for rest of her life. She wants to safeguard her ethnic identity and she does not want to allow the alien culture to smother it. Being an emigrant, Bharati Mukherjee brings out the struggle experienced by the settlers in the process of assimilation to the new culture and it has revealed her diasporic sensibility obviously.</p>
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Introduction

The term diaspora originates from the Greek word diaspeirein which means "to scatter" or "to spread out." Diasporic sensibility refers to a set of cultural, psychological, and social experiences shared by individuals or communities who have dispersed from their original homeland to various alien nations around the world. Diasporic writers are those who live away from the country of their birth. They write poems, novels, stories, articles and memoirs which showcase their own cultural aspects, traditions, and norms which are prevalent in their native country as well as the difficulties faced by the immigrants in the alien land. Some of the salient features of the diasporic writings are dual identity, memory or nostalgia, cultural hybridity, transnational connections and sense of displacement. Diasporic sensibility encompasses the experiences which arise from the migration.

Bharati Mukherjee is an acclaimed Indian-born American writer and Professor, known for her novels, short stories, and essays which explored the themes of immigration, identity, and the experience of the expatriates. She was born on July 27, 1940, in Calcutta, India, and passed away on January 28, 2017. She moved to the United States in the 1960s to pursue her education and eventually became a prominent voice in contemporary literature. Some of her notable works include *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Darkness* (1985), *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), and *Jasmine* (1989).

She received several awards and honors for her contributions to literature, including the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her writing continues to be studied and appreciated for its insightful exploration of complex themes related to immigration and cultural identity.

Darkness is a collection of twelve short stories which reflects Bharati Mukherjee's insights into the treatment of South Asian diaspora in Canada and the USA. In this collection, four of the stories "The World According to Hsu," "Isolated Incidents," "Hindus," and "Courtly Vision" were written during her stay in Canada. The story "The World According to Hsu" also has some autobiographical elements of Bharati Mukherjee. This study aims at an analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's short story "The World According to Hsu," so as to bring out the bitter experiences of immigrants in an alien land. Being a diasporic writer, Bharati Mukherjee presents a series of injustice committed against the immigrants in the host country.

"The World According to Hsu" starts with the couple Ratna Clayton and Graeme Clayton. Ratna Clayton is a house wife and her husband Graeme Clayton is a Professor of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal. Graeme Clayton has been offered the chair of Professor and Head in the Department of Personality Development at the Toronto University. He persuades his wife to move to Toronto but she does not like Toronto as much as Montreal. She compares both Montreal and Toronto and she is afraid of moving to Toronto: "In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell" (35). To her, Toronto is not a better place for the migrants especially the South Asians where they are humiliated worse than other parts of the country. Ratna's fear of Toronto is a result of physical, psychological and emotional detachment from her homeland India and also from Montreal where she has been settled for some years. As of her knowledge about Toronto, she could not live there as an immigrant because of its racial hostility.

Ratna does not like to go to Toronto and she persuades Graeme Clayton to plan a holiday trip to an island at the coast of Africa for the vacation. She desires to get the enjoyment of spending time on the shores of the vast ocean. They have planned to pick shells, feed lemurs on the balcony of a hotel and visit a colonial museum. When they have arrived, they face unexpected problem there. They are caught in the midst of a revolution which constrains them by night curfew and they are forced to stay inside the hotel room. The threat of violence which they witness there, kindles the memories of Toronto in Ratna's mind. She says: "I'm not worrying about this island," A week before their flight, a Bengali woman was beaten and nearly blinded on the street. And the week before that an eight-year-old Punjabi boy was struck by a car announcing on its bumper: KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI" (41). Ratna is in a bad mood, so Graeme cheers up her by saying: "Toronto's the safest city on the continent" (42) and she replies: "Sure," "for you" (42). Graeme Claytons' professional advancement surely makes his wife happy but she could not accept the dislocation of them. When he convinces her to accept Toronto as a safest city, her quick and sharp response reveals her aversion towards the city where the racism is practiced widely according to her. She accuses him for being selfish and his inability to understand her emotional state. Graeme could not pacify her and she thinks of the hostile attitude of the natives against the immigrants. Another event comes to her mind which happened to an Indian Professor's wife: "An Indian professor's wife was jumped at a red light, right in her car. They threw groceries on the street. They said Pakis shouldn't drive big cars" (42). This incident reveals the racial hatred of Torontonians towards the immigrants especially the South Asians whom they call as Pakis.

Ratna feels that it is better not to leave Montreal where she is only a dark skinned Indian or foreigner instead of a Paki as in Toronto. Though there is curfew in the island, she is not afraid of the violence outside the hotel. She feels happy in her delay to depart to Toronto. She enjoys her dinner with other tourists without any discrimination. Her ability to enjoy dinner with other immigrants and tourists amidst the violence outside the hotel illustrates that she is very much concerned about dignity and respect not with fighting. The immigrant life of Ratna revolves around the incidents of racial discrimination in Canada. The hatred of certain racist Canadians affects her psyche harshly. Though she does not want to go Toronto, she has to follow her husband's way. Many of the Indian women believe that the perfect place for the married women in India is her husband's home. There is no other place is better for them than to reside along with their husbands. This shows the innate cultural belief of Ratna who likes to follow the wishes of her husband for the sake of the harmony of the family.

Many of the tourist spots like the zoo, the museum, the mission school are closed because of the curfew. Finally, Justin, the tourist guide has asked, "If you like, we can drive past the Indian shops"

(44). At the Indian shop, Ratna has felt safer than her stay in the subway stations of Toronto. When it is time, they have left for the hotel in which they stayed. Justin's casual suggestion to stop by at the Indian shops gives Ratna some unexpected comfort and cultural connection and this simple gesture gives her sense of familiarity and safety. Ratna feels safe near the Indian shops than in the subway stations. She feels the solidarity and fraternal feeling among the Indian migrants. She hates racism and she does not like the racists.

At the dinner table, Ratna orders "the National Dish" (48) for her supper. Her husband Graeme reads her an article by Kenneth J. Hsu about the geological collision of the continents from his copy of Scientific American. Graeme says: "According to Hsu" he said, "the last time the world was one must have been about six million years ago. Now Africa and Asia are colliding. India got smashed into Asia—that's why the Himalayas got wrinkled up. This island is just part of the debris" (49). She questions Graeme: "Why did the Black Sea have to drain? Why did the continents have to collide? Why did they have to move to Toronto?" (51) These questions reveal her deep emotional vacuum and these are not merely the scientific questions instead they are the cries of frustration about the colonial, patriarchal and racial politics. Her last question about Toronto is something personal too. For her the movement to Toronto is not a happy venture but a traumatic one. Instead, she is happy to live as a foreigner in a small island off the coast of Africa rather than living as an outsider in Toronto for the rest of her life. Ratna expresses her displeasure over her movement to Toronto to experience a different kind of collision that is racial and cultural. She could not accept any reason regarding her entry to Toronto. In the hotel, she could sit and listen to other guests who converse in a same second language and they are the same non-islanders like her. No one treats her as a foreigner and all are the same there. The island becomes the refuge for Ratna, and it is a place where racism is not practiced and it provides comfort to her. No one calls her Paki in the island, and if she enters into Toronto, she will be treated as Paki.

Graeme has tried his level best to persuade Ratna to reside in Toronto and he pleads her to do so. Finally, she accepts her situation when she has realized the Indian notion that a good married woman has to live with her husband. And also, she feels it strongly that "no matter where she lived, she would never feel at home again" (51). No place on this earth will be the home to her, wherever she lives, she will never feel home again. There is always a feeling of otherness for those who have come to Canada and USA from South Asia. Thus, Bharati Mukherjee has portrayed skillfully the pain of immigrant's life in their host country.

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