

A FIJIAN READING OF BHARATHI MUKHERJEE

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Dr. Kamala Lakshmi Naiker, the author of **A Fijian Reading of Bharathi Mukherjee**, emphasizes this book's purposiveness in her *preface*. It is to demonstrate the pleasures of reading fiction which habit has effaced itself from students. Her desire is to expose her to the dilemmatic situations migrant women are embroiled. This exposes the author's beliefs that would instil humanism and a penchant for both pleasure and intellectual embellishment in readers.

The first chapter, which is the *Introduction*, speaks of the author's resolve to probe into the subjugation, oppression, marginalization, violence against women and gender-related issues. These eventually prompted her to choose a woman author to facilitate herself to pursue further. Initially, Kamala Lakshmi intended to concentrate on Fiji / South Pacific writers. However, it turned out to be quite fleeting, and she preferred to pay attention to writers of Indian descent in the diaspora. This craze landed her hands on Bharati Mukherji's **Wife** (1975) and her generation of interest in the author and further study on her. It is Bharati Mukherjee's presentation of hyphenated identity that constitutes Dr. Kamala Lakshmi's study. She relates women's predicament to Fiji, which is prompted by her reading of Bharati Mukherji's **Wife**. Bharati's Indianness coupled with her life in Canada and later in America tied Dr. Kamala to Bharati's diasporic novels texturized with women's problems in distant lands – both physical and psychological.

The author of the thesis convincingly states the consonance between “the nature of hyphenated identity in Bharati Mukherjee's novels and Michael Walzen's book **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN AMERICAN** (1992). That the hyphenation is doubled in America in the case of the culture and ethnicity of the diasporic community constitutes the paradigm of her thesis is well felt and understood, and her associating it with Fiji is a penetrative research point. The individual identity and the modification in the categorization of rationality are the aspects Dr. Kamala Lakshmi has taken cognizance of. This recognition has helped her realize that the hyphenated identity is a facilitator aiding the process of making the transition of migrants easier. Taking care of Michael Walzer, Dr Kamala posits her probe into the original identity concern in Bharati Mukherji's novels and moves further to look into the hyphenated identity. She vivifies this process until the end of the *Introduction*. This vivification posits her on feminism with its complexities in Bharati Mukherjee's novels. The Management encounter with the others that women resort to in life is reflected in the later novels of the author researched. Dr. Kamala identifies that Bharati's

novels show women gaining power and not acting as pawns of “feminist rhetoric”. As regards Bharati’s language, Dr. Kamala finds a blend of vision with it. She concludes her Introduction by stating that there is a diasporic connection between Bharati Mukherjee and the female writers in Fiji.

Chapter II, entitled *A stepping stone*, speaks of the researcher’s finding of two significant anthologies of literature in the South Pacific region.

Indo-Fijian Experience and **Lali** – She refers to **South Pacific Literature** that facilitated access to extensive bibliography to ease her research. Her fixing attention on Bharati Mukherjee preceded the occasion of the emergence of new regional publications from Sia Fiegel, Shalini Akhil, Lani Wendt and Kavita Nandan. The researcher takes cognizance of the name-change problem highlighted in Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine* and *the Holder of the world*, particularly when the protagonists return to India. The problem with diasporic writers with a particular accent on Bharati Mukherji is that, in order to be American, they abandon their Indian culture and traditions. Casting aside caustic critics of Bharati Mukherji, Kamala Lakshmi notices the irony of Bharati Mukherji’s discordance between “cherishing noble principles and adaptation of American Customs”. The researcher is able to perceive the difference between V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee (both from the third world) in the sense that the former could not find a home while the latter did it in a positive. The comparative observation makes the researcher place Bernard Malamud and Bharati Mukherjee for their similarities. The former confines with Jewish immigrants, and the latter deals with newcomers from the third world. There is a projection of the difficulty of Indian girls’ in the matter of self-identification in Bharati Mukherjee, says the researcher. Mukherjee’s belief in Hinduism and classical Indian culture. This conviction of Bharati Mukherjee is elaborated in the thesis with reference to her novels.

Further, the researcher analyses Bharati’s projection of the psychological consequences of Indian women migrants. The crunch of this chapter hinges on the sync between the Indian cultural traditions of India and new learning imposed by British colonists accounting for her women’s psychic transformations.

Chapter III enlightened on the methodology adopted in the thesis – critical evaluation of symbolic and actual violations in the transformations of identities in Bharti Mukherji’s women protagonists. The researcher believes that the psychological consequences of migration on women migrants will be a kind of exploration.

Chapter IV, entitled *Home Again*. Dr. Kamala Lakshmi Naiker takes to deal with Bharati Mukherjee’s **The Tiger’s Daughter** – its theme of Home and Exile, western feminism and cross-cultural conflict.

The domination of patriarchy constitutes the content of chapter V which revolves around the novelist’s second novel **wife**. The researcher juxtaposes the status of old and new women migrants. Doing so, the researcher points out that Indian women are colonized _____” in the colonial era by the British administrations and then later by men of their society”. This raises the question of whether there was no patriarchy during British rule. The researcher’s argument is that culture and ideology create feminine identity. She brings out the immigrant woman’s complex lifestyle and social disorientation.

It is pointed out that the novel has many dimensions – feminism, refugee status, the conflict between two cultures and the quest for self-identification. Dr. Kamala Lakshmi Naiker points out that women are capacitated to make the right decisions for themselves, as evidenced by the protagonist in *Jasmine*. Defying the age-old traditions, *Jasmine* dictates her terms to achieve her desires. There is elaborate vivification of the moves of *Jasmine*, the protagonist. The thesis writer draws her attention to women’s self-acceptance, which is an indispensable imperative. Another aspect quite singular in the novel is that the process of creating one’s identity is perpetual to the multi-

consciousness of women protagonists. Hence there is continuous transformation and evolution with completeness proving eternal. The difficult route to selfhood in the diasporic atmosphere is discussed here.

Bharati Mukherji's **The Holder of the World** posits that the situation in the late 17th century is a white woman's search for independence and meaningful life. This discussion is entitled *journey into coromandel coast*. The researcher exposes the fact of the novel challenging the reader's notions regarding discrete periods of history, culture and ethnicities. The two-time frames in the novel – the 17th and 20th centuries – collapse into one. However, one notices the researcher's silence over the 18th and 19th centuries. This chapter counters disturbance owing to the redundancy of certain ideas already introduced at the outset. A detailed textual analysis of the formalistic kind is what one finds here. The researcher observes that New America is what the novelist wants to effectuate in the minds of readers.

Finally, this thesis (rendered in book form) lets the reader know the conventional views held so far about the migration of women. Eventually, their diasporic state needs to be altered. Hence, there are de-constructions without intent by the novelist, which emerges to establish under the eyes of penetrative research as has been done by Dr. Kamala Lakshmi Naiker.

Reviewed by

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