# Mukherjee's Diasporic Vision

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## Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee is a foundational figure in Indian diasporic writing, articulating a specific trajectory of change—immigrant longing breaking open into engaged assimilation. Her novels follow the fluid selves of women negotiating to make sense out of the ambivalences of migration, cultural displacement, and gendered dislocation. This section discusses Mukherjee's diasporic imagination along five axes: her own emigrant history and its impact upon her fiction; the ideology of shift from mourning to rediscovery; her position in Indian-American and feminist discourse; the political and aesthetic tactics which locate her as a literary resister; and lastly, thematic description of her chosen novels—Jasmine, Desirable Daughters, and The Tree Bride. Together, these components illustrate Mukherjee's subtle construction of postcolonial identity, where diasporic life is not loss of home but a site of revolutionary redefinition.

## Biographical Sketch and Personal Migration Trajectory

Bharati Mukherjee's own life reflects the transnational nuance she so richly writes into her fiction. Born in Calcutta in 1940 to an upper-middle-class Bengali Brahmin family, Mukherjee grew up within a conservative but intellectually rich environment. Her initial education in India gave her a profound respect for tradition and literary heritage, but her eventual emigration to the West triggered a radical ideological shift that shaped her creative vision. She also studied graduate-level English and creative writing at the University of Iowa, where she married the Canadian author Clark Blaise—a move that initiates her personal and political separation from dogmatic cultural demands (Mukherjee, qtd. in Gómez 69). Mukherjee's immigration to Canada during the 1960s, then to the United States during the 1980s, was both a literal and a metaphorical crossing. Her early Canadian years were spent in a state of alienation and institutional racism. Mukherjee herself defined the Canadian model of multiculturalism as "a polite apartheid" wherein non-white immigrants were tolerated but never accepted fully (Alfonso-Forero 43). This disillusionment had a deep impact on her early work, including The Sorrow and the Terror, a journalistic report co-written with Blaise on the Air India bombing, which revealed the vulnerability of diasporic identity in North America. The ideological path of Mukherjee's writing took a radical turn once she settled permanently in the United States. Contrary to her critique of Canadian multiculturalism, she welcomed American pluralism with fervent approbation. This transformation is evident in her assertion that she had gone from "expatriate to immigrant" and finally to "naturalized citizen" (Alfonso-Forero 44). Mukherjee moved away from the passive nostalgia for homeland found in previous diasporic texts and instead glorified the intrusive, even brutal, acts of incorporation. Her characters were no longer mere victims of dislocation—a dramatic departure from the melancholy note of much postcolonial literature. This autobiographical turn influenced her narrative structure and thematic interest directly. Mukherjee's characters frequently resemble her own migrant experience, crossing geographic and psychological boundaries. In Jasmine, for example, the eponymous heroine assumes multiple selves as she travels from India to America, mirroring the author's understanding of fluid, constructed selves (Deshmukh 60). Correspondingly, Desirable Daughters presents a semi-autobiographical reinterpretation of generational and geographical dislocation, depicting India not as a paradisal loss but as a cultural object to be sharply questioned. Mukherjee's own migration story—from a grounded Bengali woman to a transnational feminist intellectual—gives her literary imagination credibility and energy. Her diasporic condition enables her to write not only of movement across borders but of transformation across identities. This dualism renders her one of the most important voices in Indian American literature and a key player in the redefinition of diasporic subjectivity.

## Ideological Shift: From Nostalgia to Assimilation

Bharati Mukherjee's ideological journey from nostalgia to assimilation is perhaps the most identifying feature of her diasporic fiction. This transformation was not in a vacuum but influenced by personal experience and changing socio-political contexts in Canada and the United States. Unlike most diasporic writers who are still bound to the homeland by the literary gaze of loss, nostalgia, and cultural retention, Mukherjee later broke away from the melancholic tale of exile in favour of the more confident celebration of transformation and mixed identity. During her initial Canadian period, Mukherjee's writing showed a feeling of alienation and emotional displacement. Her Canadian short fiction—e.g., that in Days and Nights in Calcutta—illustrates a cultural in-between that puts the immigrant subject into a position of unworked-through tension. Alfonso-Forero suggests that Mukherjee's Canadian fiction was rife with "an aesthetics of nostalgia" in which the characters were suspended between spaces, unable to reconcile their inherited pasts with the pull of a new

cultural environment (44). This phase in her writing life coincided with her own disappointments with Canada's racial frontiers and its exclusionary policies of multiculturalism. The clear-cut ideological turnaround occurred after her relocation to the United States during the late 1980s. There, Mukherjee's narrative voice shifted from apologetic observing to confident self-fashioning. She came to regard assimilation as a changing process of personal reinvention, rather than as cultural treason. Her protagonists during this stage were no longer mere victims of exile but active agents of transformation who challenged and remade their cultural selves. Mukherjee herself asserted, "I am an American writer, not an Indian writer in exile," distancing herself from the diasporic lament prevalent in South Asian fiction (Alfonso-Forero 46). This repositioning marked a profound ideological break from the traditional diasporic imaginary based on postcolonial melancholia. The novel Jasmine best illustrates this ideological shift. The transformation of the protagonist—Jyoti to Jasmine, then Jase, and finally Jane—exemplifies the mobility of diasporic identities forged through dynamic negotiation instead of nostalgic reminiscence. According to Deshmukh's argument, Jasmine's transformation symbolizes "a triumph over nostalgia, a rejection of fixity, and an embrace of the plural self" (61). Her transmutations are not frantic bids to be included but calculated acts of agency in inhospitable socio-cultural landscapes. Similarly, in Desirable Daughters, Mukherjee examines the tensions between generations that follow the shift in ideology from tradition to cosmopolitanism. The heroine, Tara, is a product of modern sensibility that challenges the strict moral precepts of her Bengali training and lives through the liberties and uncertainties of American life. Her tone is not nostalgic or romanticized but critical, self-conscious, and transitional. As Bera discusses, "Mukherjee's writing makes a clear break from the sentimentalism of exile, focusing instead on the calculated production of identity within diasporic space" (Diasporic Sublime 58). This is an ideological move that puts Mukherjee into a singular position in diasporic literature. She is unlike Salman Rushdie or V.S. Naipaul, who tend to write from a perspective of ironic distance or historiographic revisionism, Mukherjee's is an experiential and generative lens. She builds a new diasporic narrative—one in which migration is not just loss of roots but a rich soil for reinvention of identity.

**Mukherjee in Indian American and Feminist Discourse**

Bharati Mukherjee stands at the crossroads of Indian American and feminist literary debates because of her complex characterizations of diasporic women's subjectivities. Her heroes—contrary to the obedient or nostalgic characters in typical diaspora literature—epitomize cultural subversion, gender transgression, and narrative resistance. In focusing on tales of women who move beyond essential ethnic and national identities, Mukherjee helps to construct a transnational feminist poetics that resists both patriarchal formations and identity politics of essentialism. In Indian American literary circles, Mukherjee is credited with promoting a paradigm shift. As opposed to the tendency of earlier diasporic authors to place the trauma of cultural loss at the center, Mukherjee reconceived diasporic writing as the site of self-assertion. By refusing to sentimentalize the homeland and radically embracing the host culture, she joins the ranks of those authors who reject nostalgia and instead assert identity change. As Bera states, Mukherjee's novels present "a politics of survival and reinvention in the diaspora that repositions the immigrant subject as dynamic and self-determining" (Diasporic Sublime 65). This repositioning occurs particularly in Mukherjee's feminist positioning. She designs her heroines as women who challenge conventional Indian gender roles and avoid Western fantasies of the subservient South Asian woman. Her characters frequently transgress social norms—having inter-racial relationships, spurning arranged marriages, or resorting to violence as liberating acts. This has elicited both praise and criticism. Some authors hail her as a feminist pioneer, while others—like Aldewan and Al-Saleet—warn against interpreting her characters as universally empowering, arguing that her stories at times reproduce neoliberal values of individualism (8308). Still, Mukherjee's feminist relevance consists of her definition of identity as performative and contextual. In Jasmine, the heroine's several remakes are reminiscent of Judith Butler's gender performativity. Jasmine will not be pinned down by cultural or gendered norms. She becomes what she needs to be in her context—wife, illegal alien, caregiver, lover, and ultimately, self-determining woman. As Alfonso-Forero notes, "Mukherjee's feminist strategy is grounded in multiplicity and narrative mobility" (73). Additionally, Mukherjee's writings critique the patriarchal Indian family as a site of patriarchal domination. In Desirable Daughters, Tara's refusal of marital obedience and her adoption of a modern, independent way of life subvert the cultural scripts placed on Indian women. Chatterjee argues that Tara's voice "interrogates the double binds of ethnicity and gender, marking a feminist departure from conservative diaspora fiction" (58). These concerns connect Mukherjee's work to a broader feminist diaspora conversation that involves authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri, but her voice is more combative and revolutionary. Mukherjee also speaks to intersectionality by showing how race, class, gender, and immigrant status intersect in constructing her female characters' lives. Her female characters are not just women but brown-skinned immigrants navigating systemic disparities in white-dominated societies. In so doing, Mukherjee gives voice to those usually silenced in both diasporic and mainstream feminist literatures. Bharati Mukherjee's work in Indian American and feminist discourse is foundational and revolutionary. Her fiction challenges fixed concepts of ethnicity and womanhood, presenting instead a kaleidoscopic vision of identity, forged by conflict, resilience, and choice.

**Writing as Resistance and Reimagination of Female Subjectivity**

Bharati Mukherjee's literary work serves as an act of cultural resistance, particularly in the context of female subjectivity. In her fiction, she deconstructs inherited models of passive femininity and creates narratives in which South Asian women not only endure diaspora but also appropriate it as a site of radical self-reinvention. For Mukherjee, writing is a way of pushing back against cultural essentialism and patriarchal control—both of which tend to circumscribe immigrant women

within strict parameters of duty, modesty, and silence. In novels like Jasmine and Desirable Daughters, Mukherjee's protagonists rewrite themselves through conscious decisions that go against family, religion, and societal expectation. This postcolonial feminist agency is one of resistance that is not realized through revolution but through mundane acts of resistance and self-determination. As Bera writes, Mukherjee's women "claim their space by narrating their dislocations, by refusing to be reduced to nostalgia or victimhood" (Diasporic Sublime 67). Resistance in Mukherjee's work is also realized through the subversion of cultural prohibitions. For example, Jasmine's illegal immigration into the U.S., her having several sexual affairs, and her identity changes defies the romanticized image of the faithful, conventional Indian woman. Jasmine refuses to be confined by her past or by the caste and community origins. Rather, she writes new narratives about herself in each city she travels to. Alfonso-Forero maintains that "Mukherjee's protagonists resist cultural orthodoxy by weaponizing narrative transformation" (75). Their narratives are not straight lines of assimilation but tactical negotiations of identity. In the same vein, in Desirable Daughters, Tara turns away from the expectations of her high-caste Bengali life to a contemporary, unmarried one in America. She is neither shamed at her divorce nor at her cross-cultural decisions. Rather, Tara employs memory, narrative, and introspection to reclaim her subjectivity. As Chatterjee points out, Mukherjee's literary voice "empowers women to reauthor themselves in the face of both diasporic dislocation and patriarchal silencing" (Reading Lahiri 62). Mukherjee similarly employs literary form as resistance. Her application of non-linear narrative, interior monologue, and disjointed timelines corresponds to the psychological upheaval of her characters and eschews the tidy moral explanation characteristic of realist fiction. Through the act, she emphasizes the politics of diasporic experience, particularly for the woman who needs to navigate not just one oppression, but dual ones—both brown and feminine—within Western culture. Far from symbolic alone, this reinscription of the feminine subject has significant political content. Mukherjee's women don't accommodate—they remake. In The Tree Bride, for instance, the past is recalled not with nostalgic yearning but to decode inherited trauma and relocate it towards empowerment. Deshmukh points out that "Mukherjee's resistance lies in her refusal to romanticize the past; she urges women to use it as raw material for constructing their futures" (63). Therefore, for Mukherjee, writing is activism. It challenges mainstream accounts of gender and diaspora and presents in their place a literary arena in which female subjectivity is reclaimed, redefined, and emancipated. Her protagonists resist not by retreating into nostalgia, but by challenging the normative boundaries of speaking, transgressing, and transforming.

**Overview of Selected Novels and Their Intertextual Resonance**

The depth of Bharati Mukherjee's diasporic imagination becomes most evident in the examination of her major novels—Jasmine, Desirable Daughters, and The Tree Bride. The novels, though different in locale and character, are woven together by motifs of displacement, fluidity of identity, and women's agency. Together, they build an unfolding narrative trajectory that resonates intertextually, connecting individual stories of migration with broader political, cultural, and historical contexts. Jasmine (1989) is perhaps Mukherjee's best-known work, chronicling the life of the eponymous heroine from rural Punjab to several American cities. The journey of each place is a new persona—Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane. The novel eschews chronology in favor of a fluid temporal structure that mirrors the heroine's fractured psychological life. Jasmine's incessant reconstruction resonates with postcolonial and feminist theory accounts of subjectivity as performative and non-essentialist. As Alfonso-Forero states, Jasmine "does not search for authenticity in any solitary identity but continues to survive by way of a perpetual self-authorship" (72). With Desirable Daughters (2002), Mukherjee returns to an internalized, post-assimilation narrative. Divorced and Indian in San Francisco, Tara Bhattacharjee ponders her diaspora self by comparison with herself and her convention-society sisters versus her uncommunicative son. The novel intersects with Indian mythology, in particular with the story of Saint Tara, a symbolic mirror as well as narrative counterpoint. According to Bera, "Tara's narrative unwinds over narrative levels—family, folklore, and modernity—each conversing to undermine rigid notions of belonging" (Diasporic Sublime 85). The fragmentation of the novel is echoed by the multilocality of diasporic life, and refuses linear modes of migration. The Tree Bride (2004), which is a sequel to Desirable Daughters, engages intergenerational trauma through the linkage of Tara's narrative with that of her ancestor, a colonial Bengali freedom fighter. Mukherjee weaves together personal history and nationalistic memory through historical flashbacks and archival reconstructions. Intertextual layering here deconstructs colonial narratives while providing diasporic subjects with a recovered sense of historical agency. Deshmukh highlights how the novel "interrupts colonial historiography with alternative female voices from the margins" (66). What unites these novels is Mukherjee's groundbreaking literary design. Her stories switch between first-person and omniscient narrations, between present-day America and colonial India, between urban realism and mythic allegory. The language, too, is hybrid—mixing Bengali phrases with American slang—representing linguistic negotiation at the core of diasporic expression. As Chatterjee sees, "Mukherjee's fiction is dialogic: it speaks across cultures, histories, and generations, collapsing boundaries between the personal and the political" (64). In addition, Mukherjee establishes a literary genealogy in which women are not only passive bearers of culture but also active forces of rupture and continuity. Each novel extends the emotional and political range of diaspora—Jasmine is concerned with survival and reformulation, Desirable Daughters with self-discovery and hybridity, and The Tree Bride with resistance and inherited trauma. Together, their intertextual power lies in their combined argument in favor of a reconceptualization of home, identity, and woman in the terms of global fiction. All in all, Mukherjee's chosen works are not discrete artifacts but constitute an interconnected corpus that broadens the literary horizon of South Asian diaspora. In overlapping characters, repeated themes, and intersecting hronologies, she builds a diasporic consciousness of depth that subverts and rethinks the frontiers of genre, gender, and geography.

### 2.2 Thematic Frameworks in Mukherjee's Novels

#### Exile, Dislocation, and Identity Crisis

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction combines the psychological existence of exile and the physical migration in intricate narratives that track the interlocked relationship between dislocation and identity crisis. Exile in Jasmine and Desirable Daughters is less a matter of physical displacement than an existential disjunction, causing fragmentation of self and perpetual identity negotiation. These two novels are literary portraits of South Asian female migrants' inner conflict as they navigate unfamiliar cultural topographies while burdened with the emotional weight of their native country. In Jasmine, Mukherjee presents her heroine Jyoti—later Jasmine, Jase, and finally Jane—as a character who sheds identities by stages with each step, both geographic and psychic. The shock of her exile from India following her husband's death sets in motion a cycle of crossings at the borders, each of which symbolically severs a limb of her past. Multiple changes of name are both survival skills and symbols of enforced remaking for Jasmine. Deshmukh identifies that Jasmine's transformation is not a progressive development but "a violent series of ruptures, marked by physical trauma and psychic realignment" (Deshmukh 61). Her transition from Punjab to Florida, New York, and later Iowa highlights the itinerant, rootless state of exile—a state that gets exacerbated by her efforts to establish connections in new sociocultural contexts. In contrast to Jasmine's self-imposed exile precipitated by political violence and personal loss, Desirable Daughters traces a process of emotional exile through one of cultural estrangement. Tara Bhattacharjee, well established in San Francisco, goes through a sort of interior exile as she increasingly becomes estranged from her own traditional Bengali heritage. Voluntary and seemingly privileged migration in her case conceals a schism that reflects a more fundamental psychological divide. Tara's decision to leave her husband and exist independently in a liberal Western environment estranges her from her sisters and society and makes her a cultural traitor and renegade subject. Gómez argues that Tara represents the "diasporic bhadramahila who, in the process of negotiating modernity, finds herself isolated from tradition as well as from progress" (Gómez 74). This feeling of alienation finds expression in Tara's relations with her heritage and family. Her sentimental reminiscences of Calcutta are laced with ambivalence—longing and relief. She is relieved to be free in her Western independence but grieves for the loss of her collectivist closeness in her Indian childhood. Ambrose and Lourdusamy highlight this paradox by contending that "diasporic identity in Mukherjee's work is constructed through simultaneous movements toward and away from origin" (Ambrose and Lourdusamy 358). This paradox is crucial in perceiving the emotional exile faced by diasporic women caught in between competing cultural loyalties. Jasmine and Tara both face the gendered aspects of exile, wherein the weight of assimilation rests overly on the female subject. Their struggles are defined not just by geopolitical displacement but also by family obligation, communal monitoring, and internalized perceptions of obligation and transgression. Jasmine's reinventions are frequently reactions to violence and coercion, whereas Tara's independence is tinged with guilt and family splintering. Mukherjee's stories therefore refuse idealized accounts of exile, instead depicting it as a site of ongoing crisis, where the self is in constant transition and belonging is forever out of reach. Jasmine and Desirable Daughters reflect Mukherjee's diasporic imagination in characters who inhabit intermediary zones of bodily and psychological exile. Their journeys map the complex realities of dislocation—trauma, accommodation, and fractured identity—and introduce the centrality of exile in constituting diasporic consciousness.

Dislocation, in the diasporic sense of Bharati Mukherjee's fiction, exceeds bodily re-location—it becomes a condition of broken identity, continuity, and double-edged cultural negotiation. Dislocation, in her fiction, is not merely spatial but also existential, prompting perpetual questioning of belongingness and self-hood. The figure of dislocation is at once thematic site and textual tool, registering the internal conflict of diasporic citizens caught between nations, languages, traditions, and modernities. In Jasmine, the heroine's displacement from Hasnapur to America sets off an unfolding process of cultural disengagement in stages. With each new topographic space she occupies—Florida, Manhattan, Iowa—there comes a redescription of identity that is substitutive rather than additive. The renaming of Jasmine to Jyoti, then Jasmine, and finally Jase and Jane symbolizes this fragmented self. Instead of maturing into an integrated hybrid self, these names symbolize breaks with the psyche, each name an attempt at response to trauma and disorientation (Deshmukh 61). The life of Jasmine is mapped into a map of emotional dislocation, as her body travels over borders while her psyche gets ever more disturbed. The transition from the old to the new identity does not solve the cultural contradictions, but rather emphasizes her alienation by turning her into an eternal outsider in each new role that she takes. Likewise, in Desirable Daughters, the dislocation is less spatial and more cultural and psychological. Tara Lata, the heroine, though seemingly more rooted geographically, is the site of extreme fragmentation within. Her choice to leave her Indian husband, live with an American boyfriend, and mother a bicultural child is not an easy or uncomplicated embracing of freedom—it is fraught with feelings of guilt, nostalgia, and betrayal toward her cultural and family heritage. Gómez notes that Tara's experience is characterized by "an unresolved oscillation between diasporic freedom and inherited tradition," wherein the effort to rewrite one's story is always undercut by the irrepressible force of origin (74). Unlike Jasmine, Tara does not remake herself completely but rather exists in a liminal state where she is neither quite Indian nor quite American. This in-betweenness is also evident in her ambivalent approaches to religion, sexuality, and motherhood, all of which lay bare the fractured state of her diasporic consciousness. Psychological dislocation is also extended to the historical memory in The Tree Bride by Mukherjee. Psychological dislocation here is transmitted through collective trauma within generations, specifically through Partition and the political turmoil of Bengal in the run-up to independence. The author's quest to reclaim her ancestral heritage fails to uncover a romantic reunion but instead reveals a palimpsest of violence, silence, and loss. Ambrose and Lourdusamy highlight that "the spatial dislocation of the immigrant is mirrored by a temporal dislocation from historical certainty" (358). What ensues is a layered identity that not only gets displaced in space but also

fractured in time. The Tree Bride's ghostly presence, revolutionary fervor, and muffled anguish haunt the narrator's American life, making her contemporary existence inextricably linked to ancestral unease. The psychological fragmentation described in these novels usually manifests itself through narrative structure and voice. Broken timeliness, shifting points of view, and interior monologues are utilized to create the fractured consciousness of diasporic characters. The past is not told linearly but infiltrates the present via memory, hallucination, and symbolic actions, emphasizing how intensely dislocation cuts into the diasporic mind. Mukherjee's characters rarely declare a solid self; rather, they oscillate back and forth between roles, values, and desires, constantly reaccustoming themselves to the shifting outer and inner topographies. Bharati Mukherjee's portrait of dislocation exceeds physical action of migration and into the arena of psychological dissonance. Her characters endure not just the pain of displacement but the relentless trauma of identity fragmentation, shaped by cultural conflicts, family pressures, and historical burdens. As in Jasmine, Desirable Daughters, and The Tree Bride, displacement is a lens through which the complexities of diasporic life are scrutinized—not merely as a spatial dislocation but as a site of profound emotional and cultural renewal.

The mutual play between doubled self, name change, and border-crossing is a thematic triplet that repeats throughout Bharati Mukherjee's diasporic work. Her female protagonists more specifically live in ongoing processes of border-crossing, not only into new loci but by redescribing themselves to fit the demands of their cultural and affective contexts. These name alterity and crossing motifs are not gratuitous; instead, they serve as narrative devices reflecting internal ruptures and exterior transformations caused by exile and migration. In Jasmine, the protagonist's name shifts numerous times, every new name marking a broken self rebuilt under social-cultural compulsion. From Jyoti of Punjab to Jasmine of Florida, then to Jase and Jane of New York and Iowa respectively, her metamorphosis marks the diasporic subject's constant negotiating with selfness. As Deshmukh comments, "Jasmine's fluid identity is both a survival strategy and a resistance against hegemonic narratives of fixed nationality or cultural essentialism" (61). The changing names mark not only the transition of place but the psychological re-births necessary for exploring new worlds. Her identities are layered, interstitial, and unmoored from fixed definitions—a characteristic of diasporic writing. The same pattern is repeated in Desirable Daughters, where Tara, the protagonist, moves between her Indian background and her life in America. Her sister Padma remains a traditionalist, grounded in Indian custom, while Tara takes on a more assimilative position. But even when Tara appears to spurn traditional norms, her identity is one of rupture, not resolution. Gómez observes that Tara's unease about her family name and its transmitted meanings points to a more profound fear of cultural belonging and authenticity (74). Her inner conflict is amplified by her son Rabi's Americanized sensibilities, which serve as both mirror and critique of her dislocated selfhood. In The Tree Bride, name and identity undergo a more historical and transgenerational treatment. The narrator traces her ancestry back to a freedom fighter who becomes known as "the Tree Bride," a name infused with symbolic resistance and spiritual continuity. The bridge linking colonial domination, religious heritage, and diaspora identity is established through name inheritance—names that cut across space and time. As Ambrose and Lourdusamy convincingly assert, "The Tree Bride's symbolic power lies in her being both a real historical figure and a mythic archetype passed on through generations" (358). This familial connection makes the narrator's own identity more complex, as she struggles with a heritage to which she feels alienated as well as committed to revere. Border-crossing, literal and figurative, serves only to reinforce these identity variables. Migration is not merely travel from country to country but travel from self to self. In Jasmine's instance, illegal immigration is complemented by moral and emotional trespasses—her identities as widow, lover, and fugitive disrupt the victim-agency binaries. In Desirable Daughters, religious border-transcendence occurs from within, as Tara revisits her arranged marriage, religious principles, and post-divorce independence. In The Tree Bride, colonial boundaries overlap with family memory, and the narrator's final choice to take back her homeland represents a return not to a geographical location, but to an ideological one. Mukherjee's exploration of dual identity and symbolic crossing undermines the easy East/West, tradition/modernity, and authenticity/assimilation binaries. Through characters who shed and acquire names as they shed and acquire selves, she charts a narrative landscape in which identity is fluid, performative, and heavily politicized. Her work insists that diasporic identity is not a condition of confusion but of complexity—layered and dynamic, attached to neither homeland nor hostland, but to the intervals between.

In Bharati Mukherjee's The Tree Bride, psychological trauma is a strong undertow that connects individual and collective memories of communal violence to diasporic identity formation. The psychological wounds of historical violence—specifically those based on Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984—vibrate strongly within the emotional lives of the characters. This part discusses how these traumatic political incidents, although geographically remote from the diasporic territories inhabited by Mukherjee's characters, penetrate their consciousness and form their diasporic subjectivity. The trauma of Operation Blue Star, a military operation on the Golden Temple at Amritsar in 1984, resonates through Mukherjee's work, not as a footnote to history but as a force that disrupts identity formation. The brutality caused to the Sikhs in the course of the operation and subsequent retaliatory communal riots later are rendered iconic for state-induced trauma and national insecurity. Tara, the central figure of The Tree Bride, resident in San Francisco, is drawn psychologically into the violent history by virtue of family background and her ancestral past. Geographically transplanted, Tara remains a victim of remembrance, bequeathed apprehensions, and unhealed national hurts. According to Deshmukh, Mukherjee's story "reinscribes historical trauma within the intimate sphere of the diasporic psyche" (Deshmukh 61). The trauma is indirect and somatic in Tara's experience but intergenerational, rooted in family narratives and cultural transmission. Mukherjee's intertwining of historical memory with private unease makes visible the continuity between historical violence and modern diasporic conflict. Tara's involvement with the history of her ancestor, the Tree Bride, becomes a means of returning to colonial and postcolonial trauma through feminist genealogies. This revision of

history from a female perspective not only resists patriarchal historiography but also indicates the psychological imperative to make sense of intergenerational suffering. As Ambrose and Lourdusamy note, "Mukherjee's fiction upsets linear historical narratives by making affective residues—fear, rage, shame—that linger in displaced communities even after the violence longue duree" (358). Tara's fractured identity, defined by her refusal to acknowledge her Indian past or fully commit to her American present, is exacerbated by these leftover traumas. In addition, the repetition of communal violence in the backdrop of the novel works towards underscored vulnerability of secular ideals in postcolonial India. The emergence of religious fundamentalism and the connivance of the state in the pogroms of minorities initiate a fissure in the diasporic vision of India as a moral homeland. Gómez points out that Tara's ambivalence towards India stems from the dissonance between the mythologized home and its actual socio-political shortcomings (74). Her fragmented self is thus a result of both personal dislocation and wider historical disillusionment. She is neither completely Indian nor comfortably American, caught between a past that she cannot accommodate and a future that provides no sanctuary from inherited trauma. In The Tree Bride, trauma and memory work through archival remnants, letters from the past, hauntings, and internal monologues—narrative strategies that echo the disorienting power of trauma itself. Mukherjee refuses closure; she lets the past leak into the present, making trauma a living, changing state instead of an end event. Tara's final confrontation with the legacy of her ancestor is not a cathartic finale but a tentative recognition of her split self. The interconnection of Operation Blue Star and the subsequent happenings with Tara's diasporic experience is the indication of the longevity of historical scars that cross borders and generations. Mukherjee's The Tree Bride shows that diasporic identity is not only formed because of the physical migration but the psychological bequeathal of trauma. Operation Blue Star and the communal violence that ensued are narrative catalysts for examining the profound psychological fault lines of diasporic consciousness. By situating historical violence within the affective lives of her characters, Mukherjee reiterates the idea that the postcolonial diaspora bears not only memories of migration but also the wounds of a nation's unresolved histories, reflected through the lens of exile and desire.

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