

## **Bharati Mukherjee's Novels : outspoken expressions of Female Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

In the modern society, literary context presents feminism as the belief of equal status to women – rights, opportunities and struggle to achieve these objectives. General meaning of 'Feminism' is everything related to the female gender. It is the strong awareness of the female identity- realizing, taking interest and female problem solving ...etc. Empowerment is granting social, political, economic power to an individual or group. It is the process of supporting another person to discover and claim personal power. This research paper deals with the themes of this international seminar 'Empowerment of Women.'

Literary artists became the outspoken exponents of female empowerment. Indian female novelists are no exceptions to it. Bharati Mukherjee raised voice for female empowerment. Her fiction focuses on the concept of migration, alienation, plight of immigrant, Indian women and their struggle.....etc. Her female characters present spatial and temporal dimensions among different cultures. To present the female empowerment issue, following novels of Bharati Mukherjee are selected. Female figures in them forward the same idea.

1. Jasmine (1989) 2) The Holder of the world (1993) Jasmine presents evolution of Jyoti, 5<sup>th</sup> daughter in the family of nine. This novel presents ventures of the central characters. She was a completely transformed woman. Like a male figure she sustained herself by her own efforts in a foreign land.

The Holder of the world also, presents individuality and self confidence. It is a story about dislocation. Here, the central figure Hannah Easton, born in Massachusetts and traveled to India, involved with a few Indian Lovers. Hannah presents enduring strength for achieving personal recognition and empowerment. Through these female characters, Bharati Mukherjee forwarded a firm conviction that now woman can't be a subaltern. She can't be exploited as a weaker sex. On the other hand, she can handle any critical situation and she is capable to support the entire family and social structure.

**Key Words:** Female, empowerment, gender, subaltern, weaker sex, alienation, struggle...etc.

Female writers have raised the powerful voice of women against the age old male dominated society. This feminine perspective presented - the perfect touch of variety, inner, deeper self, struggle of identity in the family, society & in their working fields, in their own silent world....etc. Such type of women's writing is an attempt to keep one away from the injured psyche of the hidden self. Portrayal of these hidden and unspoken concerns of the suppressed women has become prominent. These female writers deal with tie inner conflicts arising out of gender discrimination. Self realization through the portrayal of feminine sensibility, quest for own identity, one's own self is the main objective of such writings. In the modern society, literary context presents feminism as the belief of equal status to women – rights, opportunities and struggle to achieve these objectives. General meaning of 'Feminism' is everything related to the female gender. It is the strong awareness of the female identity- realizing, taking interest and female problem solving ...etc.

Empowerment is granting social, political, economic power to an individual or group. It is the process of supporting another person to discover and claim personal power.

This research paper reflects the theme of this International seminar, “Empowerment of Women: Changing Role of Women in Social Structure.” Literary artists became the outspoken exponents of female empowerment. Indian female novelists are no exceptions to it. Bharati Mukherjee raised voice for female empowerment. Her fiction focuses on the concept of migration, alienation, plight of immigrant, Indian women and their struggle....etc. Her female characters present spatial and temporal dimensions among different cultures. Bharati Mukherjee was born on July 17, 1940 in Calcutta. Sudhir Lal and Bina Mukherjee were her parents. In 1947, she moved to Britain with her parents. At 10, she wrote short stories. In 1959, she completed her B.A. & in 1961. She completed M.A. in English. In 1969, she completed Ph.D. in comparative literature. While studying at Iowa, she met & married a Canadian student from Harvard, Clark Blaise on Sept. 19, 1963. Now, she is settled in USA.

Through her writings, she tried to show that oppression of woman is not material reality. It does not originate in economic conditions. It is a psychological phenomenon. She tried to deconstruct social norms of gender bias. She suggested ways to liberate women by focusing on the structures that have marginalized them. Reinterpretation of woman's status in present modern society is her main objective. Woman is a member of patriarchal and gender biased society. Her experiences of life are totally different. All this forms her psyche. Different social norms like age, creed, class, and race greatly affect her status in society. Each woman's experience of life is different and therefore, it is unique. Bharati Mukherjee is supposed as trend setter in Indian English fiction. She reflects image, status, plight, struggle of Indian rural & urban woman of all classes & creeds. Most of her novels present immigrants experiences. Her heroines travel from one place to other and fall as victims facing different situations. In such writing rootlessness, gender inequality is presented. Potential for gender equality can be seen through her female figures. It forms the main idea about post modernist feminist debates.

Bharati Mukherjee through her female figures forwarded a different type of idea related to post modernism that only sympathy and compassion expressed through figurative language is not useful, practical approach about gender equality is most important. She was sensitive observant of the contemporary socio- political situation. She portrayed the lives of the female immigrants after partition, their status quo, the problems they faced...etc. Through it, she sympathized with women. Her novels present socio-political condition of both East and West. Her main focus is on presentation of problems of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants. Her heroines are bold and assertive. They show strong potentiality for adaptability by accepting the bitter truth of their lives. They are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys. They faced many problems because they fought for their rights as women and as an individual. They struggle for equal status, non oppression, non exploitation, no gender discrimination...etc. It shows women's empowerment. Bharati Mukherjee is a Third World Feminist writer whose preoccupation is to deal with the problems and issues related with the South Asian Women particularly India. Her basic concern is to delineate the problems of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian women immigrants. To present the women's empowerment, following novels of Bharati Mukherjee are selected.

1. Jasmine (1989)

2. The Holder of the world (1993)

Jasmine (1989) is a novel by Bharati Mukherjee presents a young Indian woman in the United States who, trying to adapt to the American way of life in order to be able to survive, changes identities several times. Mukherjee's own experiences of dislocation and displacement in her life helps her in recording the immigrant experience of the protagonist in this novel. Jasmine, which was based on an earlier short story in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, tells the story of a seventeen-year-old girl widowed after her husband's murder in a bomb attack. She and her husband originally planned to move to Florida, but as a result of his death Jasmine continues with the trip on her own. In her path she faces many obstacles as she travels from Florida to New York City to Iowa. It presents evolution of Jyoti, 5<sup>th</sup> daughter in the family of nine. This novel presents ventures of the central characters. After marrying to Prakash, Jyoti became Jasmine, migrated to America as Jase and settled as a mature woman under the pseudonym of Jane in the farmlands of Iowa. Prakash was killed in bomb blast and tragedy takes place and from this point Jasmine discards notions of gender inequality and Kali become role model for her and she entered America illegally. She learnt how to dress and walk like American and how to survive there. Now, she was a completely transformed woman. Like a male figure she sustained herself by her own efforts in a foreign land. She is presented as a liberated woman from a third world nation. Her plight, struggle as a woman advocates potential for Gender equality. She tried to achieve everything that was deprived for her as a woman. Through this character, Bharati Mukherjee transmitted the message of multiple codes of society. Her advances and thoughts prove that she was capable to do all this like a male figure. Her connection to America is connection to new thoughts of gender equality.

Hence, Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine is the movement of Jasmine's life towards achieving true identity. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. Even when the protagonist goes through the worst experiences of her life, she is able to come through the obstacles and attains self-awareness and a new identity and overthrows her past life. The protagonist Jasmine repositions her stars in the adopted country by deciding to remain as a care-giver to Duff in which she gets her peace of mind. At every step of her life, Jasmine is a winner, she does not allow her troubles and struggles to obstruct her progress in life and she is finding a place for herself in the society. In other words, she is a true feminist who fights every challenge in life to establish herself in the society. The novel is written in three sections, the first taking place in Calcutta, the second in America while Amit and Dimple are living with Sens, and the third when they are subletting an apartment in Manhattan.

The Holder of the World (1993): - It presents a spatiotemporal connection between the oriental and the occidental Cultures. The story is told in Hannah's standpoint, who came to India from Massachusetts. It also presents individuality and self confidence. It is a story about dislocation. Here, the central figure Hannah Easton, born in Massachusetts and traveled to India, involved with a few Indian Lovers. A king presented her a diamond known as 'The emperor's Tear. A detective, Beige Master was searching for this diamond and he narrates Hannah's story of immigrant experiences. She married Gabrid Legge, an adventurer and after his death, she formed a passionate relationship with Raja Jadhav Singh of Devgad and this new identity as a Bibi shows her transformation. It reveals an advanced stage of progression. After death of Raja Jadhav Singh, her encounter with Emperor Aurangzeb matured her experiences. Hannah presents enduring strength

for achieving personal recognition. And it forms ground for gender equality. She struggled in new locality to achieve equal status, for that she made many adjustments. Bharati Mukherjee described this as a post modern historical novel. Her whole personality undergoes a change as she traveled from one place to another. At last she emerges as a real fighter of life. Her strength, adaptability, courage forms base for gender equality. Through her figure, Bharati Mukherjee forwarded that in East and West plight of woman is same so, we should think of gender equality in practical sense.

The Holder of the World' re-in forces expatriation as a Journey of the human mind. It tells us the protagonist's latest tensions, aspirations and ambitions. Hannah is born in Massachusetts who travels to India. She becomes involved with a few Indian lovers and eventually a king who gives her a diamond known as true, Emperor's Tear". The story tells the detective's searching for the diamond and Hannah's view point. The physical journey of the female hero not only leads to probing of the self but also makes her recognize the side of herself. She returns to her native land, not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as a unique human being and gives message to her fellow females. In "The Holder of the World", she suggests two advantages of Women Liberation. Hannah and Bhagmati in "The Holder of the World" recurrently defy estrangement in the society. They live and get the answer in rejecting cultural stereotypes. They develop the life of their own outside the home.

As women have experienced displacement and dislocations in personal lives, they are better suited for adaptability in an alien culture. A close reading of Mukherjee's novels reveals that her primary aim is to champion the cause of women. Influence of feminism can be seen through these two novels. Because when Bharati Mukherjee began writing, the feminist movement was in full swing in West and she was a lady struggling to survive in alien country. Her female characters are outwardly aggressive, demanding freedom. But, they are submissive, facing problems of life for survival. They do not compromise with conventionality. It is post modern approach. Her female figures present the fact that we are all individuals. It shows that women must be supposed as equal to men. Her female figures emerge as conquerors and new pioneers. New world of democracy, freedom and unlimited possibilities are presented as new dimensions for gender equality. Her female figures are the best post modern illustrations of uncompromising, unrelenting and decisive Womanhood. They have shattered mythical male superiority and advocated potential for Gender Equality.

Through these female figures, Bharati Mukherjee succeeded in presenting a firm conviction that hereafter woman will not be a subaltern, she can't be exploited as the weaker sex. On the other hand, she is empowered, capable to support the entire family and social structure. It shows that these portrayals resist and respond to various roles assigned to women in the name of traditions and family and social norms. They present typical Indian socio-political, religious, economic, educational situations. They vividly disclosed the untold sufferings and miseries of women and colors of the hidden female self. Despite their sufferings, they are not ready to look back. Their sensibility altered as per the circumstances & they changed the situation around them by empowering themselves and fighting against it. These female characters present the manifold fragmented consciousness. Finally, they became competent of living in a world without borders. They proved that conventional answers and roles no longer satisfy them. They realized that women have to play a steering role.

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