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## SOCIAL IDENTITY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *DAYS AND NIGHTS IN CALCUTTA*

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## ABSTRACT

The study is an attempt to discuss Bharati Mukherjee's social identity in a remarkable work of diasporic Indian literature, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, based on Henri Tajfel's theory. *Days and Nights in Calcutta* is classified as one of the most prominent works in diaspora literature. It is a shared work of Bharati Mukherjee and her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise, in which they record their daily life for fourteen months in India. While reading the text, it is easy for the reader to capture the two opposite perspectives, the Western and Eastern. The Western attitude is represented in Clark Blaise's section, in which he conveys his own experience in India by describing the streets, hotels etc. He reflects the Western eye of Indian culture by drawing the contradictions of the Indian culture with the Western one. The Eastern lens is presented in Mukherjee's section when she narrates her leaving India when she was a little girl to Europe and her return after a long absence to her homeland. In her narration, she seeks reconciliation and reunion again with her origin. She suffers the culture clashes and racial discrimination for most of her life. Her identity is torn between the Eastern and Western cultures. European culture treated her as an Indian due to her skin colour, while in India, she is Western due to her looks. Thus, the study attempts to discuss Mukherjee's social identity in the light of social psychology and to examine whether the writer can adopt a new culture to get a reunion after a long absence. Moreover, it also focuses on the transformative experiences of Mukherjee, which she acquires while abroad, such as racial discrimination in alien cultures due to her race, culture, and origin, leading to discrimination against her people in the homeland.

**Keywords:** *Identity crisis, other, racial discrimination, self, social identity*

## INTRODUCTION

Adopting and constructing an identity is considered the most controversial issue in the scope of social psychology. Numerous social psychologists attempt to attach the notion of identity and its construction to social discourse.

As a vital and disputable subject in social psychology studies, scholars turn their attention to the notion of identity and self-formation. The idea of the self and its formation works as a tenant for many issues concerning the individuals' life regarding their personality, society, culture and even religion. According to social

psychology, the process of shaping or reshaping a man's identity is affected by numerous factors, for instance, the historical, social, cultural and religious aspects. Also, it confirms that the family condition, particularly parental relations with their religious background, is the cornerstone informing the individual's identity (Adjaero 59).

One of the essential questions that dwell in the man's thinking process is "Who am I?" and "How do others see me?" Generally, each person is capable of giving many aspects of qualities that man possesses to depict his\ her character to other people; such conditions have some

elements that may be changed according to the period. Some psychologists pay much attention to the self because it constitutes the main piece of the human psyche.

Among those figures is Henry Tajfel, a remarkable British social psychologist. He theorizes that the person's identity has two sides. One is concerned with the person himself, which is known as a personal identity, while the other one is based on social recognition, which he calls social identity. He confirms that personal and social identity are firmly connected and that social environments can easily influence personal identity. The social environments help in forming and reforming the personal identity. This theory can be applied to the autobiographical work of Bharati Mukherjee, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Because she reflects on her life experiences in which she lived in different societies, which led her to be in contact with various sorts of people, affecting her social identity.

*Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) is a cooperative autobiographical work achieved by Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee. They narrate their fourteen months of living in India autonomously through their writing. In her autobiographical work section in *Days and*

*Nights in Calcutta*, Bharati Mukherjee describes her personal experiences in confronting the cultural clashing of the Eastern and Western cultures. Most of her works deal with forming and reforming her identity in two different social discourses. She depicts her childhood experiences in India till the age of eight. Afterwards, she unwillingly left for Europe, where she interacted directly with Western societies. She highlights the most significant moments of her life in India and Europe in which she reveals the impact of her life experiences in both cultures as an Indian individual on her personal and social identity. The current paper investigates the construction and reconstruction of the author's identity while inhabiting two different societies.

Bharati Mukherjee is classified as an American novelist who has occupied a special status for the last few decades among literary writers. She is one of the significant writers of Diasporic Indian literature through her noteworthy accomplishments in the field. Through her works, Mukerjee sheds light on some notable works of unknown writers belonging to different literary trends, such as Indian Diaspora writers, post-colonial literature concerning Indian female writers, Asian American writers, Canadian writers, and American Writers. Her

writings include short stories, novels, essays, and journal articles. While writing, she intends to concentrate on the themes of isolation, cultural clashing and racial discrimination, as well as. She discusses the concept of the New World, which becomes the destination point for many immigrants to redefine themselves by spending great efforts to gain exemplary accomplishments.

The study attempts to identify Mukherjee's social identity while she is living in various multicultural societies during her life. It traces her life from childhood to adulthood, which investigates how she recognizes people around her and how she is recognized by them — starting from her life in India to her staying in Canada till her settlement in the USA. Moreover, it sheds light on her vivid descriptions of the social interactions in different societies concerning different people in different places regarding her social identity construction.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

After the publication of Mukherjee's *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, a considerable number of critical studies articles have been undertaken concerning the identity crisis in the life of Bharati Mukherjee, who experiences living status in three different societies. These studies

vary depending on the conclusions reached. Few of them examined the rage effects on the Indian women's identity for those who experience living in an alien culture. Other studies showed that immigrant women have to manage the harmony of traditional values with the principles of the new world to survive their beings from the coming danger.

Man's identity moves around social and cultural factors. These factors concern primarily with two elements such as names and location. On the one hand, the names go for a man's name, family, tribe, and sometimes profession. At the same time, the place deals with a regional space, such as the location of a house, school, city, and country. In childbirth, the identity is constructed based on the given name of the family and the place of birth. The identity is influenced by social norms, traditional customs and even religious beliefs. Therefore, when a man changes names or locations, it is a challenge with a social problem in identification, known as an identity crisis.

Generally, the identity crisis faces specifically the people who migrate from their native land to a new one searching for a considerable way of living. Living in another land acquires assimilation with the alien culture, such as adopting new

cultural and social norms to avoid unpredictable danger.

A published article under the title "Identity Crisis in Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Name Sake*" discusses the theme of immigration issues which lead to the alienation and depression in the alien with fading away from the principles of the native culture. The study goes beyond to explore Erickson's aspects of "identity-role of confusion" and 'identity- isolation' in which it classifies the immigrants into two groups due to their capacity to absorb the bitterness of being confused and alienated. Although the immigrants face the same circumstances at the beginning when they reach the new country for the first time, their reaction is entirely different when it comes to their struggle with the accommodation of the new culture. While on the other, they have various responses to the self-identification process. For instance, changing names is comprehended as identity recognition. In the case of assimilation, some immigrants have a smooth way of assimilating, while others have a hard time accepting another culture. The harshness exists due to their self-recognition in the foreign land. They classify themselves as a minority who are considered self-degraded and outcast individuals.

As a diasporic writer, Bharati Mukherjee addresses the issues of immigration through most of her works. She attempts to explore the problematic situation which targets immigrants' beings, especially Indian women who escape the bitterness of the male-dominated system and oppressive social hierarchy, searching for equality, sex recognition and liberty. Mukherjee also highlights those women's psychological effects when they face the horrible impressions of being an immigrant in a new country and acquiring the transformative immigration experiences that become an integral part of their life experiences. Mukherjee embodies her wishes to overcome all the disastrous moments that she experiences during her life abroad. For instance, her novel *Jasmine* is considered a reflection of Mukherjee's life in an alien culture. The novel attributes the significance of names to the man's identity construction. The article "Changing Names, Changing Places: The transformation of Female Identity through Translocation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" shows the unbreakable correlation between the person's name and the identity-formation process. In other words, changing names and changing locations acquire new identity recognition.

## THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the present, literary critics turn their attention to theories of the self and identity. The discussion will shed light on some prominent figures with their influential theories in the social psychology field of the identity construction process concerning Mukherjee's social identity in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*.

Starting with one of Freud's fellows, Jung theorizes that the individual's identity is built in any specific society and should be influenced by social foundations, like family and school. He distinguishes between the personal psyche and the collective unconscious when he states that the latter consists of some attitudes that are similar from person to person. Jung agrees with the idea that these attitudes should be directly affected by the social foundations through the process of identity formation. He unveils his claim that the collective psyche is underneath the personal unconscious. Then he adds that the identity is acquired as collective memory in all individuals, as he said, "I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of

behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals" (Jung 30).

Jung uses one of Freud's idioms, "ego", to refer to the person's identity and clarifies that the personal unconscious includes the person's comprehension and psychological and physical conditions in which it is closely connected with the self-image. He claims that self-image and identity are accomplished through a lengthy procedure influenced mainly by life experiences. He agrees with Freud that all human beings are filled with unaccomplished desires. He needs to be veiled by civilization, "The sight of a child...will arouse certain longings in adult, civilized persons longings which relate to the unfulfilled desires and needs of those parts of the personality which have been blotted out of the total picture in favour of the adapted persona" (Jung 39).

Another psychologist who deals with identity is Erik Erikson, who highlights the idea of identity, particularly in childhood. A study proposes eight phases of the psychosocial progress of a person, and it clarifies that the manner in which others see people has an impressive function in constructing their identity, Erikson states in his article "Introduction to Child Development." He confirms that the eight

phases aim to cover the process of a person's identity construction. Erikson clarified the stages during one's life:

Starting with the first stage, which he calls infancy or oral stage (from birth-1 year), the infant acquires trust and mistrust (Crain 291). At the age of one to three years, the children experience the second stage, toddlerhood or Anal stage, when they start to strive with the test of self-sufficiency against suspicion (Crain 294). In the third stage, when the children are nearly to join the school in the Phallic (Oedipal) stage when they are between three and six years old, they attempt to comprehend the distinctive features of initiative activity and guilt (Crain 296). In stage four, known as the pre-youth or Latency stage, when children are between six and eleven years old, they struggle to obtain the differences between industriousness and inferiority (Crain 297-298). The fifth stage is called immaturity (between 13-19 years) or the Genital stage; adolescents encounter the test of acquiring identity versus confusion (Crain 298-299). Phase six, pre-adulthood (20-24, or 20-39 years), is when human beings start to understand life through the test of closeness and alienation (Crain 301). In the seventh stage, which he calls middle adulthood (25-64, or 40-64 years), human beings encounter the analysis of

endeavouring to have any distinction (Crain 302). In the last stage, which is from 65 years to death, human beings are still indeed to find out more about the defiance of righteousness and desperation (Crain 303).

According to Erikson, the suitable age for human beings to recognize their identity signification is in the youth stage. It is the stage of what he calls Fidelity in which the individual questions himself or herself by "Who am I? What would I be able to be?" As well as their identity construction is processed in this stage. Furthermore, he believes that the step of preparing human identity is the most crucial phase in a person's psychosocial progression:

As to youth and the question of what is in the centre of its most passionate and most erratic striving, I have concluded that fidelity is the vital strength which it needs to have an opportunity to develop, to employ, to evoke and to die for. Having made such a "basic" claim, I can only repeat some of the variations on the theme of youth presented so far, to see whether fidelity, indeed, is

recognizable as pervasive.

(Erikson, *Identity-Youth and Crisis* 233)

Erikson coins the term "identity crisis" to any cultural clashes that people experience during their life. Moreover, he claims that by detecting these clashes with the assistance of close social members such as family members, friends or teachers, the person would be able to construct a constant identity (Erikson, *Identity-Youth and Crisis* 15-20). As indicated by him, a social member can acquire refined social experiences and convenient social relations only when flourishing social interactions and emotional intimacy characterize a society.

The definition of identity has become very attractive and debatable for many scholars. An American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist, George Herbert Mead, believes that two distinctive elements construct a person's identity. First is the person's internal feelings, which are known as "I", including self-organizing behaviours and motivations. In contrast, the second is the external social interaction called "Me", including the others' responses towards him or her in the social discourse. Mead concentrates on the second element by saying that "me" has the leading role in constructing the identity in which the other social members'

behaviours, responses and opinions can directly influence the person's identity.

In the same context, Mead proposes that the connection between identity and society is similar to the chicken-egg relationship; drawing such an attractive comparison, he highlights the significance of social construction and circumstances in constituting human identity. On the other hand, he confirms the active role of identity construction with its social interactions to represent society. Due to what he notes in his work *The Philosophy of the Act*, George Mead says:

In an experience within which individual and environment mutually determine each other, the unity of the environment and of its constituent objects as well as that of the individual arises out of the activity of the individual. (374)

One of the professors, Professor Derek Layder in his book *Social and Personal Identity: Understanding Yourself* puts Mead's idea under the microscope to examine the relation between identity and society in his book *Social and Personal Identity* in a simplified way:

The self is both social and psychological in nature. It is



neither exclusively psychological nor social. Something of the self always stands apart from the social world. At the same time the self can only exist within a social context... Everyone is influenced by the society and it makes its indelible mark on us. It's great error to think that there is no such a thing as society or that we are separate, self-sufficient individuals. Everyone is influenced by family, friends, education, ethnicity, work, class, gender, politics and history. (Layder 7)

However, he assures the uniqueness of human identity when he mentions that although identity is deeply affected by social interactions and circumstances, it is still unique because human beings have completely different responses to their life problems. In other words, each social member experiences life differently depending on their personal identity (Layder 8).

Another remarkable figure, a Polish-born British social psychologist Henry Tajfel is well-known for his extraordinary contributions to social psychology, such as experiments and theories in the last

century's social psychology field. His contributions to social psychology are the "Social Judgment Theory Experiment," "Theory of Inter- group Relations", and "Social Identity Theory" are labelled as the most fundamental theories in the field. He proposes that people naturally prioritise constructing a social group and living with them (Tajfel, *Social Dimension* 547). His orientation and various social discourses lead to various social behaviours and responses in different societies. Through his experiments, Tajfel claims that the leading cause of racial discrimination and ethnicity is the individuals' preference for their in-group members, ideologies, principles and values (Tajfel, *Social Dimension* 393).

In his "Social Identity Theory," he believes that people can classify themselves from an early age according to their sex, gender, appearance and social class (Tajfel, *Human Groups* 23). Such a classification is achieved not personally for social members' characters but also for all the people close to them. In the classifying process, the mind divides people into different groups depending on their diverse characteristics, such as age, skin colour, sex, and social status. Tajfel assures that this procedure causes the production of social groups diversity in any society, as well as the person's

preference to join one of these gatherings and show unconscious conduct due to his in-group and out-group responses (Tajfel, *Human Groups* 24). Moreover, he believes that the person's social identity and social classification are the main reasons behind the social differences in which individuals compare their physical appearance, sex, and social conditions with others of the same society. Therefore, this phenomenon leads them to prefer the characteristics of their in-group rather than the out-group.

Tajfel theorizes that the social members create two opposite sides in their thinking, like "we" and "they", while processing the identification and comparison. Furthermore, he confirms the notion that individuals can have self-respect built-in deeply in their unconscious. It happens when they feel "we" superior to others "they," or else they will endure the bitterness of inferiority or the self-degrading members such as the minorities and the out-casted people (Tajfel, *Social Dimension* 565).

Generally, the process of social classification classifies people into social groups and social classes based on self-respect and self-schema. Through his remarkable experiments, Tajfel shows that collective identities are mostly concerned with out-group members who suffer from

degraded social status and lack social prestige. Therefore, their social trauma directly relates to the identity crisis in which they are socially underestimated and neglected. Hence, it causes internal conflicts to acquire a well-recognized identity or external struggle against social principles (Tajfel *Social Identity* 65).

### **Social Identity in *Days and Nights in Calcutta***

The diasporic literature is an excellent ingredient to examine the issues of social identity. The nature of this category extends the scope of Tajfel's theory which deals with more than one culture or society sharing the same principles. In contrast, Tajfel's theory claims that each should recognize their in-and out-group in their society. His approach can be applied to those who spend most of their lives as constant inhabitants in the same nation, while the case is different for diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee and others.

Discussing Tajfel's theory needs to trace the life of Mukherjee from her birth till now as she expresses all her life experiences in *Days and Night in Calcutta*, especially in three episodes she achieves under the titles: Emblems, Intimations and Calcutta.

On the 27th of July 1940, the literary world witnessed the birth of the prolific diasporic American-Indian writer Bharati Mukherjee to an upper-middle-class of Bengali Brahmin family in Calcutta. Her parents are well-educated, her father, Sudhir Lal Mukherjee, is a remarkable figure in Pharmaceutical Chemistry, and her mother, Bina Mukherjee, is an educated housewife. At an early age, she imitates her mother's attitudes toward others, leading her to resemble her, as her relatives declared. During her life, Mukherjee experiences living in three different societies as she refers, "my life...falls into three disproportionate parts" (Mukherjee 179). She spent the first eight years of her childhood in India, then Mukherjee left for Europe, settling in Canada, married, and had her children. Afterwards, she decides to find a comfortable way of living in the United States. It is evident that her life faces constant displacement, tearing her identity between these societies. Mukherjee's identity is hard to say whether it is Indian according to her origin, Canadian attached to her family members (her husband and her children), or American based on her current residence. Therefore, the discussion focuses on her identity construction based on her classifying people in different social environments

and how they recognize her. Identity construction is based on social interaction, which centres around two aspects: persons and places. Mukherjee's social communication is restricted, especially in her childhood till her youth, to specific people such as her family members, friends and neighbours; all of them belong to Mukherjee's same class, while places concerns with house, school and university.

During the first eight years of her childhood in India, Bharati Mukherjee lived with a large joint family at Rash Behari Avenue (Mukherjee 179). It was inconvenient to live with such a big family "... I was not happy in that joint family," but she feels superior to her cousins (Mukherjee 180). Based on Tajfel's theory, she starts to recognize herself and her family as "we" while the people around her are "they." Also, she gains the notion of being superior to her other cousins. She classifies herself and her family as "we," while all the other members in the same house as "they."

Moreover, she feels her family is superior to other families as she mentions, "we who consider ourselves more intelligent, more politically, more sophisticated, more charming..." (Mukherjee 187). She prefers to swallow the bitterness of isolation rather than join

the other family members' sessions, but she enjoys listening to her grandmother's Indian folk. She feels happy when she individualizes with her favourite books for great literary writers such as Dostoevsky, Maxim Gorky and Tolstoy.

Unexpectedly, Bharati Mukherjee left for London with her family because of her father's research requirements. For three years, she stayed in London and then in Basel. Her life is accompanied by a calm, joyful, peaceful, modern lifestyle during this time. Her staying in Europe acquired her English language to be an excellent bilingual. Nevertheless, acquiring a new language has an unpredicted slopping towards losing most of her mother-tongue language segments (Bengali), as she refers to in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* by saying, "...In sacrificing language, we sacrifice our roots" (Mukherjee 182). Her life in Europe takes an exciting binary. On one side, she experiences racism for the first time. Therefore, she believes that learning the English language can be an appropriate weapon to obtain her position as an ordinary social member. She explores racism in London by saying:

It was the first time I was forced to see myself not reflected in people around me, to see myself as the curiosity that I must have

seemed to the majority a skinny brown child, in stiff school uniform and scarred knees, who could not cartwheels. The sense that I had had of myself in Ballygunge, of being somehow superior to my cousins, was less destructive than this new sense of being a minority on account of my color. I felt I was a shadow person because I was not white. (Mukherjee 182)

On the other side, her career as a writer promoted professionalism at ten in Britain when she wrote a novella from 60 to 80 pages dealing with British children. Moreover, when she started writing short stories, her career widened to reach the gate of success. Mukherjee's career is polished and crystalized by her parents' consistent encouragement, as she indicates in her interview with Geoff Hancock:

He was a visionary and a great risk taker. Though he insisted on an almost anachronistically sheltered adolescence for us, he was able to send us three sisters abroad, out of his reach, for schooling. He wanted the best for his

daughters. And to him the —best meant intellectually fulfilling live...My mother is one of those exceptional Third World women who burned all her life for an education which was denied to well-brought up women of her generation. She made sure that my sisters and I never suffered the same wants (Hancock 11).

In London, Mukherjee starts to put her new life under the microscope compared to India's previous one. She tastes negative due to her skin colour, degrading her social status as a minority among the white British people. This sense recalls her memory during her joint family living conditions, which were less destructive to her than living as an outsider in European society (Mukherjee 182).

On her eleventh birthday, Bharati Mukherjee's family returned to India to live again in Calcutta but with an independent modern style. The journey has a visible impact on the characters of the family members, especially Bharati Mukherjee, as she confesses, "On returning to Calcutta, we found that our image of ourselves had changed radically..." (Mukherjee 182). Bharati

Mukherjee praises those days as the most brilliant days of her life because she lived in the extravagant big house belonging to the compound of the pharmaceutical company. The house's design is similar to classical Western architecture. From inside, there are some decorations in the rooms identical to that in the English house Keeping Magazines. With such a life, the family are so interested in teaching their children English education that's to say, they are westernized, but they also give some importance to the practices and beliefs of their ancestral religion.

Bharati Mukherjee enrolled in Loreto Convent School, which Irish nuns manage. Consistently she is taken to the school accompanied by bodyguards to protect her from unexpected danger, which leads her to be completely isolated from the society in Calcutta. Her parents insist on keeping her away from any social interaction with the locals (Mukherjee 185). Bharati Mukherjee confesses that the Irish nuns' teachings are characterized by racist thoughts, which have an influential defect on her personality to underestimate her native culture (Bengali) and Hindu beliefs:

There was an instilling of value systems, cultural value systems, which strikes me as

ironic. The nuns were Irish to begin with, but in the outpost, they became more British than the British. And during the schooldays we were taught to devalue ... Bengali plays, Bengali Literature, Bengali music, Bengali anything. Then we went home, I came from a very orthodox, traditional family so we had to negotiate in both languages. But as I'm sure happens with minority children who are being channelled into fancy prep schools and all, it created complications within the Hindi community, within the Indian upper-class community of my generation. (Connell 38)

From the age of eleven to nineteen, Mukherjee lives in complete isolation, lacking social interaction with the local Indian people. Her communication is determined to include only her family members and some of the neighbours. In the same context, she describes the abnormal feelings of the neighbours toward her family as they consider Mukherjee's family as "objects of envy and probably freaks" (Mukherjee 183).

Moreover, she describes the physical barriers which separate her family from the neighbours as "there are screening devices to protect us: gates, guards, internal telephone" (Mukherjee 183). According to Erickson's theory, Mukherjee's identity is constructed in these years (youth stage). In addition, her identity is constructed directly by limited social and cultural interactions concerning specific groups of people. She spent her life having no chance to meet new people; as she writes, "we were at home to only those we wished to see, others could be sent away from the front gate" (Mukherjee 183). In those days, Mukherjee enjoys the privacy she devotes a lot, unlike the time she spends in the joint family, which lacks privacy. In this regard, Mukherjee's life is characterized by Western principles, implied in the house design, the school teaching methods and even their daily conversation as if she is living in a Western embassy in India.

At the age of twenty-first, Bharati Mukherjee is sent to join a creative writing programme at Iowa University as a result of her parent's encouragement to get her higher education. She stayed in the USA for more than five years until she enrolled to get her PhD. During her stay in the USA, she married a Canadian Professor and novelist at Iowa University. Her marriage leads her to live again in Canada

but not as a visitor, as a Canadian's wife. She spent more than fourteen years in Canada until she became a Canadian citizen.

Nevertheless, unfortunately, racism is still chasing her wherever she goes. She identifies herself as others belonging to the minorities in the white Canadian society "...I had seen myself as others saw me in Montreal, a brown woman in a white society, different, perhaps even special, but definitely not apart from the majority" (Mukherjee 179). On one occasion, she was subjected to racism again when she received racist letters from female students accusing her aggressively of being "mysterious," "cold", and "hard to get to know" (Mukherjee 179). Moreover, she gets depressed when her husband's works are recognized in Canadian literature when hers is not because of her origin. During this time, she prefers to be isolated from people around her, even from her husband, as he mentions:

Days would pass without much talking. She wouldn't answer my questions. You're very lucky you have your Canada, she said, -and that your Canada accepts you so nicely. I'd been getting letters from a newly launched

Canadian Writers Union, begging me to join. Bharati predictably had not been asked. (Mukherjee 136)

Bharati Mukherjee is targeted to racial discrimination in Canada from Toronto to Montreal. She is considered a pariah in Canadian society. Canadian society discriminates against her when some literary scholars create a racial line between her works and her husband's when they deny her writings and accept her husband's as she describes them:

But if as a citizen I am painfully visible, I cannot make myself visible at world at all as a Canadian writer. The literary world in Canada is nascent, aggressively nationalistic, and self-engrossed. Reviewers claim that my material deals with Indians usually in India, and because my publisher is America, my work is of no interest to Canadian writers and leaders. (Mukherjee 169-170)

Bharati Mukherjee confronted a severe cultural clash when she was in Canada. The feeling of loneliness, rootlessness and alienation occupies her psychological

status. Despite having a Canadian husband, she is unable to assimilate into Western culture. While trying to westernize herself, she loses most of her Indian identity, which converts her to an expatriate.

In the first step of her unique creative writing talent towards the professional world of literary success, Bharati Mukherjee has been profoundly influenced by V.S. Naipaul's narrative technique. As an Iowa University student, she attempted to read more of his novels. Mukherjee chooses him because she is attracted by his main themes, which focus on the buried nations of the third world. She considers herself an expatriate writer, just like V.S. Naipaul, who is not British nor American. Moreover, she finds herself in his character as she thinks that her situation is similar to his case as they share their talent in common by narrating the feelings of pain and absurdity a while living in the alien culture as she indicates:

In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of Naipaul; it is he who has written most movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and exile, 'of third world art' and exile among the former colonizer; the

tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a desh. (Mukherjee 299)

Bharati Mukherjee acquired necessary experiences of being alienated, rootless and isolated while staying in Canada despite having a Canadian husband. She starts to redefine herself as an outsider who lives in a foreign culture.

Bharati Mukherjee fanatically expresses her feelings about Canadian society by describing their real attitudes towards other ethnic groups, which uncover during the arrival of the third-world immigrants to Canada, as she indicates in the introduction of her other novel, *Darkness*:

I was frequently taken for a prostitute or a shoplifter, frequently assumed to be a domestic, praised by astonished auditors that I didn't have a sing-song accent. The society itself, or important elements in that society, routinely made crippling assumptions about me, and about my 'kind'. In the United States, however, I see myself in those same outcasts... in professors'



domestics, high school students, illegal busboys in ethnic restaurants. (Mukherjee, *Darkness* xiv-xv)

As a result of what she has experienced in Canada, she fails to tolerate racist activities towards her. As a result, in 1980, she decided to go back to the place she loved, the United States, again to spend the rest of her life there (Mukherjee 168). She claims that America is the perfect place to live, especially for socially rejected people.

After fourteen years of absence from her native land, Mukherjee makes her decision to go again to India, looking back for her identity. She was utterly dislocated from her country these years, even though she had no contact with her friends or relatives (Mukherjee 172). Besides, she tastes strange feelings in India, similar to when she was in Canada for the first time; Mukherjee recognizes herself as others as she indicates, "...this year-long stay in India, I had seen myself as others saw me in Montreal..." (Mukherjee 179).

In the time of Mukherjee's staying in India, she starts to change her opinion about India drastically. After fourteen months of staying in India, Bharati Mukherjee comprehends that her ideas about expatriation in an alien culture

turned out to be inaccurate. She began to consider herself to be an expatriate individual in Canada. When individuals leave their native culture, they build an imaginary version of their origin. In contrast, this version is different from the actual one, as Mukherjee expresses in her work *Days and Nights in Calcutta*:

My year in India had showed me that I did not need to discard my Western education in order to retrieve the dim shape of my Indian one. It might have been less painful if I could have exchanged one locked trunk of ethics for another, but I had to admit that by the end of the year in India, I no longer liked India in the unreal and exaggerated ways I had in Montreal. (Mukherjee 296)

Bharati Mukherjee compares her life in Canada and India; she perceives that living in a Western country is more suitable for her. Despite being away from her parents, she enjoys her freedom abroad because she was imprisoned by her parents' strategy to exclude her from interacting with the Indian locals. The permanent work restlessness, poverty, and

aggressive labour struggle complicate her life as she refers to:

I realized that for me there would be no more easy consolation through India. The India that I had carried as a talisman against icy Canada had not survived my accidental testing's. I would return, of course, but in future visits India would become just another Asian country with too many agonies and too much passion, and I would be another knowledgeable but desolate tourist. (Mukherjee 297)

Even though her resentment about India is noticeable, she is still devoted to her own country, as she explains her feelings in the interview with Parimal Bhattacharya:

No, not really new, except for some new houses and high-rise buildings, the city is still the same. Of course, it has become more crowded, and many people are forced to live in the streets. There is garbage lying all over the place. But

I cannot call Calcutta a dirty city. Actually Calcutta is not so dirty city as it is publicized to be. A little later she said. -I love Calcutta. I love it more than Bombay or Delhi. I feel pleasure of reunion here. Coming back after living a long time in the West, I can realize it better now. (Bhattacharya 7)

Nevertheless, Mukherjee's devotion is not enough to restore her position as a Bengali Indian woman. The primary goal of Mukherjee's journey to India is to look back for her lost identity, in which she attempts to restore her position in the family and society. She said, "I was going to India... because I was tired and irritable and because I thought of myself as a careless person...In India, I would relearn the precautions taken by a people fluent in self-protection" (Mukherjee 169).

However, her efforts go with the wind as she is recognized as an outsider. Her appearance gives her an alien look who appears like a Western individual. Hence she is excessively rootless, to be a typical middle-class Bengali woman upbringing on an exceptionally middle-class Ballygunje street (Mukherjee 219). For instance, she has a conversation with an Indian man on her way to Calcutta, and he

can recognize her as an individual living in Canada "Madame, I can tell you must be a resident alien in Canada..." (Mukherjee 198). But she is financially and intellectually independent, which leads her to be an outsider due to Bengali women, as she mentions, "I was a career person which meant that I had the right to independent thought without incurring censure while the middle-class Bengali woman was locked into a woman's world of gossip and speculation" (Mukherjee 225).

### CONCLUSION

As an autobiographical work, Mukherjee investigates life in different societies. In India, she spent most of her childhood and her youth in which she supposedly absorbed Indian traditions, values and social norms. However, she has merely acquired these principles due to her direct interaction with the surrounding Western social environment. In other words, she is westernized. During her life in India, her identity is shaped and reshaped under the conditions of loneliness. Besides, her social interaction confines only to specific people and places. While in Canada, she examines life as an Indian immigrant dislocated from her native land to live in an alien culture. She is subjected to racial discrimination due to her skin, which negatively impacts her

social identity. Such experience leads her to classify herself as an ethnic individual with low esteem and shattered self-schema. After a long absence, she returns to her native land to reunite again with her position as a Bangli Indian woman. In this regard, her social identity is formed, reformed and influenced during her life in India and abroad. While overseas, her transformative experiences, such as racial discrimination, become an integral part of her life experiences, preventing her from reconciling again with her origin.

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