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CULTURAL SYNCHRONY AND PARADOXES POSTULATED FROM WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE LION AND THE JEWEL* AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *JASMINE AND DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS*

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Abstract:

Cultural studies have been a significant and unflinching theme of study for the past few decades. Culture includes language, beliefs, customs and codes including the masterpiece of arts belonging a particular place. The culture differs according to the demographics. The etymology of cultural studies traces back to British Marxism during 1950's and the pioneers in this genre are Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall. Raymond and Richard drew their inspiration from the works of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence, who represented lower/working class culture in their novels. The representation of the ambience and the targeted class of these novels acted as a spark to explore the further classes of the society and the culture associated with the place. Stuart Hall expanded the legacy of cultural studies by exploring the culture of indigenous black people and working class women. The main factor in imbibing these cultures is due to migration and interest in exploring another culture. This article focuses on the study of cross cultural perspective analyzing the novels of Wole Soyika and Bharati Mukherjee. The works taken for the study includes Soyinka's play 'Lion and the Jewel' (1962) and Bharti Mukherjee's novels –Jasmine (1989) and Desirable Daughters (2002).

Keywords: *Culture, etymology, migration, exploration, cross-culture, etc.*

T. S. Eliot, who is torch-bearer of the modernist movement in his book, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, points out that 'Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living' (Eliot, 27). Eliot believes that there is a nexus between culture and religion. He makes an important assertion: 'No culture has appeared or developed except together with religion; culture will appear to be the product of religion, or the religion the product of the culture' (Eliot, 15). When it is culture and studies oriented to culture, it highlights the attitude, behavior, traditional beliefs and conceptions followed by particular group of people. These habits and practices differ from place to place. In India, cultural dissemination is first dealt by the group of National institutions like Sangeeth National Academy and the film institutes. They represented the glorious Indus valley civilization, monuments and glorious arts and architecture of the Indian soil

Cultural studies reached its pinnacle in 1970's and 80's all over the world. Multiculturalism became the trend as many authors migrated from their native land to other lands in the pursuit of career, profession, family life etc. The term 'diaspora' originated from the Jewish term, which meant spreading is widely used. So many writers presented the parallelism of the cultures they were born and the one which they inherited. Comparison of cultures explicated the panorama of the vivid lands.



This article focuses on the comparison and contrast between Indian and Yoruba cultures projected in the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Wole Soyinka. To specify about Yoruba culture, they are famous sculptors renowned for their art works and handicrafts. They are known for their traditional weddings and ceremonies. The people belonging to this tribe prefer indigenous names for their children rather than common names. Like Indian belief, Yoruba people also believe in rebirth. Indian literature reflects its blend of history, languages, architecture, music, geography and religious practices. Indian culture has its etymology from Indus valley civilization to the Vedic period and extends up to the Mughal period.

Wole Soyinka, the most prolific of modern African writers. He touched on all the literary genres like drama, poetry, fiction and criticism. As a dramatist, he achieved much fame. He was born in Nigeria, attended college at Ibadan and after did his Honors degree in English from the University of Leeds, England. His parents served as his inspiration, as his father was a headmaster in primary school and his mother- a teacher, political activist, performer and trader. Soyinka's mother carved his niche to become a writer and dramatist. He acted in several plays at Leeds being a part in theater club and published short stories in student magazines. Prof Wilson Knight of Leeds University acted as his impulse to blend his western thoughts and Yoruba rituals. Returning Nigeria, he found his acting company and published *Lion and the Jewel* (1962), *Dance of the forest* (1963), *the trails of brother Jero* (1963), *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Road* (1965) *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973), the Parody King Baabu (2002). His plays reveals his disregard for African authoritarianism and his flair for Nigeria throwing light on western elements synergizing the subject matter and dramatic elements deeply rooted in Yoruba folklore and religion. Symbolism, flashback, genius plotting, irony, satire are his forte, which one can find in his works. He is the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize in 1986.

Bharati Mukherjee, famous diaspora author of Indian origin is best known for her plots encompassing the themes of cultural identity crisis, assimilation, isolation, and emotional imbalance of Asian women. In her works, all the woman protagonists undergo lots of transformation and sufferings. She was born at Calcutta to Bengali parentage. Her father, a chemist secured job at London which enabled Bharati to pursue her schooling abroad. Her parents provided her the best of schooling at prestigious institutions. She started reading the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Bengali classics from her early years. Her grandmother narrated her Indian folklore which became her favorite pastime and the reflections of these Hindu mythologies are evident in her works. Bharati pursued her higher education at Iowa University, where she met and loved Clarke Blaise and married him. Her works include: *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975) and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977). During the period of Transition she wrote short story collections and a non-fiction; *Darkness* (1985), *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1987) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). In the phase of Immigration she wrote many novels; *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughter* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004), and *New Miss India*, (2011).

Jasmine begins with the concept of rebirth in the words of the protagonist Jyothi's grandmother whom she calls Dida. Importance is laid on the place called Varanasi or Kasi, a holy place where Hindus believe that their soul attains moksha (peace) after their death. In the novel 'Lion and the Jewel', the setting is Ilujinle where the traditional ideas and traditions are maintained by the bale or leader, Baroka. The opening scene reveals the village center and



introduces the two main characters, Sidi, the central character in the play and Lakunle, the village schoolmaster.

To compare the dressing styles of both the traditions, the Indian traditional attire of sari as witnessed in many characters in *Jasmine*. For instance: Jasmine's mother, grandmother, her friend Vimala, Professor Dave's wife Nirmala are used to traditional attire and after husband's death, the conventional Indian woman's attire is plain saree abandoning jewels and other costumes. Whereas In the novel, 'The Lion and Jewel', the characters appear in Yoruba traditional attire displaying their shoulder and a fabric tightly woven around their bodies. Lakunle comments on Sidi's costume: 'A grown-up girl must cover up her shoulders' (Mukherjee, 2).

In 'The Lion and Jewel' all the characters are flat for instance, Baroka, Sidi, Lakunle, Sadiku do not change their traits in the course of the play, whereas in *Jasmine*, most of the characters are round characters who transform themselves in the course of the plot. Some of the characters, who undergo transformations, are Jasmine, Professor Vadhera, Du, and Duff.

Bride price, the term in Yoruba tradition refers to the price paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage. In this play, Sidi demands bride price, if Lakunle wants to marry her. In contrast, 'dowry' is the practice seen in India up to these days where the bride's family has to pay large sums either in the form of money or gold or furniture or utensils at the time of the marriage. In another novel of Bharati Mukherjee *Desirable Daughters* (2012), the cruelty of dowry is intensely portrayed, in one instance the groom's father asks for post-haste dowry which signifies that that the bride's home has to pay the dowry even after the death of the groom. The incident has happened at the time of the marriage when the groom was bitten by snake. "The snake had not been charged to kill the thirteen year old bridegroom by a goddess enraged at having been defiled by a menstruating devotee... you will arrange posthaste for the dowry cash and the dowry gifts to be brought on board, Jai Krishna Babu. What you do with your wretched girl, the killer of my son. I make your business" (Mukherjee, 13).

The trait of hardworking and confident womanhood is seen in both the cultures, when the author describes about the ladies working in the fields of Punjab and Illujinle. The turmoil of torture, rape, dearth and other struggles is always impending in the agricultural forms. In Yoruba tradition, women pound the yam, bent all the days to plant the millet with the child strapped on their shoulders. By uttering this Sidi feels confident that women empowerment exists in Illujinle as well. *Jasmine* also is considered as epitome of women empowerment as she transforms her identity and survives wherever she treads.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is one of the main themes pictured in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Tradition is represented by Baroka, the bale and other characters like Sidi, Sadiku, Ailatu etc. Modernity is represented by Lakunle as he likes and wishes to reform the village of Illujinle. He says, "Within an year or two, I swear, the town shall see a transformation, Bride price will be a thing forgotten and wives shall take their place by men. A motor road will pass this spot... No man shall take more wives than one. (36-37). His rejection of the traditional bride-price is another part of his modern ways. Lakunle is madly in love with Sidi and "offers her a 'Western' monogamous marriage" (Gibbs, 307).

In comparison, *Jasmine*, the protagonist will face a conflict between Indian culture and American culture. In the beginning of the novel, Jasmine represents Indianess but later when she gets accustomed with America, she totally becomes American personality. "She even says I could not admit that I had accustomed myself to American clothes. American clothes disguised my widowhood. In a T- shirt and cords, I was taken for a student. In this apartment of artificially



maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyothi-like” (Mukherjee, 145). Tradition is portrayed through Jasmine’s grandmother, Dida who, stays in ashram. Patriarchy is much evident when she blames Jasmine’s mother is responsible for all the flaws in the family. When jasmine insists she wants to become doctor and set up a clinic. Dida says, “Blame the mother. Insanity has to come from nowhere. It’s the mother who is mad... the girl is mad. Her mother is mad. The whole country is mad. Kali yuga has come” (Mukherjee, 51-52).

In *Desirable Daughters*, culture is represented through family relations. Sister is addressed as ‘didi’, children are taught from the childhood to call auntie or uncle. ‘It’s how a family based culture sees the world, outward from the protective weave of relatedness, suspicious of anything that can’t be fitted inside it (Mukherjee, 36). The nexus between the cultures is noticed in the concept of childbirth. In the words of Baroka, he speaks about his family’s male prowess. “While my grandfather, that man of teak, fathered two sons, late on sixty five. But Okiki, my father beat them all producing female twins at sixty-seven” (Mukherjee, 30). In Jasmine, the protagonist conceives in her later years in hostile land and Bharati Mukherjee refers in all her novels about the long generation progeny in Indian women. She portrays her protagonist conceives during their later phase of their age around late 30’s or 40’s. Baroka lies to sadiku that he had lost his manhood but actually the reason acts as a trap to win Sidi. Readers can witness the generation before one century, where ten children are considered as common in Indian families. ‘Bud has five brothers and three sisters, and they were all born or at least christened with silver spoons in their mouths. I too, come from family of nine’ (Mukherjee, 17).

Women power is expressed in both the novels as both the authors have social outlook. Jasmine’s transformation from a village girl to American lady is evident from each and every phase of the novel. Her identity and name changes accordingly to the places. Like Lakunle, Jasmine also accepts modernity and she feels very exuberant with her new lifestyle. ‘I could not admit that I had accustomed myself from to American clothes. American clothes disguised my widowhood. In T shirt and cords, I was taken for student. In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyothi – like’ (Mukherjee, 145). Lakunle throughout the novel acknowledges modernity. He wanted to throw away the shackles of the tradition that obliterate the development of the people. Soyinka’s beautifully depicts: “We’ll buy saucepans for all the women, Clay pots are crude and unhygienic, No man shall take more wives than one, That’s why they’re impotent too soon....d take to tea with milk and sugar. (Mukherjee, 37). He also mocks Sadiku to attend his school and sit with twelve year olds though she is seventy. Soyinka emphasizes the importance of education through Lakunle in many of his conversations with Sidi and Sadiku.

The flavor of the rural life is enumerated by both the authors in quintessential manner. The life of farmers and the main occupation of agriculture is showcased by Soyinka and Bharati. On the words of Sidi, it could be comprehended by the readers that pounding the yam, planting the millets are all the occupation in Illujinle. Other sorts of occupation include rearing and hunting. In the words of Baroka about his might, these are evident: “Do I not still with the most fearless ones, Hunt the leopard and the boa at night. And save the farmers’ goat from further harm? Did I not to announce the Harmattan, Climb to the top of silk cotton tree, Break the first pod and scatter tasseled seeds” (Soyinka, 28). Even the stamps of the region are filled with agricultural images like groundnuts, palm trees or cocoa trees. Even their religious practices find a circumlocution around the tree. Sadiku brings the vision of beautiful land of harvest and asks Lakunle to carry on



with agriculture to pay the bride price. Juxtaposing Bharti spotlights the bucolic landscape of Hasnapur, where buffaloes were jam packed in an enclosure and the maid servant was keeping herself busy in making dung cakes. “The maidservant’s pretty little girl was scooping up fresh dung, kneading it thick with straw chips, and patting them into cakes the size of her palms. She would slap the cakes down on the adobe walls of our kitchen enclosure and leave them to dry into fuel” (Mukherjee, 50).

The author brings out her minute analysis of ancient Indian landscape, where people lacked toilets and they defecated in open fields where leeches and roaches crawled. In *Desirable Daughters*, the writer depicts India in another prospect, a way through beautiful hills and rivers. When Tara, the protagonist visits her parents to Rishikesh along with her son Rabi, the author takes us to another spiritual world. Holistically though the cultures are totally contrasted, some common features are perceived by the readers. Both Soyinka and Mukherjee have embellished the cultures of the land in an unleashed manner. Like the rivers end at the ocean, the cultures seem to merge in a point which is the tribute to the nativity. The idea which can be deciphered from the novels is that though people migrate to many places, the universality is one cannot change the dedication and reminiscence of their nativity will never change.

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