



A study of Bharathi Mukherjee's Short Story "Lady from Lucknow"

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Abstract:

Literature transcends national and cultural boundaries, offers a global view of world literature. In literature, religions probe vital issues everywhere as innumerable religions are followed all over the world reflect in various literatures. The present paper is focused on a short story titled "The Lady from Lucknow", taken from Bharathi Mukherjee's short story collection, Darkness. Stereotypes and racism are all around us, many times affecting what we do and how we act. Quite often however, we do not realize the impact that they have on others and even ourselves. Bharati Mukherjee's short story, "The Lady From Lucknow" is about Nafeesa Hafeez, a young woman who moves to America with her husband. Although they are well off, Nafessa's struggles to enjoy her life and fit in the world around her, Nafeesa then meets James Beamish, an older married man, and the two have an affair. Nafeesa suicide is caused by the varying degrees of racism that she experiences through her numerous attempts to assimilate in a new country and be recognized and equal to others.

Key words: culture, ethnic, religion, stereotypes, racism, assimilate. I. Introduction

Literature transcends national and cultural boundaries, offers a global view of world literature. An literature, religions probe vital issues everywhere as innumerable religions are followed all over the world reflect in various literatures. Religion is considered as a set of institutions, or ideas and beliefs or lived practice, all of which have complex relations with each other, and all of which are affected by and in turn affect literature. The question here is how religion and literature are interrelated to one another.

The present paper focuses on short story, titled "The Lady from Lucknow," taken from Bharathi Mukherjee's short story collection, "Darkness". She is a novelist and a short story writer who deals with the problems of transition which brings a state of displacement, separation, rootlessness, cultural conflict or biculturalism and cultivates the ocean of diasporic ethos in her works. If we look at her



characters in novels and short stories, we find them as a harbinger of diasporic consciousness in the shape of sufferings, pains, predicaments, loneliness, homelessness and rootlessness. The present short will develops deep in highlighting such diasporic ethos of cultural conflict of Indian as well as American cultures.

Bharathi Mukherjee's short story in the volume *Darkness*, "The Lady from Lucknow" is ironical in theme and technique. Beginning the story with a surrealistic picturing of a broken heart from the point of view of a small and possibly shocked girl of four, Mukherjee develops the theme of passionate love into a major cultural paradox as the Muslim protagonist matures into a young and voluptuous woman married to Iqbal an engineer-manager, working for the IBM in Atlanta, Georgia. Mukherjee's fictional intention, in this story, seems to create an ironic double-edged situation: one on the cultural, ethical level and the other on the personal- moral level.

Islam does not mandate Muslim women to be housewives; but she needs her husband's permission to leave the house and take up employment. In majority of the Muslim countries, women exercise varying degrees of their religious rights with regards to marriage, divorce, legal status, dress code, and education based on different interpretations. In Mukherjee's "The Lady from Lucknow", The toddler Muslim girl Nafeesa, who was probably confused or puzzled by the logic of love-punishment-death of Husseina, later on develops an intense desire for an adulterous relationship with an elderly sixty five year old white American intellectual. The significance of the story lies not in the theme of adultery, but in the juxtaposition of repressive cultural orthodoxy and permissive cultural heterodoxy. Her use of irony is indeed tellingly effective. At a personal level, it is ironical that the Muslim family which moved to Rawalpindi from Lucknow "because my father wanted to protect us from the Hindus shameful lust" should fail to preserve its cherished communal value system under the impact of an alien culture. In addition, the ironic detachment of Mukherjee is so complete that it enables her to provide the full opportunity for the character to grow and reach its limit naturally. The Lucknow-born Pakistani wife's lust and love for Dr. James Beamish reach their climax as she sheds all fear and shame even when humiliated by his middle-aged wife. Mukherjee seems to say with an ironic chuckle that now it is left to the permissive Americans to turn the tables on the overprotected Asian expatriates. The message seems to be loud and clear: the cloistered virtue due to one's excessive



cultural conditioning is always vulnerable. She is finally sent back to her beautiful deck-house by a cab.

Nafeesa eventually is unable to deal with the pain she feels, for living in the invisible state any longer and so she hangs herself. Her constant attempts to be viewed as equal as the racism she battles in society, while wanting nothing more than to fit in, push her over the limit to lead into her taking her own life.

The United States of America has its own unique social and cultural characteristics. It is an ethnically and racially diverse country as a result of large-scale migration from many ethnically and racially different countries throughout its history. At present, cohabitation of unmarried couple is common in the U.S. The Free Encyclopedia from Wikipedia authentically states cohabitation of unmarried couples totals 4.85 million couples who live together in the United States.

In Islam, sexual intimacy between a woman and any man who she is not married to is called Zina, which is considered as a religious crime in Islam. This includes extramarital sex, premarital sex and rape. It is in the list of severe crimes, that is a crime against God. If such is the case, Nafeesa's sexual intercourse with the white American Intellectual can be considered as a crime spiritually, in one sense. But in another sense, In American's culture it is not big crime, where one's own violation of personal sexual desire is not severely condemnable.

Themes like cultural shock, cultural victim, and cultural adaptation interrelated with religions are vividly explored in Bharathi Mukherjee's and the "The Lady from Lucknow".

"The Lady from Lucknow", may be considered in the category of cultural adaptation. Beginning the story with a surrealistic picturing of a broken heart from the point of view of a small and possibly shocked girl of four, Mukherjee develops the theme of passionate love into a major cultural paradox as the Muslim protagonist matures into a young and voluptuous woman, Nafeesa. A lady from the orthodox Muslim community dares to violate culturally, spiritually and admitted her personal passion to fulfill.



Conclusion

Hence, Socio-Cultural redemption in terms of Cultural shock, Cultural victim, Cultural adaptation are interrelated with religion vividly depicted in Bharathi Mukherjee's short story "The Lady from Lucknow" from her volume of Darkness taken.

Works cited

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