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IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES of CULTURAL SHOCK in THE MIDDLEMAN AND OTHER STORIES

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Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee (July 27, 1940-January 28, 2017) belonged to an upper-middle class Hindu Brahmin family in Calcutta, India. In her second collection of short stories *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) that has won the National Book Critics Circle Award, Mukherjee expands her narrative voice to explore not only the lives of immigrants but also those of European Americans who have been brought into contact with cultures about which they have little knowledge. It is a smart collection of eleven short stories, which explores the experiences of the immigrants belonging to various countries of Europe. It highlights the reciprocal effects of the migrants, and the American life on each other. The migrants are the middlemen. The word middleman of the titular story portraits of Alfie Judah, a Baghdadi Jew, Indian Shaila Bhav in Canada, Vietnam vet Jeb Marshall, Trinidadian Jasmine of Indian origin, Danny, Maya, Panna, Roshan and others, the legal, illegal migrants from the different countries, are painted with glittering colors of America. They have to adopt the American culture for survival. It also portrays an America which is landscape of migration. Human trafficking, arms and drugs smuggling, sexual exploitation of women, administratively sanctioned human oppression, political patronization, some of the socio political problems of the times that surface in these stories still perplex the human society. Bharati Mukherjee is herself a middleman, an Interpreter of two cultures. She is keen tackling such big subjects as violence, cultural shock and politics in these stories. Her own struggle for identity, first her exile from India, then her being as an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as immigrant in the US have provided her with satisfaction of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants.

Keywords: Cultural shock, exile, exploitation, identity, Migrants, struggle

INTRODUCTION

The Middleman and Other Stories deals with theme of diasporic feelings of characters which is reflected through the dream of America as a land of fortune, freedom and happiness. In the stories, her characters have to pay a heavy price of being 'American' and they belong to different countries of world like India, China, Italy, Hungary, Iraq, Trinidad, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Germany, Philippines, Vietnam and Afghanistan. Protagonists are generally women characters who are crazy and inclined to have a sexual relationship which finally results in the sexual misadventure. In these stories sex becomes a bond of love which captivates them to come to America for seeking happiness and fortune. It is a tragic situation of characters which provides them the sufficient stock of diasporic experience of exile and alienation.