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**Racism and Rootlessness Reading of Bharati Mukherjee's Short Story – 'The World According to Hsu'**

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**Abstract**

Racial Discrimination and Rootlessness is at the core of culture-clash as well as Diasporic writing. The short story 'The World According to Hsu' of Bharati Mukherjee is not exception to these aspects. The racial discrimination presents a series of injustices committed to immigrants in that country most immigrants fear and feel threatened because they are afraid to lost everything they have and also afraid to be deported and return to the homeland. The offshoot of this tension brings the alienation and rootlessness.

**Key words:** Racial discrimination, rootlessness, homeland, alienation, hostland, immigrants etc.

Racial Discrimination and Rootlessness is at the core of culture-clash as well as Diasporic writing. The short story 'The World According to Hsu' of Bharati Mukherjee is not exception to these aspects. The racial discrimination presents a series of injustices committed to immigrants in that country most immigrants fear and feel threatened because they are afraid to lose everything they have and also afraid to be deported and return to the homeland. The offshoot of this tension brings the alienation and rootlessness.

Racial Discrimination is major hindrance of the immigrants that causes to suffer. It is an ideology and action of rejection and intolerance towards people who have a different nationality, coloured skin and creed and they become the subject of ridicule, rejection and hostility. The usage of the word 'Racial Discrimination' is

relatively recent and widespread into the western world in the 1930s when it was used to describe the political agenda and ideology of Nazism which saw 'race' as a naturally political unit. Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia defines,

*"Racism and racial discrimination are often used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of whether these differences are described as racial."*(P.1)

The Oxford English Dictionary (2008) records,

*"Belief in the superiority of a particular race."*

According to the UN International Convention (1965)

*"The term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."*(Racism, Wikipedia P.3)

Garner, in 2009, identifies the existing three elements of Racial discrimination,

1. Historical, in which he speaks about the hierarchical power relations between groups.
2. An ideology about racial differences.
3. Discriminatory practices.

The immigrant looks for a new opportunity and a new lifestyle in alien land where he is looked as invading the country with his family. The situations will become more and more difficult for him because native people who are around immigrant do everything possible to take advantage of the conditions including Government Officials of host land.

The Diasporic writers present a series of injustices committed to immigrants in the host country where the immigrants look for a new opportunity and a new lifestyle in U.S. where they are looked as immigrants invading the country with their families by native inhabitants. The situation will become more and more

difficult for them because native people who are around immigrants do everything possible to take advantage of the conditions including government officials of Canada and America. The problem of the immigrants in the alien land arise out of cultural displacement. They cannot have the sense of belonging anywhere because of their sense of alienation that is evident in the members of a diasporic population lead their life in a way bearing marks of displacement and searching for belongingness. In this way, racial discrimination and rootlessness are integral in diasporic literature.

The attack on the immigrants is common inhuman practice of the host land. Most of them suppose the job opportunities are invaded by these immigrants who are also ready to work on low pay scale which lead the natives to hate and discriminate. Even in legal matters, it remains difficult to win cases when people argue with people who belong to the country though they are not guilty. The government officials look partial in these cases. The selected writers point out the same in their short stories.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Darkness* (1985) offers an angry judgment of the hospitality of the west. The book reflects her thoughts of Canada and U.S. where she had bitter immigrant experience at the initial years of her career.

*"If I may put it in its harshest terms, it would be this: in Canada, I was frequently taken for a prostitute or 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;"* (Darkness, Introduction, P.2-3)

Racial discrimination is the heart of immigrant writing. Bharati Mukherjee's third story in *Darkness* – *The World According to Hsu* exposes this bitter truth of immigrant life. Her protagonist in the present story faces not only racial discrimination but abrasiveness of host people also. It is the story of Ratna, the Eurasian of Indian origin and her husband Graeme Clayton, a Canadian professor of psychology at McGill University, Montreal. They are on holiday trip to an island at the coast of Africa. Both of them are here to enjoy the vacation on the shores of the vast new ocean. They have planned to pick shells feed lemurs on the balcony of

a hotel and visit to a colonial museum. However, they face another unwanted adventure – violent demonstrations of agitators. So, they are forced to remain confined in the hotel room. As an immigrant and having face like Indians though Eurasian, the protagonist of this story, Ratna feels insecure. She compares Montreal and Toronto. She thinks,

*“She claims to be happy enough in Montreal, less perturbed by the impersonal revenges of ‘Quebec politicians than personal attacks by Toronto racists. In Montreal, she was merely ‘English’..... in Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki, And for Pakis, Toronto was hell” (p.41)*

In the curfew, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton are forced to live in a hotel room, hotel Papillon. Ratna doesn't afraid of the violence outside in Montreal but she is happy about the curfew which delays her departure to Toronto where her husband is going to join become a Head in the Department of Personality Development in Anglo Montreal. So, Graeme persuades her to move Toronto. She recalls some incidents of racial hatred

“A Bengali woman was beaten and nearly blinded on the street. And the week before that an eight year old Punjabi boy was struck by a car announcing on its bumper.

*KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI” (p.47)*

Graeme wants to cheer up Ratna and pays five thousand dollars for airfare to enjoy the vacation. Ratna accuses him selfish because he is not able to understand her emotional upheaval which racially discriminated incidents provoke in her.

He wants to soothe her.

He says, *“it won't happen to you.”*

*“Look --- violence is everywhere. Toronto's the safest city on the continent”*  
(p.47)

At this she promptly retorts

*“Sure,” she said, “for you,” (p.47)*

Graeme is not able to relax her. Another event flashes in her mind about an Indian Professor's wife.

"An Indian Professor's wife was jumped at a red light, light in her car. They threw her groceries on the street. They said Pakis shouldn't drive big cars." For Ratna, it is better not to leave Montreal where she is dark skinned Eurasian or a foreigner, instead of a Paki at Toronto. She can enjoy her dinner and her time with other tourists without any discrimination. The immigrant life of Ratna revolves around the incidents of racial hatred at Canada which affects her psyche.

Perhaps she is in search of 'home' where there is a feeling of ease, secure and free from conflict but her inescapable past remains Ratna as alien on that island.

Homelessness and Racial discrimination is bitter truth of immigrant's life which Ratna faces; Mukherjee ends the story with,

*"No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home again"* (P.55-56)

We find that the title of the story is derived from an article by Kenneth J.Hsu in *The Scientific American* which Graeme is reading at his holiday resort. In this story, according to Christine Gomez, 'Hsu' is a 'metaphor.' It is for 'one world' which is free from cultural collisions, dilemmas, and separation. But Nagendra Kumar considers that the view of Gomez proves a mere hollow dream. Here we have the world that is based on sharp racial distinctions. There is a feeling of "otherness" for those 'Pakis' who have come to Canada from South Asia.

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