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# ‘A Shadow without Depth or Color’? Corporeality and Migration in Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction

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## Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee, perhaps the most famous of first-generation South Asian American women writers, has made a name for herself by exploring the problematics of migration and border-crossings in much of her literary oeuvre. Many first-generation women writers from South Asia address – and challenge – in their works the precarious status of an immigrant middle-class woman who is supposed to function within the diaspora as the keeper, protector and embodiment of the reified national tradition. As DasGupta and Das Dasgupta put it, “it is the icon of the perfect Indian woman which upholds community integrity” (386) to keep up with the model minority myth that many South Asians in the US subscribe to. What Bharati Mukherjee does in her representations of female migrants, however, is to privilege the category of gender over that of social class. The presentation will focus on several of her short stories and novels (“The Tenant,” “The Lady from Lucknow,” “Jasmine” and the novel of the same title, to give just a few examples) that articulate the experience of migration in corporeal terms, showing that it is primarily her female body that affects a woman’s transition into the new cultural reality and her reception there, regardless of whether she happens to be a professor teaching comparative literature at college (like Maya in “The Tenant”), the wife of a successful professional (like Nafeesa in “The Lady from Lucknow”), or an illegal immigrant finding a baby-sitter occupation in the States (like the eponymous characters of both the story and the novel *Jasmine*). Mukherjee’s literary texts can thus be argued to illustrate Meena Alexander’s comment that an immigrant woman is essentially “a body crossed by faultlines” (182).

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