The Management of Grief Study Guide

The Management of Grief by Bharati Mukherjee

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Introduction

"The Management of Grief" is a poignant fictional account of one woman's reaction to the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182. It was first published in 1988 in the collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*, winner of the 1988 National Book Critics Circle Award. "The Management of Grief" tells the story of Shaila Bhave, an Indian Canadian Hindu who has lost her husband and two sons in the crash. In third person narration, Shaila recounts the emotional events surrounding the event and explores their effects on herself, the Indian Canadian community, and mainstream Euro-Canadians. The clumsy intervention of a government social worker represents the missteps of the Canadian government in the general handling of the catastrophe.

Mukherjee herself had a deep personal response to the crash, having lived in Canada from 1966 to 1980 with her husband, Clark Blaise. She was enraged by the Canadian government's interpretation of the crash as a foreign, "Indian" matter when the overwhelmingly majority of the victims were Canadian citizens. In a book-length investigation and account of the incident, *The Sorrow and the Terror*, co-written with Blaise, Mukherjee pieces together the bombing and events leading up to it, charging the government with ignoring clear signs of Khalistani terrorism cultivated on Canadian soil. Mukherjee argues that the government dismissed the escalating Indian Canadian factionalism (e.g. Canadian Khalistanis vs. Canadian Hindus) as a "cultural" struggle that would be best settled among the "Indians." She blames Canada's official policy of "multiculturalism," which ostensibly encourages tolerance and equality but effectively fosters division and discrimination across racial boundaries.

The Sorrow and the Terror is a moving, non- fictional precursor to "The Management of Grief," articulating the human costs of the escalations of intra-ethnic Indian conflict whose reach does not exempt the country's North American emigrants. As Shaila laments: "We, who stayed out of politics and came half way around the world to avoid religious and political feuding, have been the first in the New World to die from it."

Author Biography

Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta, India on July 27, 1940. Her father was a renowned chemist with connections around the globe. She and her two sisters were educated in India, England and Switzerland. At the age of three she spoke English along with her native Bengali. Mukherjee received her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and an M.A. in English and ancient Indian culture from the University of Baroda in 1961. She received her M.F.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1963 and 1969 respectively. In 1964 she married Clark Blaise, a fellow writer in the Iowa Writers Workshop. The "culture shock" of the midwest, not to mention America in general, profoundly affected Mukherjee; many of her works, like *Jasmine* (1989) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), dramatize the uniqueness of the immigrant's struggle in the "heartland."

Mukherjee's academic resume is impressive: she has taught literature and writing at Marquette University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, McGill University, Skidmore College, Mountain State College, Queens College and Columbia University. She is now Distinguished Professor at the University of California at Berkeley. She is also an award-winning writer of both fiction and non-fiction. Her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1975), was a finalist for the Governor General's Award of Canada, and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction that year.

Mukherjee remembers Canada bitterly as an angry, racist nation. In a 1989 interview with *The Iowa Review*, she remarks that in her nearly 15 years of residence there, the country never ceased making her feel like a "smelly, dark, alien other." Mukherjee blames Canada's policy of "multiculturalism" for engendering this atmosphere of thinly veiled racism. "The Management of Grief" speaks out against the social ills generated by this policy. In this story, the tragedy of the Air India Flight 182 brings the racial divisions of Canadian society into sharp relief. Shaila Bhave's perspective is much like Mukherjee's own, criticizing the government for dismissing the catastrophe as an "Indian" incident when over 90% of the passengers were Canadian citizens. The clumsy treatment of crash victims' relatives by Judith Templeton, the government social worker, represents mainstream culture's ignorant perception of ethnic citizens as "not quite," second-class, Canadians.

Plot Summary

"The Management of Grief" opens with the chaos at Shaila Bhave's Toronto home. Her house is filled with strangers, gathered together for legal advice, company, and tea. Dr. Sharma, his wife, their children, Kusum and "a lot of women [Shaila] do[esn't] know" are trying to make sense of the crash of Air India Flight 182, simultaneously listening to multiple radios and televisions to catch some news about the event. The Sharma boys murmur rumors that Sikh terrorists had planted a bomb. Shaila narrates the scene from a haze, speaking with detached, shell-shocked calm. The Valium she has been taking contributes to her stable appearance, but inside she feels "tensed" and "ready to scream." Imagined cries from her husband and sons "insulate her" from the anxious activity in her house.

Shaila and Kusum, her neighbor and friend, are sitting on the stairs in Shaila's house. Shaila reminisces about Kusum and Satish's recent housewarming party that brought cultures and generations together in their sparkling, spacious suburban home: "even white neighbors piled their plates high with [tandoori]" and Shaila's own Americanized sons had "broken away" from a Stanley Cup telecast to come to the party. Shaila somberly wonders "and now . . . how many of those happy faces are gone." Implicitly Shaila feels "punished" for the good success of Indian immigrant families like hers and Kusum's. Kusum brings her out of her reverie with the question: "Why does God give us so much if all along He intends to take it away?"

Shaila regrets her perfect obedience to upperclass, Indian female decorum. She has, for instance, never called her husband by his first name or told him that she loved him. Kusum comforts her saying: "He knew. My husband knew. They felt it. Modern young girls have to say it because what they feel is fake." Kusum's first daughter Pam walks into the room and orders her mother to change out of her bathrobe since reporters are expected. Pam, a manifest example of the "modern young girls" that Kusum disdains, had refused to go to India with her father and younger sister, preferring to spend that summer working at McDonald's. Mother and daughter exchange harsh words, and Pam accuses Kusum of wishing that Pam had been on the plane, since the younger daughter was a better "Indian." Kusum does not react verbally.

Judith Templeton, a Canadian social worker, visits Shaila, hoping Shaila can facilitate her work with the relatives of the deceased. Judith is described as young, comely and professional to a fault. She enlists Shaila to give the "right human touch" to the impersonal work of processing papers for relief funds. Judith tells Shaila that she was chosen because of her exemplary calm and describes her as a "pillar" of the devastated Indian Canadian community. Shaila explains that her seemingly cool, unaffected demeanor is hardly admired by her community, who expect their members to mourn publicly and vocally. She is puzzled herself by the "calm [that] will not go away" and considers herself a "freak."

The story moves to Dunmanus Bay, Ireland, the site of the crash. Kusum and Shaila are wading in the warm waters and recalling the lives of their loved ones, imagining they will

be found alive. Kusum has not eaten for four days and Shaila wishes she had also died here along with her husband and sons. They are joined by Dr. Ranganathan from Montreal, another who has lost his family, and he cheers them with thoughts of unknown islets within swimming distance. Dr. Ranganathan utters a central line of the story: "It's a parent's duty to hope." He scatters pink rose petals on the water, explaining that his wife used to demand pink roses every Friday. He offers Shaila some roses, but Shaila has her own gifts to float —Mithun's half finished model B-52, Vinod's pocket calculator, and a poem for Vikram, which belatedly articulates her love for him.

Shaila is struck by the compassionate behavior of the Irish and compares them to the residents of Toronto, unable to image Torontonians behaving this open-heartedly. Kusum has identified her husband. Looking through picture after picture, Shaila does not find a match for anyone she knows. A nun "assigned to console" Shaila reminds her that faces will have altered, bloated by the water and with facial bones broken from the impact. She is instructed to "try to adjust [her] memories."

Shaila leaves Ireland without any bodies, but Kusum takes her husband's coffin through customs. A customs bureaucrat detains them under suspicion of smuggling contraband in the coffin. In her first public expression of emotion, Shaila explodes and calls him a "bastard." She contemplates the change in herself that this trauma has wrought: "Once upon a time we were well-brought-up women; we were dutiful wives who kept our heads veiled, our voices shy and sweet."

From Ireland, many of the Indian Canadians, including Shaila, go to India to continue mourning. Shaila describes her parents as wealthy and "progressive." They do not mind Sikh friends dropping by with condolences, though Shaila cannot help but bristle. Her grandmother, on the other hand, has been a prisoner of tradition and its gender expectations for most of her life. She was widowed at age sixteen and has since lived a life of ascetic penitence and solitude, believing herself to be a "harbinger of bad luck." Shaila's mother calls this kind of behavior "mindless mortification." While other middleaged widows and widowers are being matched with new spouses, Shaila is relieved to be left alone, even if it is because her grandmother's history designates her as "unlucky."

Shaila travels with her family until she is numb from the blandness of diversion. In a deserted Himalayan temple, Shaila has a vision of her husband. He tells her: "You must finish alone what we started together." Knowing that her mother is a practical woman with "no patience with ghosts, prophetic dreams, holy men, and cults," Shaila tells her nothing of the vision but is spurred to return to Canada.

Kusum has sold her house and moved into an ashram, or retreat, in Hardwar. Shaila considers this "running away," but Kusum says it is "pursuing inner peace." Shaila keeps in touch with Dr. Ranganathan, who has moved to Montreal and has not remarried. They share a melancholy bond but are comforted to have found new "relatives" in each other.

At this point, Judith has done thorough and ambitious work observing, assessing, charting and analyzing the grief of the Indian Canadians. She matter-of-factly reports to Shaila that the community is stuck somewhere between the second and third stage of mourning, "depressed acceptance," according to the "grief management textbooks." In reaction to Judith's self-congratulatory chatter, Shaila can only manage the weak and ironic praise that Judith has "done impressive work." Judith asks Shaila to accompany her on a visit to a particularly "stubborn" and "ignorant" elderly couple, recent immigrants whose sons died in the crash. Shaila is reluctant because the couple are Sikh and she is Hindu, but Judith insists that their "Indian-ness" is mutual enough.

At the apartment complex, Shaila is struck by the "Indian-ness" of the ghetto neighborhood; women wait for buses in saris as if they had never left Bombay. The elderly couple are diffident at first but open up when Shaila reveals that she has also lost her family. Shaila explains that if they sign the documents, the government will give them money, including air-fare to Ireland to identify the bodies. The husband emphasizes that "God will provide, not the government" and the wife insists that her boys will return. Judith presses Shaila to "convince" them, but Shaila merely thanks the couple for the tea. In the car Judith complains about working with the Indian immigrants, calling the next woman "a real mess." Shaila asks to be let out of the car, leaving Judith and her sterile, textbook approach to grief management.

The story ends with Shaila living a quiet and joyless life in Toronto. She has sold her and Vikram's large house and lives in a small apartment. Kusum has written to say that she has seen her daughter's reincarnation in a Himalayan village; Dr. Ranganathan has moved to Texas and calls once a week. Walking home from an errand, Shaila hears "the voices of [her] family." They say: "Your time has come, . . . Go, be brave." Shaila drops the package she is carrying on a nearby park bench, symbolizing her venture into a new life and her break with an unproductive attachment to her husband and sons' spirits. She comments on her imminent future: "I do not know where this voyage I have begun will end." Nevertheless, she "drops the package" and "starts walking."

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

On June 23, 1985, an Air India Boeing 747 left Toronto for London Heathrow, the first stop on its scheduled journey to Bombay. As the plane prepared to descend into London, it was destroyed by an on board bomb, sending the craft on a fiery path into the Irish Sea. All 329 passengers, ninety percent of whom were Canadians of Indian ancestry, were killed. From the outset, Sikh extremists were thought to be the perpetrators of the worst terrorist event in the years prior to the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

"Management of Grief" begins in the aftermath of that horrible day in June 1985. The narrative voice, and in many respects the conscience of the story, is Shaila Bhave, a Hindu Canadian who knows that both her husband Vikram and her two sons were on the plane when it was lost. In the opening two pages, images of death and horror are the backdrop to the haphazard but well intentioned attempts by the Indian community of Toronto to help the families of the victims. Various neighbors, the president of the Indo-Canadian Society and children move in and out of the scene, which is driven forward by the observations by Shaila as to the confusion about the cause of the crash, and her own fanciful but maternal hopes that her family remain alive.

The opening pages of "Management of Grief" also set out the immersion of traditional Indian values and social mores into secular Canadian society-- the agony over the loss, the strangers in her kitchen making tea "the Indian way", the coming of a reporter to conduct an interview about the disaster, Shaila's desire to scream in the midst of the confusion, and her recall as to how they had initially come to Ontario-- all woven together, where the reader can imagine the riot of emotion that day.

The first segment of the story concludes with Shaila and her neighbor, Kusum, sitting together holding hands while the other well-intentioned members of their community move about them. Kusum has also lost her husband and a daughter who were on the Air India flight. Shaila tells us of the depth of Kusum's grief, a confrontation between Kusum's elder daughter Pam and Kusum as Shaila sits with her on the stairs, a challenge from the teenager that her mother was really wondering , "why not her?" Pam is a westernized teenager, who by example declares that she will take the Canada's "Wonderland" amusement park and the North American image it projects over Bombay. Her challenge goes unanswered by Kusum - she gives voice to the feeling of most of humanity when they suffer a personal loss - " 'Why does God give us so much if all along he intended to take it away?"

The second segment commences with Shaila meeting with a representative of the provincial government, an earnest and well intentioned young social worker named Judith Templeton. Templeton has contacted Shaila in the hope that Shaila can help her reach out to members of the Indian community whose family were killed in the Air India

crash, but who are more isolated from the Ontario mainstream, through the barriers of language and Indian culture, than people like Shaila. Templeton tells Shaila that she has sought Shaila out because it is the opinion of the Toronto Indian community that Shaila is a very strong, resolute person in the face her family tragedy. Shaila outwardly is polite and obliging to Templeton, observing all of the social niceties, but to Templeton's suggestion that she is a stalwart.

Shaila concludes her meeting with Templeton offering to meet with her again, conflicted between the "terrible calm" she feels and how others have perceived her in the aftermath of the tragedy.

The third segment of "Management of Grief" continues four days later, on the coast of Ireland, overlooking the place where the Air India jet crashed in to the Irish Sea. Shaila has come to this place, joining Kusum and other mourners, to grieve and to identify the bodies of victims as they are recovered.

In this segment, Shaila recounts the contrasts between the hard facts of the ongoing police investigation - the cause and the fact that death would have been instantaneous, with the fanciful, abstracted words of Kusum as she sits on the edge of the sea, looking across the water. Shaila seeks relief from Valium; Kusum has consulted with a swami in Toronto, who has told her that all of the victims, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Parsi and atheists - all were fated to die together here in the Irish Sea..."They are in a better place than we are...my swami says that depression is a sign of our selfishness"

Shaila, half fanciful, tells us that they pretend to spot their loved ones on the waves at sea from their vantage point on the cliff. At one point, both Kusum and Shaila go into the water, hoping for a miracle, that perhaps there are survivors pinned under a rock close by, or that the swimming prowess of Shaila's sons might have resulted in a miraculous escape from the crash. Another mourner, an electrical engineer, joins them and asserts that he had not yet surrendered hope. Moments later, the engineer while talking about how a good, strong swimmer of 14 years of age might be able to rescue a younger child, he throws rose petals on the surface of the sea, the ancient Indian symbol to honor death.

Shaila returns to the hospital where the bodies of the crash victims are being taken for identification. It is the intention of those who can identify a loved one that the body will be transported to India for a proper burial ceremony. Shaila is asked to identify photographs of a boy recovered from the water - she cannot. Shaila says that it is only the "unlucky ones" who leave without their children's bodies. She travels to India with Kusum, to assist her with her own efforts to honor and bury her dead family members.

Shaila describes her return to India. On arrival, with Kusum, who had the carriage of the coffins of her husband and daughter, Shaila engages in a bitter row with a customs official - "Once upon a time we were well brought up women; we were dutiful wives who kept our heads veiled, our voices shy and sweet" - a contrast to the horror of the Air India crash and the stark sense of loss described in Ireland.

In India for three months after the disaster, Shaila then sets out some thing of a reversion from her Canadian life - she returns to the role of the only child in a family of wealthy, ailing parents. Shaila describes herself in this life of conflict between her Indian roots and her newer Canadian reality, as "I am trapped between two modes of knowledge. At thirty six, I am too old to start over and too young to give up. Like my husband's spirit, I flutter between worlds." Shaila describes the imperatives of custom felt by some of the men widowed by the Air India crash, the pressure to immediately re marry, and her own comparative luck in that no one will be seeking her, an unlucky widow, as a new bride.

Six months after the crash, Shaila describes how she saw her husband while making an offering at a temple to animist gods. Her husband is wearing the clothing he wore prior to the flight, and he tells Shaila, "You must finish alone what we started together." Shaila resolves to return to Canada.

In the next segment, Shaila describes how the relatives and loved ones of the Air India crash victims maintain their own sense of connection and community. She speaks with some affection for the efforts of those left behind to persevere. She also details her further contacts with Judith Templeton, the social worker who continues to endeavor to assist members of the Toronto Indian community who either refuse to accept the loss of their family members, or who have no ability to operate effectively in a Canadian culture of legal requirements, bank documents and government forms.

Templeton tells Shaila that the government want nothing more that to help the family members "accept" loss - acceptance she defines by moving ahead, taking college courses and receiving support from various agencies in the community. Templeton asks for Shaila's help in reaching out to a particular couple whose sons were killed, but who have evidently refused to sign anything presented by the government for fear such an act truly means there is no hope for their son's lives.

Shaila agrees to assist Templeton, with her own undercurrent of misgivings - the couple are Sikh, as were the alleged bombers of the Flight 182. As they sit having tea in the small apartment, Shaila describes the contrast between the attitudes of Templeton, who is sincere in her desire to advance what she sees as the interest of people who have suffered a loss, and the Sikh couple, whose attitude to Templeton and her efforts is stated as "God will provide, not government. . . When our boys return. . . . I will not pretend that I accept (their deaths)."

Templeton is hopeful that Shaila will similarly assist her with other of her difficult cases in the Indian community. Shaila does not; she simply walks away from Templeton and the efforts of officialdom to reach out to these people.

The story concludes with Shaila's observation regarding the irony in her families initial arrival in Canada to avoid religious and political problems, and the fact that they in fact became victims of that precise issue. She describes her walk on a winter day in Toronto, when she heard voices of her family telling her that her time has come and that she must be brave. Shaila, uncertain as to her direction, heeds their advice.

Analysis

"Management of Grief" is one of those rare short stories that does ample justice to a number of themes, at a number of levels, within a compact, well paced structure.

The underpinning to much of the narrative in "Management of Grief" is the conflict between Indian culture and Canadian / Western world expectation, a fluttering between worlds. The protagonist voice of Shaila is just as conflicted in her emotional response to the Air India tragedy - her actions are those of a woman who truly has a foot firmly planted in each culture. On the day of the crash, she learns of the event from her neighbor, Kusum, each living in what appears to be comfort in a Toronto suburb, each a part of an evidently large and vibrant ex pat Indian community. Kusum ultimately finds her solace in the old ways of the swami and a return to India. Shaila, in a tortured route that includes a long stay at her parents Indian home, a mystical visionary meeting with her dead husband, eventually opts for a North American solution, to make her life.

On a related level, "Management of Grief" underscores the relationship between men and women, their roles in the new Canadian society to which they have emigrated, and their respective response to the tragedy. There is a powerful sense that as Kusum retreated to the tenets of tradition, Shaila took the modernist path of getting on, and coming to terms with her grief in the Toronto setting.

A further undercurrent to the appreciation of Shaila's efforts to deal with her own turmoil in the aftermath of the tragedy is the tension between the seemingly genuine benevolence and concern expressed by the Ontario authorities through its agent Templeton, and Shaila's ultimate refusal to assist her to reach other persons touched by the crash. It is as if Shaila, in some fashion, sees the person of Templeton as subtly dictating how relatives of the victims ought to feel or ought to respond to tragedy. Shaila expresses a feeling here not uncommon in those who have immigrated to Canada from less supportive social systems: if the government suggests it, distrust it.

Shaila Bhave is a terrific character to advance these various messages from the author. With regard to the death of her husband and her sons, the reader feels a warmth and a kinship with her. However, in her expressions, both direct and indirect, concerning the lack of warmth or the emotional coldness she describes in the Ontario culture to which she emigrated voluntarily, Shaila is not an altogether sympathetic character.

There are two other observations to buttress the analysis at hand. One, the author Mukerjee emigrated to Canada from India, and she resided in Canada for 14 years. She was a professor at McGill University, Montreal; she is now a Professor at the University of California at Berkeley. Management of Grief is the only "Canadian" story anthologized in Mukerjee's work, "The Middleman and Other Stories", published in 1988. In numerous interviews, Mukerjee has stated her preference for the United States as a place for an immigrant person to live, as opposed to Canada.

The second additional observation is that the trial of the alleged Air India Flight 182 bombers is only now reaching its conclusion in Vancouver, British Columbia. Fifteen

years of investigation, followed by four years of tangled legal proceedings, will soon be concluded. One wonders, given the state of the world, as imperfect and flawed the Canadian investigation into the incident might have been, how many countries would have ensured that the matter was concluded as thoroughly as possible, no matter how long the path might be? One senses that Shaila would not care, as the proof of the identity of the perpetrators was irrelevant to the twin issues of her loss and her resulting personal journey.

Characters

Shaila Bhave

Shaila is the central character of "The Management of Grief." Her third person voice narrates the story and offers poignant reflection, provocative implications and subtle irony. Her tone can be described as understated and detached, but it is by no means dispassionate. Like the appearance of calm that masks her "screaming" within, the even, often soothing tone of the narrative voice stretches thinly over Shaila's rage and pain. She is shellshocked by the rapid succession of devastating events.

Shaila's husband and two sons have been the killed in the crash of Air India Flight 182. Some consider her callous and insensitive for not openly grieving, but Judith Templeton, the government social worker, hears that she is a "pillar" of the community and solicits her help. Shaila scorns Judith's textbook methods of "managing" grief but agrees to play the cultural liaison out of politeness. Shaila wishes she could "scream, starve, walk into Lake Ontario, [or] jump from a bridge." She considers herself a "freak," helplessly overtaken by a "terrible calm."

Like many others, Shaila harbors hopes that her family is still alive. She travels to Ireland to identify and possibly recover the bodies of the deceased. When called by the police to identify a body thought to be her son, Shaila insists that it is not him. She is unable to provide a positive identification of any of her family members.

From Ireland, Shaila goes to India. Her "progressive" parents encourage her to avoid falling into self-destructive depression and mourning, the "mindless mortification of her grandmother." She is discomfited by Sikh friends who pay their condolences and admires her parents' unprejudiced attitude, noting that in Canada the crash will likely revive Sikh-Hindu animosity. In a Himalayan temple, Shaila sees Vikram in a vision. He commands her to "finish alone what we started together." Taking this as an injunction to resume a forward moving life, she returns to Canada. Unlike many of the others, Shaila does not remarry. She assumes that friends and relatives in India avoid matching her up because of her "unlucky" history (her grandmother's husband died when he was nineteen). For this, Shaila is relieved.

Shaila accompanies Judith to a ghetto tenement to visit a helpless Sikh couple whose sons have died in the crash. Shaila is struck by the poverty and concentrated ethnicity of their apartment building. Just as Shaila could not bear to identify any of the bodies in Ireland, the couple refuses to sign Judith's documents, even though they entitle them to relief funds. Despite Judith's urgings, Shaila does not press them to sign, remembering Dr. Ranganathan's adage: "It is a parent's duty to hope." They leave the apartment without signatures, and in the car Shaila can no longer tolerate Judith's complaints about "stubborn" and "ignorant" Indian Canadians, recalcitrant textbook subjects, and asks Judith to stop so that she can get out.

Shaila has made a tolerable life for herself with the profits from the sale of her and Vikram's house. But she is living joylessly and mechanically; she "waits," "listens," and "prays." She is falling prey to the "mindless mortification" of her grandmother. The turning point is when Shaila hears the voices of her "family." They tell her: "Your time has come . . . Go, be brave." Shaila drops the symbolic "package" on a park bench and "starts walking" toward a life of healing and hope.

Vikram Bhave

Vikram is Shaila's husband and is killed in the Air India crash. In a vision, he tells Shaila: "You're beautiful" and more importantly, "What are you doing here? . . . You must finish alone what we started together." He appears to her healthy and whole, "no seaweed wreathes in his mouth" and speaking "too fast, just as he used to when we were an envied family in our pink split level."

Vinod and Mithun Bhave

Shaila and Vikram's two sons, Vinod and Mithun, were also killed in the crash. Vinod was going to be fourteen in a few days. His brother, Mithun, was four years younger. The boys were going down to the Taj with their father and uncle for Vinod's birthday party.

Elderly Couple

Because their sons have been killed in the crash, the elderly couple that Judith and Shaila visit are entitled to government relief funds, including air-fare to Ireland. They speak little English and live in a tenement building inhabited by Indians, West Indians, and a "sprinkling of Orientals." Judith Templeton has visited them several times, imploring them to sign government documents that will entitle them to the funds. Because they are poor and unable to write a check, their utilities are being cut off one by one. Notwithstanding, they refuse to sign Judith's papers. The husband places his faith in God, uttering : "God will provide, not [the] government." The wife believes her sons will return to take care of them.

Kusum

Kusum has lost her husband, Satish, and her unnamed second daughter in the plane crash. She had moved into the well-to-do Toronto suburb with her family, across the street from Shaila and Vikram, less than a month before the crash and hosted a welcoming party to celebrate their success. She is with Shaila in Ireland identifying bodies and hoping for life. Her husband's body is discovered and she takes it in a coffin to India. When Kusum moves back to India to follow a life of mourning, Shaila accuses her of "running away." Kusum responds that this is her way of finding "inner peace." She writes Shaila at the end of the story to inform her that she has seen her husband and

daughter. On one pilgrimage she spotted a young girl who looked exactly like her deceased daughter. Noticing Kusum staring at her, the young girl yelled "Ma!" and ran away. Kusum alludes to suicide in Ireland when she remarks to Shaila at Dunmanus Bay: "That water felt warm."

Pam

Pam is Kusum's oldest daughter and would have been on the plane had she not refused to visit India. Pam is represented as irreverent and "westernized." She works at McDonalds, preferring "Wonderland" to Bombay, and is "always in trouble," "dat[ing] Canadian boys and hang[ing] out in the mall, shopping for tight sweaters." Her lifestyle and attitude strain her relationship with her traditional Indian mother, who in a moment of selfpitying despair blurts: "If I didn't have to look after you now, I'd hang myself." Deeply hurt by this remark ("her face goes blotchy with pain"), Pam retorts: "You think I don't know what Mummy's thinking? *Why her?* That's what. That's sick! Mummy wishes my little sister were alive and I were dead!" She later heads for California to do modeling work or open a "yoga-cum-aerobics studio in Hollywood" with the insurance money. She ends up in Vancouver, working at a cosmetics counter "giving makeup hints to Indian and Oriental girls." She sends Shaila "postcards so naughty I daren't leave them on the coffee table."

Dr. Ranganathan

Dr. Ranganathan is a well-to-do and respected electrical engineer who has also lost his family in the crash. The reader is introduced to him when he meets Shaila and Kusum searching for hope on the southwestern coast of Ireland. He suggests to the women that survivors may have been able to swim to uncharted islets and gives Shaila hope that both her sons may have survived given that "[a] strong youth of fourteen . . . can very likely pull to safety a younger one." He succors a sobbing Kusum and offers the story's central phrase: "It's a parent's duty to hope," continuing that "It is foolish to rule out possibilities that have not been tested. I myself have not surrendered hope." He has taken pink roses from someone's garden and scatters them on the water in memory of his wife. She had demanded that he bring her pink roses every Friday. He would bring them and playfully reproach: "After twentyodd years of marriage you're still needing proof positive of my love."

Dr. Ranganathan accompanies Shaila to look through photographs of recovered bodies, offering her the comfort of a "scientist's perspective." Understanding Shaila's psychological defenses, he looks at the pictures for her and does not force her to make positive identifications. He identifies the boys thought to be Vinod and Mithun as the Kutty brothers, bringing Shaila great relief.

Back in Canada, Dr. Ranganathan continues to be a source of comfort for Shaila. Both have not remarried and he calls Shaila twice a week from Montreal. He considers himself and Shaila as "relatives," joined together by race, culture and now this mournful

event. He takes a new job in Ottawa but cannot bear to sell his house in Montreal, choosing rather to drive 220 miles a day to work. His grief also prevents him from sleeping in the bed he shared with his wife, so he sleeps on a cot in his large, empty house. Describing his house as a "temple" and his bedroom as a "shrine," Dr. Ranganathan, for all the comfort he offers to others, is also crippled by his pain.

At the end of the story, Dr. Ranganathan moves to Texas to start a new life, a place where "no one knows his story and he has vowed not to tell it." He continues to call Shaila, but only once a week.

Satish

Satish is Kusum's husband who died in the plane crash.

Shaila's grandmother

Though only briefly mentioned, Shaila's grandmother has an important effect on Shaila's sense of self. She is portrayed as a traditional Brahmin woman who unquestioningly fills her role as wife and female, in other words, as a submissive and second-class citizen. Her husband, Shaila's grandfather, died of diabetes when he was nineteen, leaving his wife a widow at age sixteen. Considering herself a "harbinger of bad luck," she shaved her head and lived in self-imposed suffering and seclusion.

Shaila's Mother

Having been raised by an "indifferent uncle" in the presence of a morbid and depressed mother, Shaila's mother becomes a "rationalist" and an enemy of "mindless mortification." She encourages her daughter to rebound quickly from the crisis, still calling her son-in-law by his casual Anglicized name, "Vik." Reminding Shaila of the uselessness of her grandmother's wasted life, she tells her: "You know, the dead aren't cut off from us!" and "Vikram wouldn't have wanted you to give up things." To Shaila's discomfort, her "progressive" parents receive condolences from Sikh neighbors, refusing to "blame communities for a few individuals." Later, in the family's travels to the Himalayas, Shaila does not tell her mother about her vision of Vikram, knowing that she "has no patience with ghosts, prophetic dreams, holy men, and cults."

Dr. and Mrs. Sharma

This couple is one of the few guests at Shaila's house that are mentioned by name. Dr. Sharma is the treasurer of the Indo-Canada Society and offers Shaila help in legal and financial matters. His wife, pregnant with her fifth child, offers general comfort and admonishes her husband not to bother Shaila with "mundane details." They are respected members of the Indian community and provide leadership to the group of anxious and confused friends and relatives of the victims gathered at Shaila's house.

Judith Templeton

Judith Templeton is a Canadian social worker whose job is to contact the relatives of the crash victims and offer government aid. Her task is daunting because many of the people she visits speak little English and are wary of government employees and their confusing documents. Judith asks Shaila to help her bridge this cultural gap, suggesting that as an Indian, Shaila has the "right human touch." Judith is described as cool, stiff, professional and insensitive: "She [Judith] wears a blue suit with a white blouse and a polka-dot tie. Her blond hair is cut short, her only jewelry is pearl-drop earrings. Her briefcase is new and expensive looking . . . She sits with it across her lap . . . her contact lenses seem to float in front of her light blue eyes."

Judith's insensitivity to the Indian Canadians is not, however, malicious. She is represented as emotionally and psychologically stunted, only understanding human suffering through textbooks. In one of her conversations with Shaila, she remarks that according to "textbooks on grief management," most of the Indian Canadians are stuck between "stage two" and "three." This dispassionate description strikes Shaila as typical of Judith's impersonal and professional relationships with deeply suffering individuals. Judith has created charts and pages of analyses which appear to Shaila to be terribly inadequate accounts of the tragedy. After a frustrating visit to an elderly couple, Judith complains vocally about the Indians' "stubbornness and ignorance" which is "driving her crazy." When she begins prattling about the next "client," a woman who is a "real mess," Shaila can no longer bear to offer Judith her polite help and gets out of the car.

Themes

Gender Roles and Cultural Tradition

The crash of Air India Flight 182 brings radical changes to its victims' families' lives. In "The Management of Grief" Mukherjee focuses on its effects on women. Women are confronted with the problem of mourning; do they need to observe the self-sacrificing mourning rituals and decorum of "proper" Indian widows, even in the "new world" of Canada? Shaila and Kusum are opposing models of behavior; Kusum succumbs to her culture's expectation that she will dedicate her life to her dead husband (by not remarrying and living a life of asceticism) while Shaila struggles with these oppressive cultural demands, finally rejecting them.

Shaila imagines that she hears Vikram and her sons crying out to her: "Mommy, Shaila." Their cries are telling: Shaila's main roles are that of mother and wife. The patriarchal conventions of the majority of the world (women stay home, cook and tend the children etc.) are compounded by the specific "regulations" of Indian culture. For instance, Shaila has never called her husband by his first name or told him that she loved him, as is proper of an upper-class Indian woman. The emotions wrought by the crash lead Shaila to call into question her blind obedience, up until now, to Hindu female decorum. The tragedy of the crash makes the unseen but ubiquitous veil of female oppression palpable, challenging the affected women to break free.

As Indian wife and mother, Shaila is expected to follow mourning traditions. The Hindu widow cannot remarry, is prohibited from wearing certain hair decorations and jewelry, and is restricted in her choice of dress. In short, she is meant to spend the rest of her life despairing over the loss of her husband, denying her own social and sexual needs, and even doing penance as if somehow responsible for her husband's death. Shaila's grandmother has always been an example of such self-sacrifice: she shaves her head, thereby obliterating any trace of vanity or sexual appeal, and lives in self-imposed seclusion. She is so devoted to mourning that she forsakes her infant daughter, passing on her upbringing to an "indifferent uncle." Growing up in such a somber atmosphere, Shaila's mother has learned to be "progressive" and "rational," rejecting her mother's "mindless mortification" and urging Shaila to do the same. To encourage Shaila to "get on with her life," her parents remember Vikram by his casual westernized name, "Vik," and tell her that he "wouldn't have wanted you [Shaila] to give up things."

Shaila's parents want her to stay in India so that they can pamper her with luxuries and travel. As "progressive" as they are, they do not see that Shaila needs to return to Canada to "finish" what she and Vikram started. In deciding to return, Shaila resists binding ideas about both gender and culture. She is not just "Indian" any more, but Indian Canadian, and must return home (Canada) to foster and develop her complex, hybrid identity. Kusum, on the other hand, returns to India and in a sense becomes more "Indian" than before, pursuing a life of ascetic piety and travel to holy sites. Shaila views this as a regression into traditional culture and gender roles, accusing Kusum of

"running away" and "withdrawing from the world." Like Shaila's grandmother, Kusum also forgets about her living daughter to succumb to the "mindless mortification" expected of Hindu widows.

Shaila articulates the change she is going through when Kusum is detained at the airport on suspicion of smuggling contraband in her husband's coffin. Surprising herself, Shaila explodes and calls the customs officer a "bastard." She reflects on her transformation: "Once upon a time we were wellbrought up women; we were dutiful wives who kept our heads veiled, our voices shy and sweet." This is the clearest indicator that the trauma has unmoored traditional, upper-class Indian women like Shaila from the safety of their patriarchally imposed decorum. But even though, unlike Kusum, Shaila breaks free from these limits, the process is quite a struggle. After selling her and Vikram's house and moving into a small apartment in downtown Toronto, Shaila lives a mechanical, joyless life. For a long time, she is haunted by visions of her lost ones. In this way, Shaila has also fallen prey to a kind of "mindless mortification," repressed by her memories and her longing for the past. Like Kusum, she is living in a kind of paralyzing self-denial and has not made the brave venture into self-fulfillment. Only at the end of the story, interestingly at the behest of her "family's" voices, does Shaila finally break free, symbolically discard the package, and treat herself to a life of her own. Ironically, the tragedy is the agent of productive transformation, forcing Shaila to reexamine her patriarchally bound life.

Collective Identity versus Personal Identity

The tragedy of Flight 182 forges a new bond between Indian Canadians. As Shaila says of the afflicted, "We've been melted down and cast as a new tribe." While providing much needed comfort, this new community bond has its pitfalls, especially when it is stretched beyond its effective limits. This is most apparent in Judith Templeton's uneducated perception that all "Indians" are the same. Based on this misunderstanding, she enlists Shaila to give the "right human touch" to her government mandated visits to victims' relatives. But as Shaila explains, all Indians are not the same: the elderly Sikh couple might be uncomfortable with Shaila because she is Hindu (the religious affiliations are often marked by surnames). Judith takes no heed, thinking that "Indian-ness" is a sufficient and common enough bond. Though Shaila and the couple do manage to communicate, Mukherjee makes it clear that they communicate on the basis of their mutual loss, not their mutual "Indian-ness."

As a result of Indian Canadians being lumped together as a group, individuals lose their personal identity. They are considered as part or representative of a group rather than as unique individuals with diverse needs. Collective identity is substituted for personal identity. Members of one's own ethnic groups also perpetuate this notion. The story opens up with a group of Indian Canadians gathered at Shaila's house. As she narrates, there are "a lot of women I don't know." The group has gathered under the assumption that their common ethnicity not only brings them together in a support network but is itself a source of comfort. This is not the case for Shaila, who feels alienated and "ready

to scream." Even though they are of the same ethnicity, the strangers in her kitchen do not attend to her individual needs.

Although the story portrays the Irish as warm and sympathetic, it also highlights their assumption that all Indians are alike. Because Dr. Ranganathan has stolen roses from somebody's garden, an Irish newspaper urges: "When you see an Indian person . . . please give them flowers." While this gesture strikes Shaila as deeply compassionate, there is some criticism of the Irish conception that Indian Canadians are a generic group with a strong liking for flowers. As the reader knows, Dr. Ranganathan's floating of the pink roses has nothing to do with his "Indian-ness" but is a memorial to a very personal and unique ritual he shared with his wife.

"Melting Pot" versus "Mosaic": Assimilation versus Multiculturalism

"The Management of Grief" supports a vision of assimilation. Although the word "assimilation" in today's parlance has negative connotations, Mukherjee's conception as expressed in this story is progressive and productive. In particular, it is positioned against the idea of "multiculturalism," Canada's official cultural policy. In interviews and other writings, Mukherjee has criticized Canada's vision of its country as a "mosaic," preferring the "melting pot" model of America. Canada's Ministry of Multiculturalism recognizes and protects immigrants' rights to preserve their ethnic customs. While this sounds generous in theory, the real-life result is the emergence of divided ethnic communities that are reluctant to communicate with each other. Mukherjee and others have characterized these communities as "ethnic ghettoes" that discourage new immigrants from creatively adapting to a strange land or even just learning English. While providing important networks and mutual comfort, these mono-ethnic communities separate new immigrants from mainstream life and severely limit their life choices.

The criticism of these ethnic ghettoes is most evident in the description of the elderly Sikh couple's neighborhood. Even Shaila, an Indian Canadian who has close contacts with the Indian Canadian community, is taken aback by the unmistakably "Indian" smell of the apartment building: "[E]ven I wince from the ferocity of onion fumes, the distinctive and immediate Indian-ness of frying ghee." She is equally astonished by the women waiting for buses in saris and boys playing cricket (a British sport popular in Britain's former colonies) in the parking lot. In other words, she is struck by the distilled Indian-ness of this small bit of Canada. The non-English speaking elderly couple, with their fear of Canadian documents and the white people who bear them, are representative of the fear and limits under which immigrants restricted to ethnic communities live.

The so-called recognition and support of diverse communities engenders an attitude of separatism. For example, the mainstream Euro-Canadians who run the government may be hesitant to get involved in the Chinese Canadian or Caribbean Canadian community, perceiving their "issues" to be culturally specific and best handled among

"themselves." Mukherjee argues in *The Sorrow and the Terror* that the Canadian government's lackadaisical response to the crash was the result of this kind of separatist perception of the incident as an "Indian" matter. As Shaila's house guests strain to find radio and TV news about the crash, Shaila "want[s] to tell [them] we're [Indian Canadians] not that important." She realizes that as an "Indian" matter, the tragedy does not warrant the full dedication of national resources.

As the sympathetic protagonist, Shaila offers a more productive model of Indian Canadian living. She resists falling into the trap of tradition like Kusum, who becomes more Indian than an Indian. She also rejects her parents' implicit desire that she stay in India and be comforted by the familiarities of "home." Shaila has accepted Canada as her new home and, as Vikram exhorts, must finish there what they started together. Her dropping of the package also signals her release from being stuck in mind-numbing mourning and its associations with oppressive "Indian-ness." She says "A wife and mother begins her life in a new country, and that life is cut short." Rather than figure out how to be that same Indian wife and mother, she ventures out into a new direction.

Style

Social and Cultural Critique

In a 1989 interview with *The Iowa Review,* Mukherjee criticizes contemporary American fiction for "exist[ing] only in a vacuum of personal relationships." She believes that "[a] social and political vision is an integral part of writing a novel, or being a novelist." In light of these comments, "The Management of Grief" must be understood through a social-political lens. While it is a deeply moving exploration of Shaila Bhave's individual response to the Air India crash, it is also a critique of Canada's racialized society and its inadequate attempts at "handling" the tragedy. In this way, the story is more than a personal narrative, it is a *politicized* account, offering a social, cultural and political critique.

Through the story, Mukherjee criticizes the Canadian policy of multiculturalism. A superficial reading may fail to discover this subtle critique. The word is briefly but pointedly articulated when Judith Templeton calls on Shaila. Shaila's first words to her are "Multiculturalism?" referring to the Ministry of Multiculturalism that sent her. Judith's misunderstanding of the Indian immigrants and the several culture clashes that ensue are indicative of mainstream Euro-Canadians' ignorance about Canadian immigrants. Judith refers to the Indian Canadians as "them" and "lovely people," in other words, definitively different from the mainstream she represents. But as different as "they" are from "her," "they" are all the same. Judith fails to differentiate among Indians, asking Shaila, a Hindu, to go with her to visit a Sikh couple, oblivious and unconcerned that Hindus and Sikhs have a history of antagonism, exacerbated by rumors that Sikhs bombed Flight 182.

Remembering Mukherjee's comments about the political responsibility of fiction, the miscommunication and awkwardness between Shaila and Judith, and Judith and the Indian Canadians, can be interpreted as a microcosmic representation of the tensions between mainstream Canadians and ethnic Canadians in general. In one sense, Shaila could be read as the voice for Mukherjee's political views, though her character is not limited to this function. In another brief but pointed statement, Shaila brings up the government's sloppy investigation of the case because of the opinion that this is an "Indian," not Canadian, matter. When Judith tells Shaila that "[w]e" [the Canadian government] do not want to make mistakes," Shaila wryly replies: "More mistakes, you mean."

Shaila also expresses a criticism of patriarchal Indian traditions. By framing her individual experience in the larger context of Indian cultural mores, the story uses Shaila's personal struggle to free herself from her the crippling memories of her past life to symbolize a break from oppressive cultural traditions, particularly those that constrain women. The stagnant life of self-abnegation and mournful clinging to memories is the expected behavior of an Indian widow. By refusing to give in to this stultifying tradition, Shaila frees her personal spirit, but also symbolically rejects oppressive and outdated

cultural mores. The association of a certain kind of "Indian-ness" with personal oppression is highlighted by Shaila's grandmother's lifetime of "mindless mortification." Kusum follows in this tradition, neglecting the living (both Kusum and Shaila's grandmother forsake their daughters) in order to choose a life of self-denial and personal repression. Shaila is "trapped between two modes of knowledge" but her ultimate return to Canada and dropping of the symbolic "package" implies that she has rejected personal stagnation and the patriarchal Indian traditions associated with it.

Point of View

The perspective in "The Management of Grief" is Shaila's and allows the reader to understand the world as she sees it. This narration may be called "third person limited" as the reader is privy to Shaila's deepest thoughts but does not have access to any other character's thoughts. The intimate revelation of thought and motive provides justification for Shaila's judgment of people and events. For instance, when Shaila tells Kusum that she is "running away" by going back to India to follow a religious life of mourning, we understand Shaila's logic from her description of the "mindless mortification" of her grandmother.

But this point of view has its limitations also. While it allows the reader to identify closely with, or reject, the main character, it flattens the point of view of the other characters. Kusum, for example, explains that going back to India will help her find "inner peace," but the reader is not given any way to understand her logic, only Shaila's rejection of it. In this way, limited third person narration can obscure opposing views, depriving the reader of alternate interpretations of events.

Narrative Tone: Understatement and Detachment

The tone of the story's third person narration can be described as melancholy and subtle. While the story has great emotional impact, that impact works through *understatement* and *detachment*. Shaila's account is almost journalistic in tone, neutrally reporting events. But the weightiness of tragedy behind the narration belies Shaila's unaffected tone. The poignancy of the story is derived not from any outright declarations of misery, but from the readers' recognition of Shaila's voice as speaking from a tenuous, shell-shocked calm.

Understated tones can give increased credibility to opinions or social critiques. Consider, for instance, testimonies of individuals convinced of government conspiracy or alien invasions. Accounts spoken in calm and rational tones tend to be more believable than emotional, raving harangues that make the speaker look unreliable because of instability. Compare headlines in tabloids that shout excited claims, "Woman Gives Birth to Ape!" versus matter-of-fact headlines in respected newspapers that report "Scientists Combine Primate and Human DNA." Thus, when Shaila softly comments that the Canadian government is mishandling the investigation, or that the reason that the crash is not well broadcast is "we're [Indian Canadians] not that important," her

criticisms of mainstream attitudes are not likely to be dismissed as the rants of a radical political agitator. Her controlled attitude offers an interesting contrast to the agitated and violent behavior of the terrorists who are rumored to be responsible for the crash. Shaila's only overt display of emotion is at the airport when she calls the customs official a "bastard." But she herself is surprised at her uncharacteristic outburst and, while not wholly regretting it, ponders it as indicative of a deep change.

Similarly, a detached tone can give the narrative voice greater credibility in describing volatile, politically charged events. Shaila's detached tone is especially effective because she maintains an emotional distance in the face of a devastating personal loss. Importantly, Shaila's calm is only a mask for the "screaming" inside. On the other hand, Shaila's detached attitude may be construed as callousness; Shaila comments to Judith that some of the "hysterical Indians" are appalled by her lack of outward emotion.

Historical Context

Air India Flight 182 and Khalistan

"The Management of Grief" dramatizes the complex emotional response of those affected by the crash of Air India Flight 182 on June 12, 1985. All 329 passengers and crew members on board were killed when a bomb in the front luggage compartment exploded, hurtling the plane into the North Atlantic ocean, 110 miles southwest of Ireland's coast. The flight was headed to New Delhi and Bombay and had departed from Toronto and Montreal.

Investigations have suggested that the bomb was planted by a Canadian based Khalistani network devoted to their kinsmen's historical struggle to secede from India. Khalistanis are a sect of Sikhs, one of the three major religious groups of India, along with Hindus and Muslims. These religious groups live in varying degrees of harmony and contention, often sharing spoken language and elements of culture, but also engaging in violent confrontations over religious differences.

In 1947 the British partitioned the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan to give Muslims their own country (Pakistan). Having closer relations to Hindus than Muslims, most Sikhs in the new Pakistan migrated to the Indian side of the border after the partition. A large community of Sikhs occupy Punjab, an Indian state bordering Pakistan on the northwest. Sikh movements for independence have been ongoing since the 19th century, but it was in 1971 that the name "Khalistan," based on the Punjabi word *khalsa* meaning "pure," was created to invoke a separate Sikh state. Its founder, Dr. Jagjit Singh Chauhan, drew up elaborate maps of the imagined country, appropriating much of Punjab; he issued passports and currency and established legislative bodies like the "Khalistan House" and the "Council of Khalistan."

Except for a few militant supporters, "Khalistan" was not taken seriously until Indira Gandhi's raid on the Golden Temple, a Sikh shrine and administrative site, June 4-7, 1984. Under increasing tensions and the military buildup of the Golden Temple, Mrs. Gandhi ordered its "extirpation." At least 2700 people, mostly Sikhs, were killed in the massacre, including the Sikh leader and priest, Jarnail Singh Ghindranwale. Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards a few months later. The devastating events brought many moderate Sikhs into the radical Khalistani militant cause. The bombing of Flight 182 is thought to have been planned as a one year anniversary memorialization of the Golden Temple massacre. It is important to emphasize that not all Sikhs support the creation of Khalistan, nor do they participate or condone the often violent measures employed by Khalistani groups. After the discovery of Khalistani involvement in the bombing, many Sikhs dissociated themselves from the Khalistani movement.

Khalistanis in Canada

The Air India bombing and the related explosion at Tokyo's Narita Airport (a bomb planted in CP Air Flight 003 prematurely exploded in the baggage handling section, killing two baggage handlers and injuring four) were traced to a Khalistani fundamentalist living in Duncan, British Columbia, Inderjit Singh Reyat. On February 5, 1988, eight charges were brought against him, mostly related to the Narita bombing. Singh was being closely monitored by the CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Canadian equivalent of the FBI) and was spotted in early June of 1984 testing explosives off a highway in Duncan, British Columbia. Singh was associated with the Babar Khalsa ("Pure Tigers"), a militant North American Khalistani cell. In 1991 he was convicted of manslaughter for the Narita bombing.

In *The Sorrow and the Terror*, Mukherjee and Blaise note that religious-political commitment is often more fervent in countries of emigration than in India itself. In fact, they interpret the political activism that led to the Flight 182 bombing as having been fostered entirely on Canadian soil. Mukherjee and Blaise attribute the radical Khalistani presence to the structure of Canadian immigration law in the 60s and 70s, which engendered Sikh communities of working class background concentrated in British Columbia. In contrast, Hindu emigration was Ontario-centered and generally consti tuted by the professional-managerial class. These class differences and the glaring material discrepancies between Hindu and Sikh in the "new world" fueled their tradition of enmity. Mukherjee and Blaise suggest that Canadian Khalistani leaders prey on financially and socially struggling immigrants, offering them a sense of belonging and strong leadership, thereby redirecting their frustrations over Canadian social inequalities to their Indian and Indian Canadian countrymen. They also appeal to second-generation immigrants who perhaps have never been to India, but nurse romantic fantasies about Sikh independence.

The leadership of Sikh groups in Canada consists of middle-class, professional "family men." One interviewed Khalistani leader in New York, who was making a six figure income, told Mukherjee and Blaise: "Six days a week I work for Reagan [this was 1988]. Seventh day, for Khalistan." Another leader invited them to his comfortable suburban home and introduced them to his well-adapted children, who were probably unaware that their father was quite literally a "weekend warrior." At the time of the bombing, there were several prominent Sikh organizations in North America dedicated to an independent Sikh nation, not all of which employed terrorist tactics: the World Sikh Organization (WSO - members are usually middle-class professionals), Khalistan Youth (a moderate group that disbanded in 1986 to protest other groups' endorsement of violence), the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) and Babar Khalsa (both groups have slightly different political and religious ideals, but both are committed to violence). Competition for prestige and money among these groups often exacerbates violent actions.

Critical Overview

"The Management of Grief" was virtually universally acclaimed in North America. It is the poignant, closing story of Mukherjee's 1988 collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction that year. Not all the stories in *The Middleman* received unmitigated praise; one reviewer disdained the collection's overall obsession with "sleaze spiced with violence" (Gillian Tindall in "East Meets West and Writes It" in *The Times*, April 26, 1990). Mukherjee and her supporters respond that such "unsavory" events and topics are the reality of North American immigrants. They praise Mukherjee for having the courage to honestly represent such realities in all their raw brutality.

In *Middleman*, Mukherjee writes from the point of view of several ethnicities: Vietnamese, Caribbean, Afghanistani, and Phillipino, to name a few. Johnathan Raban writes in the June 19th, 1988 *New York Times Book Review*, that these immigrants explode stereotypes; they are "not tired, huddled or even poor." In contrast, they are daring and full of bravado, operating small businesses, legal and illegal, or jetsetting on American Express cards. Though Mukherjee claims affinity with writers like Bernard Malamud, Raban insightfully notes that her immigrants are not the "introspective and overmothered sons of the ghetto." Their "lives are too urgent and mobile" to be nostalgic for a lost "home" and "they hit the page in full flight, and . . . move through the stories as they move through the world, at speed, with the reader straining to keep up with them." Despite the often less than perfect outcomes of these protagonists' lives, many ending in violence and murder, "[e]very story ends on a new point of departure. People are last seen walking though an open door . . ."

"The Management of Grief" is different in tone from the majority of stories in *Middleman*. It is somber, understated and melancholy, but in accordance with Raban's analysis, closes on the optimistic note of an "open door," however bittersweet. Consistent with Mukherjee's preference for America's "melting pot" ideal over the Canadian "mosaic," the story ends on a note of productive and progressive adaptation, a life of dynamic combination of "old" and "new" cultures. Shaila's hope-filled choice at the end of the story is contrasted with those of others who find comfort in reverting back to "Indian-ness" in their time of crisis.

The story was also praised for highlighting and memorializing the effects of the Air India Flight 182 crash. "The Management of Grief" was the offspring of her non-fiction account of the crash, *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987), coauthored with husband, Clark Blaise. In both works, Mukherjee criticizes the Canadian government's handling of the event, connecting their attitude of negligence and dismissal to the national policy of multiculturalism. This policy, Mukherjee argues, encouraged the nation to see the crash as an "Indian" event, inextricable from the exotic machinations of terrorism, when over 90% of the passengers were Canadian citizens. This kind of nationally sanctioned compartmentalizing of people by race is exemplified in the figure of Judith Templeton.

The "open door" Mukherjee supports in this and the other stories of *Middleman* implicitly expresses an assimilationist ideal. While this word often has the negative connotations of mimicry and cultural betrayal, Mukherjee is more concerned with assimilation's positive aspects, urging immigrants to be creatively adaptive and resilient in their new environment. They have, after all, left a country for a chance to change and transform, not to stagnate in familiar modes of behavior. She contrasts her resilient, dynamic immigrants with expatriates who, with psychological and political ties to the "homeland," pine for an impossible and romanticized image of "home." As she writes in the introduction to *Darkness*, "Indianness is now metaphor." She herself had fashioned her identity as an expatriate during her years in Canada (1966- 1980) and did not fully appreciate and embrace the "exuberance" of immigration until she left the "mosaic" for America's "melting pot."

But while new worlds force a change on its immigrants, these immigrants also engender transformations in mainstream culture. As Mukherjee comments in a 1989 interview with *The Iowa Review*, the relationship between the immigrant and her new country is like "two-way traffic." Though she has lived a decade in Canada and continues to be concerned with Canadian topics, she has settled in America, moving to New York in 1980. Having declared American citizenship, she considers herself not as an ethnic writing about ethnic characters, but as an American writing about Americans.

Mukherjee has been criticized for what are perceived to be regressive ideas about gender. She was sharply criticized by *Ms.* magazine in their review of *Wife* (1975) for its representation of women as submissive. Mukherjee wryly remembers a line from the review: "*Ms*. magazine had a review which said, 'Some books can be allowed to die, but others have to be killed'" (from 1989 *Iowa Review* interview). *Jasmine* (1989), a novel developed from the short story of the same name in "Middleman" was similarly criticized because the main character, "Jasmine," seems only to be able to find her identity through a series of husbands or live-in lovers. However, Mukherjee counters that her characters are not mere mouthpieces of feminist theory. In fact, they are excluded by color and class from the white, middle-class dominated feminist movement. Instead, she portrays these immigrant women's "in-between" realities that may well disturb the privileged feminist theorists pontificating from their sheltered university positions. Mukherjee has vocally criticized "feminist imperialists" who mandate how "third world" women should behave. She points out in the *Iowa Review* interview that the feminism "being offered by the *Ms.* magazines are not at all appropriate [for women of color and poor women]; they just don't work in their lives, they don't ring true for their psychologies." Fakrul Alam paraphrases Mukherjee in a 1990 interview: "She claims that she would much rather show them [women] in the process of acquiring the power that would enable them to control their fates than make them mouthpieces of white, upper-class feminist rhetoric."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Yoonmee Chang is a Ph.D. candidate in the English Department at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently working on her dissertation, which explores class and labor issues in Asian American literature. In the following essay, she interprets Mukherjee's story as part of a critique of Canada's controversial policy of multiculturalism.

"Multiculturalism?" is Shaila's brief and somewhat enigmatic response to Judith Templeton's introduction in Bharati Mukherjee's "The Management of Grief." Judith is the social worker sent by the Ontario government to "reach out" to the families of the victims of Air India Flight 182. She enlists Shaila to give the "right human touch" to her work, in other words, to act as the cultural liaison between a Euro-Canadian government and its ethnic citizens. Shaila's response indicates that Judith's work is partially decreed by the national Ministry of Multiculturalism or Ontario's provincial equivalent. Enacted in 1971, by Prime Minster Pierre Trudeau, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act announced:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to . . . recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage. (quoted from Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* 1994)

The non-specific yet self-righteously benevolent language obscures the political motivations behind the act (namely appeasing the secession oriented Quebecois) and makes it a flexible, easy to manipulate tool in political battles that hinge on varying interpretations of the general language. Not surprisingly then, the Multiculturalism Act has proliferated, rather than resolved, a phalanx of petty politicalcultural battles. For instance, in 1990, a group of outraged RCMPs (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) presented a 210,000 name petition to their Commissioner for allowing Sikh members to wear turbans on duty. The doctrine of multiculturalism plays a contradictory and central role in this con- flict: does it support the Sikhs officers' right "to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage," or can it be invoked to protect non-Sikhs' own "freedom of religion." The vexed answer to both questions is "yes." This is just one of the inadequacies of the ambiguous policy. A survey of the recent conflicts it has engendered reveals it as Canada's Frankenstein. Novelist Neil Bissoondath writes: "As a political statement it [the 1971 Multiculturalism Act] is disarming, as a philosophical statement almost naive with generosity. Attractive sentiments liberally dispensed —but where, in the end do they lead?" (*Selling Illusions*).

The Air India crash brought the racialized structure of Canada's social, political and economic structures into sharp relief. Shortly after learning of the tragedy, the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, sent condolences to the Prime Minister of India at the time, Rajiv Gandhi. As the majority of the passengers on the Delhi and Bombay bound plane were Canadian citizens of South Asian ancestry, this action was, on the one hand,

a compassionate cross-cultural gesture. But in light of the subsequent delayed and lackadaisical Canadian investigation, the gesture took on a politically charged meaning. It soon became all too clear that Canadian leadership, despite the Canadian citizenship of the victims, considered the crash an "Indian" event.

As such, it was not worthy of the sincerest efforts or dedicated resources of the federal government. The bombing remained unresolved for 12 years, during which time more than 100 tapes of evidence were "accidentally" destroyed or lost (according to the *The Toronto Star,* June 5, 1995). The government refused persistent demands for a public inquiry, claiming that it would interfere with the criminal investigation, and conceded in 1991 to an internal inquiry in the CSIS's (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) botched procedures. A leading suspect, Talwinder Singh Parmar, was not named until ten years after the crash and at that time, he had been dead for nearly three years. Yet the CSIS had been tracking Parmar, a leader of a Canadian Khalistani radical cell, the Babar Khalsa ("Pure Tigers"), for years. In fact they were monitoring him until six days before the bombing and even witnessed him detonating "test" bombs off a Vancouver highway with Inderjit Singh Reyat, a Barbar Khalsa associate, who was charged in 1991 with manslaughter for the related Narita Airport bombing. In 1995, the RCMP announced a $1 million reward for information leading to arrests in connection with the Air India bombing, but the action — "too little, too late" — was scorned as a clumsy, belated attempt to recognize the Canadian victims ten years after the fact. In 1997, the RCMP announced that it was about to charge six Khalistani terrorists for the bombing.

The tragedy is "unhoused" as Deborah Bowen writes in "Spaces of Translation" (*Ariel*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July, 1997). Mukherjee's non-fictional account of the crash, *The Sorrow and the Terror*, cowritten with husband and Canadian citizen, Clark Blaise, poses the provocative question: "Why was the Canadian government slow to dedicate its political, social, and psychological resources to the crash that killed 280 Canadian citizens of South Indian ancestry?" Like Shaila's in "The Management of Grief," Mukherjee and Blaise's response is: "Multiculturalism."

Since multiculturalism encourages cultural practices to be "preserved" and "enhanced," Canadian immigrants encounter few incentives to transform their lives and identities. Under its rubric, various "ethnic-towns" have emerged (e.g. Chinatown, Sikh communities, Hindu communities). Today, an Indian can travel straight from Delhi to Vancouver or Toronto, and ensconce herself in one of the many Sikh or Hindu communities, depending on her af- filiation, get a job in an Indian store or agency catering to Indians, continue to dress in Indian clothes, and have easy access to Indian groceries. All this without a drop of English. Mukherjee views this kind of immigrant life as cultural stagnation. A dominant theme in her work is the criticism of such immigrants who suffer arduous and often violent journeys into America or Canada, only to settle in isolated, insulated ethnic ghettoes where opportunities are as narrow as in the "homeland" they left. This is expressed in the repulsion Shaila feels when she visits the elderly Sikh couple with Judith. The apartment building is a veritable Indian and West Indian ghetto with a "sprinkling of Orientals." The women at the bus stop are all dressed in saris and the "ferocity of onions" which denote the "distinctive and immediate Indian-ness of frying ghee" makes Shaila uncomfortably aware that Canada and its

multiculturalism is encouraging the wholesale transplant of "chunks" of India. One could argue that this enclave of Toronto "Indian-ness" is a felicitous manifestation of Canada's atmosphere of free cultural practice. But what to make of the poverty?

The dire reality of most ethnic "communities" is that they are poverty-laden, urban ghettoes. Despite the eye-candy they provide for tourists, the majority of residents in places like Chinatowns around the "western" world live alarmingly below the poverty line. The scope of this essay cannot address the forces that link spatial ethnic communities with poverty, but it is generally apparent that these communities and poverty are structurally linked, and that life in such ethnic ghettoes is severely delimited. While such "communities" can initially provide comfort, information, and networks to newly landed immigrants, the preservation of these spaces as proper, appropriate, and perhaps the only suitable habitation for ethnic immigrants perpetuates their ghettoization. With little incentive to learn English and adapt to mainstream cultural practices, immigrants who chose to "preserve" their culture in this way deprive themselves of the skills necessary to personal and professional advancement that often demands they step outside the ethnic ghetto. In the case of Canada, the government supports such ghettoization under the banner of multiculturalism, protecting these poverty and crimestricken enclaves as "natural" "expressions" of culture.

By privileging the "there" over the "here," Canada, as a result, has become a land of "us" and various "thems," with the Euro-Canadian dominated political body still holding power. Moreover, the multiculturalist recognition of diverse cultural practices has provided a convenient excuse to deny protection to all its citizens, especially those of color. Mukherjee and Blaise charge that the government had deep and detailed knowledge of Khalistani terrorist activities in Canada, including Parmar and Reyat's "bomb practice" in Duncan, British Columbia, 19 days before the bombing. They accuse the Canadian government of dismissing the import of such information because Khalistani radicalism was after all, an "Indian" matter. And Indian matters are best settled in the Indian community along Indian rules.

An analogous case is invoked by Bissoondath in *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (1994). In 1994, Quebec judge, Raymonde Verreault, ruled a lightened sentence for a Muslim man charged with sexual assault (23 months in prison instead of the prosecution's requested four years). Over a period of two and a half years, the man repeatedly sodomized his eleven year old stepdaughter, refraining from vaginal intercourse to preserve her virginity, thereby keeping her eligible for marriage by traditional Muslim standards. The judge claimed that the man "spared" the young girl by respecting his cultural tenets and that these tenets must duly be respected and recognized by the Canadian court. As Bissoondath remarks, this reasoning is perverse and absurd. More disturbingly, it points up the deeply inimical potential of multiculturalism. The judge effectively deprives a segment of the Canadian population of the full protection of Canadian law on the basis of race and ethnicity while hiding under the supposedly humanistic policy of multiculturalism. Had the victim been a white girl, it would be difficult to imagine the judge favoring the Muslim man's cultural mores over the girl's personal right to protection under Canadian law. Along the same lines, had the victims of the Flight 182 been British or white Canadian, the government response and

investigation may have been more devoted. Mukherjee and Blaise argue that it is precisely this negligence of its minority citizens that made Canada the perfect incubator for radical Khalistani terrorism. Where else but Canada to develop and execute violent, political plans under the guise of "cultural practice"?

"The Management of Grief" critiques Canada's policy of multiculturalism and its invidious consequences in many ways: through Shaila's repulsion at the Indian ghetto she visits, as mentioned, the proliferation of Judith's insensitive and ignorant comments about her work with "them," and through the negative portrayal of Kusum's return to India. The measure of the characters' "Indian-ness" is adumbrated through their mourning style, or as the title suggests, how they manage their grief. Extreme and destructive "Indian-ness" is embodied by Shaila's grandmother. When her young husband died, she, at age sixteen, sequestered herself in mourning, denying all her personal needs like a proper Hindu widow. She even neglected to raise her infant daughter, who was consequently passed on to an uncle. Shaila's parents exhort her not to fall prey to a similar "mindless mortification." Kusum follows this path. After recovering her husband's body and taking it to India for burial, she embarks on a life of itinerant, religious asceticism, searching for the reincarnated faces of her lost ones. Like Shaila's grandmother, Kusum has abjured the living, similarly disregarding the needs of her surviving daughter, Pam. Shaila accuses her of "running away" and withdrawing from her daughter and the world. Importantly, Kusum's personal and psychological regression is paired with oppressive aspects of Indian culture. In this way, engagement in this kind of life-paralyzing mourning is metonymic of a similarly unproductive revival of traditional Indian ways that may have no bearing on an Indian immigrant's Canadian life.

Shaila, on the other hand, ultimately rejects such oppressive paralysis/Indian-ness, though it is a slow and painful process. Like Kusum, she returns to India to receive the succor of her "homeland." Her parents do not want her to follow the fate of her grandmother, but they are happy to have her stay in India to be coddled by their affection and luxuries. But Shaila recognizes that succumbing to such a lifestyle, however seductive, is neither recovery nor progress. She asks a vision of her husband: *"Shall I stay?*" He replies: *"What are you doing here? . . . You must finish alone what we started together."* From this moment Shaila realizes that in order to recover a forward moving life, she must return to Canada. Implicit in this realization is that Canada, not India, is her homeland.

By rejecting a life of mind-numbing mourning, self-deprivation associated with oppressive aspects of "Indian-ness," Shaila gestures towards a transformative, productive vision of recovery and life. In the last line of the story, Shaila narrates that she has dropped a "package" and "started walking," ostensibly in a literal and symbolic new direction. If this direction is the opposite of Kusum and her grandmother's "mindless mortification"/ retreat into Indian-ness, Shaila's life will likely favor negotiating the challenges of mainstream Canadian life, discarding the burden of a repressive, insular Indian one. Her choice to be Canadian Indian with a stress on the Canadian defies the national policy of multiculturalism which would remand their ethnics to psychological and geographical ghettoes.

It is possible to criticize Mukherjee and her characters as "assimilationist." Though this word is freighted with negative and troubling connotations, the cultural vision that Mukherjee supports does not necessarily require a wholesale abdication of one's ancestors' culture. It is important to note that she does not laud assimilation for its inherently superior qualities, but as a resistant alternative to the ghettoizing nature of multiculturalism. Assimilation is a remedy, not a final solution. In her introduction to *Darkness* (1985), Mukherjee writes that for years she haughtily considered herself an "expatriate," psychologically and politically connected to India, with Canada's multiculturalism feeding her attitude. But moving to America and experiencing its so-called "melting-pot" philosophy, she realized that immigration was "exuberance" and expatriation, a mere aloof and ironic defense mechanism. Thus to support "assimilation" is not to be a cultural traitor, but to refuse being cast as a racialized, second-class denizen of the ethnic ghetto, excluded from the white, mainstream structures which are the repositories of advancement and power. Assimilation is tactical. As Bissoondath writes: "My history, my past, my 'roots' — the people, places and events that have shaped me — are an integral part of myself. Just as no one can take them away, so I cannot rid myself of them. This does mean, though, that I must be their prisoner (*Selling Illusions*). On a general level, "The Management of Grief" uses the plane crash to symbolize the inevitably failed and destructive nature of trying to return to India. The survivors are resilient characters like Shaila or Kusum's daughter, Pam, who "survives" precisely because she prefers to stay in Canada rather than visit the mythic "homeland." Both Pam and Shaila's life as immigrants embracing the "new" world are by no means glamorous. Both have undergone severe emotional trauma and Pam is living on less than enviable means as a makeup counter salesperson. Their lives are merely dynamic, creatively adaptive and bittersweet.

Source: Yoonmee Chang, for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Diane Andrews Henningfeld is an associate professor at Adrian College. She holds a Ph.D. in literature and writes widely for educational publishers. In the following essay, she examines Mukherjee's use of contrasts and unbridgeable gaps in "The Management of Grief."

Bharati Mukherjee's short story, "The Management of Grief" serves as the final story in the 1989 collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*. Mukherjee won the National Book Critic Circle Award for fiction for this collection, and in 1989, the story appeared in *The Best American Short Stories, 1989*, edited by Margaret Atwood and series editor Shannon Ravenel. Critics have continued to review the collection favorably.

Jonathan Raban, for example, in *The New York Times Book Review*, June 19, 1988, writes that Mukherjee's "writing here is far quicker in tempo, more confident and more sly than it used to be." However, although many critics and scholars comment on the quality of the collection as a whole, and although they also investigate closely a number of the stories, few have written specifically on "The Management of Grief." It seems that most literary critics prefer to concentrate on stories that seem more characteristic of Mukherjee's work. Nevertheless, reviewers like Elizabeth Ward in the *Washington Post*, July 3, 1988, call "The Management of Grief" "a quietly stunning story. . . ."

"The Management of Grief" is the story of how one woman copes (and does not cope) with the deaths of her husband and two sons in an airplane crash. It seems apparent that Mukherjee developed the idea for this story while working on a nonfiction, book-length study of the 1985 Air India crash near Ireland, a book she co-authored with her husband Clark Blaise. On board the plane were hundreds of Indo-Canadians, traveling between Toronto and In dia. According to Ann Mandel in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Mukherjee attributes the crash to "[r]acism, prejudice and ethnic estrangements born of multicultural policy." Mukherjee blames the Canadian government in large part for its failure to address the issues of Sikh terrorism, leading to the planting of bombs in the Air India jetliner. Mandel further writes, "Particularly moving are the portraits of those who died and of the other victims, those who still remember the dead and who now ask both for justice and for honor." Certainly, these portraits, shifted and fictionalized, find their way into "The Management of Grief."

The story, however, is more than a series of portraits. Mukherjee skillfully builds "The Management of Grief" on a series of contrasts and unbridgeable gaps. As Avrinda Sant-Wade and Karen Marguerite Radell assert in "Refashioning the Self: Immigrant Women in Bharati Mukherjee's New World," "Mukherjee weaves contradiction into the very fabric of the stories: positive assertions in interior monologues are undermined by negative visual images; the liberation of change is undermined by confusion or loss of identity; beauty is undermined by sadness." Through the protagonist Shaila Bhave, a member of the Toronto Indian community who loses her husband and her two sons in the crash, the reader stands poised between contradictions, balanced between two worlds. As Fakrul Alam suggests in his book *Bharati Mukherjee,* Shaila is a person in

the middle, thematically linking the story to the other stories in the collection *The Middleman and Other Stories* .

Early in the story, Shaila reports on the scene in her house as members of the Indian community gather to receive news about the tragedy that has overtaken them. She tells the reader, "Two radios are going in the dining room. They are tuned to different stations." This very early image helps to establish a sense of duality. Each radio reports the same event, but in different words. A listener would have to choose to listen to one radio or the other to make sense of the story being reported. The two radios together, their words out of synch with each other, produce meaningless noise. Shaila, numbed and distant from the event itself, finds herself unable to make sense of the tragedy. Instead, she seems to be trapped between the two radios, trapped between worlds.

Initially, it appears that the two worlds are India and Canada. Kusum's daughters Pam and her sister highlight the gap between the two. Pam, the older sister, decides to stay in Canada for the summer, choosing to work at Wonderland (a Canadian amusement park) rather than visit her grandparents in Bombay. Pam "dates Canadian boys and hangs out at the mall, shopping for tight sweaters." Her younger sister, on the other hand, chooses traditional Indian values and boards the ill-fated flight to Bombay with her father.

Likewise, Mukherjee emphasizes the contrast between Indian and Canadian culture through the introduction of the character Judith Templeton, the government social worker sent to help the Indians "manage" their grief. Templeton tries to recruit Shaila to help her with this task, placing Shaila in the middle between the government and her fellow immigrants. Mukherjee's portrayal of Judith Templeton slices to the heart of her own discontent with the Canadian's government failure to understand Indian culture. As Alam argues, "Judith is basically well-meaning but ultimately ill-equipped to 'manage' the grief of the Indo-Canadian community because of the cultural distance separating her from them." By failing to recognize that Shaila's outward calm is a signal of internal upheaval, Judith reveals her own lack of understanding of the people she is trying to help. Her mistaken assumption that Shaila is managing well places Shaila in an impossible situation. Like the two radios, Indian and Canadian cultural assumptions play in Shaila's ears until she is unable to make sense of her own grief or her role in the healing process.

Another important dichotomy in the story is that between the genders. The men and the women handle their grief differently, with the women wishing that they could commit suicide and the men trying to provide explanations for the tragedy. In India, during the months following the crash, the men who have lost their wives find that their living relatives quickly line up new families for them: "Already the widowers among us are being shown new bride candidates. They cannot resist the call of custom, the authority of their parents and older brothers. They must marry; it is the duty of a man to look after a wife." However, the women's families do not try to arrange marriages for them. As Shaila reports, "No one here thinks of arranging a husband for an unlucky widow."

Mukherjee also suggests that there are two radically different ways to respond to grief: a return to life, or a retirement from life. Dr. Ranganathan, an engineer who has resisted his relatives' efforts to remarry him, represents the gradual, active return to life. At first, this return to life manifests itself by a change in jobs, although he is still unable to change his home. Eventually, he not only changes jobs and homes, he changes careers, and moves from Montreal to Texas to start life in a place "where no one knows his story." Shaila's neighbor Kusum, on the other hand, represents the other response to grief. She leaves Toronto and moves to an ashram, or retreat, in India. She relies on a swami for advice and counsel. Through her retreat from the world, Kusum finds serenity. She is in contact with her dead husband and believes that she hears her daughter singing while on a pilgrimage. Again, Mukherjee places Shaila in the middle of these two extreme positions. Shaila returns to Toronto, determined to do as the spirit of her husband has instructed her: "You must finish alone what we started together." Although she actively attempts to return to life by writing letters to "the editors of local papers and to members of Parliament" so that they will acknowledge that the crash was an act of terrorism, at the same time, she retreats from active life, shunning Judith Templeton and living alone with the memories of the dead.

Of course, the greatest division of all in the story is the unbridgeable gap between the living and the dead. Throughout the story, Mukherjee contrasts the living with the dead. In the second paragraph of the story, Mukherjee introduces Dr. Sharma's wife, "monstrously pregnant," who is the mother of four boys. One of the boys walks through the scene at this moment and Shaila recognizes him by his "domed and dented forehead." Such reference reminds readers that Shaila's boys, too, must have literally "dented foreheads," the result of the trauma of the crash. Further, the picture Shaila keeps in her mind of her boys and her husband, as they were alive, prevents her from identifying their bodies when presented with the bloated corpses of several victims. Readers are unable to determine if the corpses truly are Shaila's sons. Does her need to think of them as living prevent her from recognizing their corpses, or are these not her sons at all, as she asserts?

Shaila again finds herself suspended between two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead, not knowing how to join either fully. "I am trapped between two modes of knowledge," she says. "At thirty-six, I am too old to start over and too young to give up. Like my husband's spirit, I flutter between worlds." While Kusum learns to live with her grief by identifying with the dead, and Dr. Ranganathan by identifying with the living, Shaila tells the reader, "I wait, I listen, and I pray, but Vikram has not returned to me. The voices and the shapes and the nights filled with visions ended abruptly several weeks ago." This suggests that Shaila has been occupying the land of the living during the day while seeking the land of the dead at night. Even her downtown apartment locates Shaila in the middle, "equidistant from the Ontario Houses of Parliament and the University of Toronto."

As the story closes, Shaila reports, "I heard the voices of my family one last time. *Your time has come,* they said. *Go, be brave."* Shaila's response is to begin walking. Although the ending is inconclusive because neither Shaila nor the reader know where she is heading, it is at least a sign that she is moving from the middle. The closing

words of the story are also the closing words of the collection: "I do not know which direction I will take. I dropped the package on a park bench and started walking." These words leave the reader with a sense of movement, a sense that Shaila no longer stands motionless and trapped between worlds, but rather walks toward her unknown future, finishing what she and her husband started in a new land, a new world.

Source: Diane Andrews Henningfeld, for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Bowen discusses Mukherjee's depiction of how the various cultural groups in "The Management of Grief" deal with tragic loss, "translating" grief according to their cultural experience.

The word "translation" comes, etymologically, from the Latin for "bearing across." Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained. SALMAN RUSHDIE, *Imaginary Homelands*

In the final article of the special January 1995 issue of *PMLA* on "Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition," Satya Mohanty observes that "vital cross-cultural interchange depends on the belief that we share a 'world' (no matter how partially) with the other culture, a world whose causal relevance is not purely intracultural." There are occasions on which such a shared world is traumatically imposed upon diverse groups of people. If ever there were an occasion for a human compassion that transcends boundaries of race and culture in the need for vital cross-cultural interchange, the Air India crash of 1985 surely must have been it—an occasion when the attempt to be "borne across" the world was itself "translated" in a particularly macabre way. During the spring and summer of 1995, the anniversary of this disaster brought it back into the Canadian news, specifically because the belief that "its causal relevance [was] not purely intracultural" had led some people to continue to fight for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into an unresolved crime.

The initial tragedy of the plane's destruction was, in the eyes of many, compounded by the fact that the Canadian government treated the event precisely as an Indian intracultural tragedy, not immediately relevant to the ordinary Canadian citizen. Bharati Mukherjee and her husband Clarke Blaise published a book about the disaster in 1987. They pointed out that over 90% of the passengers on the plane were Canadian citizens. They described the disaster as, politically, an "unhoused" tragedy, in that Canada wanted to see it as an Indian event, and India wanted to see it as an "overseas incident" that would not train an international spotlight on the escalated Sikh-Hindu conflicts in India. In the last sentence of that book, *The Sorrow and The Terrror,* one of the bereaved requests, "Mr. Clarke and Mrs. Mukherjee, tell the world how 329 innocent lives were lost and how the rest of us are slowly dying." Blaise and Mukherjee declare in their introduction that in researching the book they spoke with a wide range of people directly and indirectly involved with the tragedy; "mainly, however, we have visited the bereaved families and tried to see the disaster through their eyes" (xii). It was perhaps in order to manage the grief involved in such seeing that Mukherjee found it necessary to write not just *The Sorrow and The Terror* but also the short story "The Management of Grief," which appears in her 1988 collection *The Middleman*.

It is a story about the effects of the Air India disaster on Toronto's Indian community and specifically on the central character and narrator, Mrs. Shaila Bhave, who loses her husband and her two sons in the crash. Because she is rendered preternaturally calm

by the shock, she is perceived by the government social worker, Judith Templeton, as "coping very well," and as "a pillar" of strength, who may be able to help as an intermediary—or, in official Ontario Ministry of Citizenship terms, a "cultural interpreter"—between the bereaved immigrant communities and the social service agencies, though of course she has had no training. Shaila wants to say to Judith but does not, "I wish I could scream, starve, walk into Lake Ontario, jump from a bridge." She tells us, "I am a freak. . . . This terrible calm will not go away." In fact, then, the "pillar" and the "temple" are both unstable; figured as tottering buildings in a collapsing of hierarchy, both women are initially beyond knowing what to do. Death is the great leveller, even of the social worker's neocolonial benevolence. "I have no experience with a tragedy of this scale," says Judith; and Shaila interjects, "Who could?" When Judith suggests that Shaila's apparent strength may be of practical help to others who are hysterical, Shaila responds. "By the standards of the people you call hysterical, I am behaving very oddly and very badly, Miss Templeton. . . . They would not see me as a model. I do not see myself as a model." Instead, she says, "Nothing I can do will make any difference. . . . We must all grieve in our own way."

Judith is caught between worlds; she does not know how to translate the grief she shares with Shaila and the Indian community into cultural specifics that will be acceptable to both Indian and Western modes of thought. Shaila is initially caught, too, between different impulses coming from different cultural models which she has internalized within herself. The question of how to effect moral agency while practising the acceptance of difference is in both instances a tricky one. Satya Mohanty addresses the question of the immobilizing effects of difference by proposing a revisionary universalist perspective. "Given the relativist view of pure difference, difference can never represent genuine cross-cultural disagreement about the way the world is or about the right course of action in a particular situation" because cultures are seen as "equal but irredeemably separate." Edward Said had already taken an overtly polemical stance against such separateness, at the end of *Culture and Imperialism:*

No one today is purely *one* thing. . . . No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things.

But the practical question remains intransigent: how are such connections to be made?

Mohanty argues that "[g]enuine respect depends on a judgment based on understanding, arrived at through difficult epistemic and ethical negotiations"; otherwise, "the ascription of value (and of equality among cultures) is either meaningless or patronizing." Mohanty proposes what he calls a "post-positivist 'realism'" of socially negotiated knowledge, undergirded by a moral universalism: "Perhaps the most powerful modern philosophical ally of modern anticolonial struggles of all kinds is this universalist view that individual human worth is absolute; it cannot be traded away, and it does not exist in degrees." Such a universalist claim concerns a basic capacity for agency shared by all humans; it *invites* cultural articularization but does not *depend*

upon it for support of the underlying claim, and thus provides "the strongest basis for the multiculturalist belief that other cultures need to be approached with the presumption of equal worth." Perhaps this is not to say more than Gayatri Spivak, quoting Derrida—"there are no rules but the old rules." But then, perhaps this is to say something quite momentous. Universalism has had a bad press, associated as it has been with a manipulative essentialism and the blindnesses of liberal humanism to inherent racism, sexism, paternalism, phallocentrism, Eurocentrism, and all those other distressing -isms from which we in the late-twentieth- century West are anxious to dissociate ourselves. But perhaps a universalist ethic always already underlies much of our ism-rejection: on what other basis do we respect difference? On what other basis do we assume worth?

In Mukherjee's story, the assumption of moral universalism is a necessary precursor to the problems of negotiating social knowledge. Judith wants to help exactly because she is presuming the equal human worth of the Indian bereaved. But Mukherjee addresses questions of cultural particularization headon by showing how inadequately translatable are institutionalized expressions of concern: as Judith says to Shaila when she is trying to persuade her to help, "We have interpreters, but we don't always have the human touch, or maybe the right human touch." This distinction between "the human touch" and "the right human touch" is crucial: one is universal, the other particular. The grief is transcultural; the management of grief is not. Thus it is that grief shared rather than managed may have more chance of adequate translation.

Here is how the issue could be formulated: a shared world: the trauma of violent death; a universal: the experience of grief; a cultural, even intracultural particularization: grief "in our own way." For the bereaved relatives in Mukherjee's story, this grief is figured as "a long trip that we must all take." The story enacts a kind of diaspora through death, a doubling of cultural displacement for those immigrants whose chosen initial passage was to Canada, and who must now embark on a voyage out grimly parodic of those earlier "civilizing missions" of the colonizers, journeying first to Ireland, to identify the wreckage from the ocean, then to Bombay, to mourn and reassess in the mother-country, and thence back to step-mother Canada, to find another new identity.

Both in Mukherjee's story and in the non- fiction account of the tragedy, the people most able to connect viscerally with the grief of the bereaved are the Irish, off whose shores the plane went down. They have the quintessentially "human touch." They weep with the bereaved; strangers hug strangers in the street; once one mourner has picked flowers from a local garden to strew on the ocean, a newspaper article asks residents to please give flowers to any Indian person they meet. All this real ly happened. Such transcultural expressions of erapathetic connectedness, however impractical, construct an equal and opposite subjectivity; even the difference between the Eastern mode of management, the "duty to hope", and the Western, the spelling out of grim knowledge and the request to "try to adjust your memories", is rendered tolerable by grief so obviously felt and shared and by a compassionate regard for the privacy of pain. In fact Blaise and Mukherjee suggest in *The Sorrow and The Terror* that there may also have been a kind of cultural knowledge at work here, in that the Irish, as a chronically subalternized people who have firsthand experience of terrorism, may have been particularly sensitive to a tragedy like the Air India disaster.

The practical distinction between universal human emotions and their particular cultural manifestations seems to be one that a writer like Neil Bissoondath does not clearly draw, when he declares that "Culture, in its essentials, is about human values, and human values are exclusive to no race." The visceral connection made between the Irish and the Indians would seem to support Bissoondath's view. But Mukherjee does not allow the reader to be lulled into sentimentality by such a connection: she presents the reader also with the dissonance between Shaila and Judith. More useful here is Homi Bhabha's distinction between "the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences," including death, and "the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning." In Shaila and Judith, Mukherjee figures the problems of this social specificity: how does one translate even shared grief into practical action? What is more, this is a story in which the characters are not merely "shuttling between the old and the new world," as Mukherjee has remarked of her characters elsewhere. She does not allow the reader a straightforward binarism between Shaila and Judith; here there are also differences within the "old" culture—differences of sensibility and differences between different generations and belief-systems.

Shared ethnicity is in itself no guarantee of the presence of "the right human touch." In the story, the customs officer at Bombay airport, who is presumably Indian, is as obnoxious an example of petty officialdom as one might hope to avoid, and unlike Judith he is therefore treated to vociferous anger from Shaila. Even though "[o]nce upon a time we were well brought up women; we were dutiful wives who kept our heads veiled, our voices shy and sweet", the universal human experience of grief can be so extreme as to free such a woman from the patriarchal customs of her culture into the beginnings of an effective moral agency. The women get the coffins through the customs, despite the official's officiousness. That is, grief neither shared nor decorously managed may itself translate into a power of cultural resistance.

Moreover, when Shaila finds herself "shuttling" between Indian and Western modes of managing grief, the sense of being "trapped between two modes of knowledge" is not unlike what she had experienced within her Indian upbringing, which had pitted the irrational faith of her grandmother against the nonsense rationalism of her mother. In Bombay after the rituals of death are over, Shaila struggles: "At thirty-six, I am too old to start over and too young to give up. Like my husband's spirit, I flutter between worlds." Shaila's response at this point is to make her journey one of "courting aphasia"—dancing, riding, playing bridge. She is in any case paradoxically "luckier" than some: because the bodies of her family did not surface from the wreckage, she is marked as unlucky, and therefore does not have parents arranging a new husband for her. In a wry reversal of patriarchal oppression, she has widowers, "substantial, educated, successful men of forty," phoning her and saying, "Save me. . . . My parents are arranging a marriage for me." Most will succumb, because "they cannot resist the call of custom" that decrees it is "the duty of a man to look after a wife." But Shaila returns to Canada alone: in the end, she is saved by faith—by visions and voices, by the irrational world of temple holy men and prophetic dreams.

"[O]n the third day of the sixth month into [her] odyssey, in an abandoned temple in a tiny Himalayan village," her husband appears to her and tells her two things: "You're

beautiful," and "You must finish alone what we started together." Like other travellers, Shaila returns to her starting- place "translated" in more than physical being: she returns to Canada with "something . . . gained"—with a personal affirmation and a mission. It is through the universalizing power of grief that she experiences metaphysical intervention and the freedom to choose even between different Indian behaviors within her own cultural background. Thus in her translating and her translation, the narrator not only experiences the aporias inherent in attempts to communicate between cultures; she also recognizes the gaps in her own cultural constructedness. These gaps are traversed most powerfully in the story not by Mohanty's cognitive negotiations—Judith trying so hard to understand— but by the metaphysical "translations" of mystical experience: the voices and forms of the longed-for dead who comfort the living and direct them through their grief. This unapologetic introduction of the metaphysical is of course, on Mukherjee's part, in itself a "writing back" to the poststructuralist theorists of the West. Back in Canada, Shaila is surrounded by the spirits of her deceased family who, "like creatures in epics," have changed shapes and whose presence brings her both peace and rapture. But what is the shape of her mission?

Initially on her return she gets involved in trying to help Judith help the bereaved. She realizes that she has become Judith's confidante. As Judith's management skills lead her to compile lists of courses on bereavement, charts of how the relatives are progressing through the textbook stages of grief, lists of "cultural societies that need our help," Shaila tells her politely that she "has done impressive work." She goes with Judith to translate for her to an elderly Sikh couple who had been brought to Canada two weeks before their sons were killed in the crash, and who refuse to sign any of the papers which would secure them money, lodging, and utilities, because they are afraid, and proud. The interchange is laced with the ironies of half-translation, mistranslation, and non-translation. Because Shaila is Hindu and the couple are Sikh (something she, though not Judith, has recognized from their name), there are already unspoken stresses. Shaila stiffens involuntarily, and remembers "a time when we all trusted each other in this new country, it was only the new country we worried about." In Toronto as in India, Mukherjee explores the doublenesses and duplicities of intracultural differences. The Indian characters in Canada are united by their grief at the very moment that they are also divided by their fear and suspicion of those supposedly of their community who have caused that grief: Sikh extremists were likely responsible for the bombing. It is only when Shaila identifies herself to the Sikh couple as another of the bereaved, and not merely a translator, that real communication begins between them. The common reference provides a shared world; nevertheless, the cultural particularizations erect barriers, and those separating Judith from the Sikh couple are all but insuperable, because her neo-colonial expressions of concern inadvertently enact a recolonization. Shaila is drawn more to the Sikh couple's obstinate and impractical hopefulness than to Judith's anxious and bureaucratic goodwill. After all, Shaila too has lost sons. After all, the Sikh couple too are managing their grief.

The scene is interwoven with Shaila's awareness of the difficulties of translation: "How do I tell Judith Templeton?" "I cannot tell her"; "I want to add"; "I wonder"; "I want to say"; "I try to explain." But in the end, reading without words the elderly Sikh couple's stubborn dignity, their determination to fulfil their cultural duty to hope, she asks to be let

out of Judith's car on the way to the next appointment. Judith asks, "'Is there anything I said? Anything I did?' I could answer her suddenly in a dozen ways, but I choose not to. 'Shaila? Let's talk about it,' I hear, then slam the door." Words will not do. Words cannot enable the Sikh couple to appreciate Judith's concern; words here can construct only a kind of cultural enmeshment, *Judith*'s mode of managing grief. Mukherjee seems in this moment of decisive action to be making an equal and opposite point to that of Gayatri Spivak when she writes, "If the subaltern can speak, then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern any more." Sometimes silence itself may be a choice, against both subalternity and forced assimilation, a kind of "claiming ownership of one's freed self," as Mohanty puts it. Hybridity is not of itself necessarily productive: Ella Shohat has distinguished between the hybridities of forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, and social conformism, as well as creative transcendence. If, to use E.D. Blodgett's formulation, we posit translation as a threshold, a kind of "ur-language" or "langue" that is between languages, preventing assimilation while allowing for interpretation, then Shaila lives on this threshold in her dealings both with Judith and with the Sikh couple; and it is her choice to translate into silence.

In fact, the relationship to one's own language is also problematized in this story. One of Shaila's first responses to news of her husband's death is to lament that "I never once told him that I loved him" because she was so "well brought up." Her bereaved friend Kusum says, "It's all right. He knew. My husband knew. They felt it. Modern young girls have to say it because what they feel is fake." This distinction between words and feelings reinforces the notion of a prelinguistic realm of universal capacities. But later in Ireland Shaila lets drift on the water a poem she has written for her husband: "Finally he'll know my feelings for him." Not that her feelings are fake; rather that words are a survival technique, a management tool for her, just as, at the beginning of the story, the woman who got the first news of the crash must tell her story "again and again." After the second diaspora and return, Dr. Ranganathan, alone in Montreal, having lost his whole huge family, calls Shaila twice a week as one of his new relatives: "We've been melted down and recast as a new tribe" in which "[t]alk is all we have." Eventually he accepts "an academic position in Texas where no one knows his story and he has vowed not to tell it. He calls me now," says Shaila, "once a week." Inside the tribe, he chooses speech, outside, silence; each is a means of survival, a mode of agency.

At the end of the story, Shaila's voyage is still incomplete. She accepts the mission to "go, be brave," received through the final message of the other-worldly voices of her dead family; she "drop[s] [her] package on a park bench and start[s] walking"; but she tells us that "I do not know where this voyage I have begun will end. I do not know which direction I will take." The story is encircled in unknowing: it opens, "A woman I don't know is boiling tea the Indian way in my kitchen. There are a lot of women I don't know in my kitchen, whispering, and moving tactfully." Where that first unknowing conveyed shock and repressed hysteria, the last unknowing figures acceptance and reconstruction, another journey, willingly undertaken beyond the pages of the story. Acceptance and reconstruction: Judith would recognize these words, the last two stages of her textbook description of the management of grief. She might not, however, recognize their manifestation in Shaila, who hears voices, who drops packages, for whom grief is ultimately managed more through *meta*physical translations than physical

ones. True, she has sold her pink house for four times what she and her husband had paid for it; she has taken a small apartment downtown; she has plenty of money from her husband's careful investments; she is even looking for a charity to support. In Western terms, it seems that she has managed her grief very well. But this alone would be what Bhabha calls colonial mimicry; it is not where the story ends.

Grief must in the end also manage Shaila— almost, stage-manage her. If grief shared rather than managed is the most effectively translated, it is perhaps appropriate to point to the doubleness of Mukherjee's title. "The Management of Grief" can mean "how people manage grief," or "how grief manages people"—in other words, "grief" in this phrase can be understood as grammatical object or subject of the action of managing. Moreover, the phrase can be read as what Roland Barthes calls a "structure of jointed predication" in which the translator figures as the fulcrum, the pre (and post) position "of." This little word itself contains and signifies the space of translation, whose function is to hold substantive concepts together, a liminal space, an almost unnoticed minimal word signifying possession—in this case, possession of the ability to construct the self.

Thus when Shaila hears the voices of her family giving her her mission, "I dropped the package on a park bench and started walking." Interpreting for propositional meaning, a reader might wonder if she is going mad. If so, what happens now? Does she get home for supper? If not, who finds her? Looking for symbolic meaning, a reader might think that it is now that the most personal journey begins, in privacy and solitude. But a postcolonial reading is likely to note the performative structure of the text, and to recognize the tension between these two interpretations— the cognitive and the phantasmatic, the rational and the intuitive—as precisely that experienced both interculturally and intraculturally by Shaila as translator throughout the story. We know that she got back to her apartment: the story is composed in such a way that she is telling us about the final moment of insight a week after it happened. She is herself the fulcrum, the translator and the translation, undoing the traditional oppositions between West and East, reason and faith, physical and metaphysical. She is settled in a good apartment, and she walks off the page. Nor is this merely a West-East difference of response: Shaila's mother and grandmother themselves represented this same difference. Shaila is a figure for productive cultural hybridity. Standing on the translator's threshold, looking in both directions, she comes to possess the power to understand her liminality as itself a space for "effective (moral) agency" (Mohanty).

The phrase "space of translation" is Bhabha's: in discussing the language of critique, he suggests that such language is effective

to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of "translation": a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the "moment" of politics.

In Mukherjee's story, Shaila journeys into figuring just such a language of critique, just such a place of hybridity, and she stands at a new and unexpected political "moment":

the immigrant trans lator who learns how to be translated, how to inhabit the productivity of the threshold. The package that she drops stands synechdochally for the weight both of her grief and of her translator's role. Having journeyed thus far in her odyssey, she leaves behind the weight of translating as she steps beyond the narrative into her own translation: she "started walking." In moving from translator to translation she breaks open the management of grief, each part of the substantive proposition falling away from her because the preposition has taken upon itself its own self-possession. Through this figure, Mukherjee suggests that, despite the cultural misunderstandings inescapably exposed in a transcultural tragedy, the experience of being "borne across"—or through—grief itself opens up a space of translation in which, as Salman Rushdie hopes, "something can also be gained": Shaila deconstructs apparently opposing modes of knowledge into a productive hybridity without denying either of them. Shaila thus becomes in herself an embodiment of Mohanty's "understanding, arrived at through difficult epistemic and ethical negotiations." No longer "fluttering between worlds," Shaila reinscribes herself through self-translation, and possesses her own space beyond the page, outside the sentence, a space of moral agency where the place of both words and silences is a chosen one.

Mukherjee has written of "colonial writers" like herself that "[h]istory forced us to see ourselves as both the 'we' and the 'other,'" and that this kind of training has enabled her to inhabit a "fluid set of identities denied to most of my mainstream American counterparts." In a similar way, she chooses to write of immigrant characters for whom re-location is a positive act requiring "transformations of the self." This story suggests that such an embracing of hybridity can actually be empowered by the experience of grief, because grief first exposes an inner world irrevocably divided and estranged by loss, a world from which there is no turning away, and then acts as a form of energy to enable the dislocated mourner in the task of management, reconstruction, and translation into acceptance. In writing out of the political and personal tragedy of the Air India crash, Mukherjee achieves a particularly fine figuring-forth of such transforming hybridity; I would argue that this is because the universal nature of grief is a powerful if complex force for change, cultural resistance, and moral choice. It is partly because such transcultural grief is still at work that two years ago a million dollar reward was offered by the RCMP for information leading to the prosecution of the six prime suspects in "the worst terrorist act involving Canadians." Indeed there are many mourners who hold to the strong hope that their grief may yet translate into a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Air India crash, even though it is more than a decade after the fact.

Source: Deborah Bowen, "Spaces of Translation: Bharati Mukherjee's 'The Management of Grief,'" in *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July, 1997, pp. 47-60.

Topics for Further Study

Throughout her work and personal search for identity, Mukherjee has drawn a line between the "immigrant" and "expatriate." In her introduction to *Darkness* (1985), she rejects the "aloofness of expatriation" for the "exuberance of immigration." What is the difference between immigrants and expatriates? What are their attitudes towards their new country? Select a story or a section of a novel from Mukherjee's work and discuss whether the characters fulfill Mukherjee's (or your own) conception of immigrant and expatriate.

"The Management of Grief" offers a glimpse of the mourning rituals of Hindu women. Research in fuller detail the mourning rituals of Indian cultures (e.g. Hindu, Muslim, Sikh). Are these rituals different for men and women? Examine your own culture's mourning rituals. Do they have varying expectations according to gender?

I n *The Sorrow and The Terror,* Mukherjee and Blaise carefully differentiate radical Khalistani groups from Sikhs in general. They emphasize that it is erroneous to blame the bombing of Air India Flight 182 on Sikhs when only a small, violent group of Khalistanis were responsible. They also bemoan the media stereotype of Indians as terrorists. Research the Khalistani movement, paying attention to the work of non-violent groups. How has the media contributed to their stereotyping as violent terrorists?

Mukherjee has been both criticized and praised for being an *assimilationist.* What is assimilation? Research this concept using history, literature, or current events and discuss its pros and cons.

Mukherjee has praised America's "melting-pot" mentality. Yet across the nation, more and more "ethnic-towns" are emerging. In this way, the American landscape is beginning to resemble Canada's "mosaic." Discuss how contemporary America fits or does not fit into Mukherjee's image of the melting-pot. In your opinion, which model is better, the mosaic or the melting pot? Use specific examples from literature, history or current events to substantiate your argument.

Mukherjee and several other writers do not support "hyphenated" status. That is, they do not consider themselves Indian American or Chinese American, but simply American. What is your opinion of this "hyphenated" status? Does the hyphen devalue the immigrant's claim to this country, or does it duly honor her ancestor's culture? Use excerpts from literature, history and current events to support your argument.

Compare and Contrast

1970: 13% of Canadians are bilingual in English in French.

1991: After $ 2.5 billion is spent to promote bilingualism, as part of the larger effort to support multiculturalism, there is only a 3% increase in English and French bilinguals.

1971: Prime Minster Pierre Trudeau enacts the Act of the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada, popularly known as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

1990s: The Canadian Council of Christians and Jews conducts a public opinion poll on the perception of multiculturalism. Their report, published in the December 14, 1993 *The Globe and the Mail,* is headlined "Canadians Want Mosaic to Melt . . . Respondents believe immigrants should adopt Canada's values." The report states that Canadians are becoming "increasingly intolerant" of ethnic groups' demands and favor a "homogenization" of Canadian society. In 1992, the federal government conducts its own opinion poll, reporting that 46% of polled Toronto residents felt that there were too many "visible minorities" in the city, particularly Arabs, blacks, and Asians. In 1994, the federal government conducts another opinion poll which reports a 21% increase in immigrant intolerance. Now, 67% of polled Toronto residents complain that there are too many immigrants in the city, which in 1994 had a 38% immigrant population, the largest in Canada.

1914: The *Komagata Maru* is detained and quarantined in a Vancouver port. Of the 376 passengers on board, all from Asia and many of Sikh background, only 22 are allowed to land. The rest are rejected on grounds of possible contagion. In an attempt to get its passengers off board, the ship remains docked for two months, during which time it is refused the transmission of food, water, passengers, and garbage. One young male Sikh is removed from the ship and presented as a "test case" for eligibility for Canadian entry. The courts reject him and the *Komagata Maru* is ordered to return to Asia.

1930s: Canada charges standard landing fees of $25 - $50 to Americans, depending on whether they are black or white, while Asians are charged "head taxes" of $200 to $250.

1993: Herbert Grubel, a member of the conservative Reform Party and Professor of Economics at Simon Fraser University, declares new immigrants are a burden to Canadian society (reported in the October 15, 1993 *The Globe and the Mail*). John Tillman, also a member of the Reform Party, calls women and minority groups "parasites of society" (*The Globe and Mail,* October 29, 1993).

1986: Employment Equity Act enacted in Canada. Sets up quotas to increase employment of women, aborigines, visible minorities, and the disabled in federal jobs.

1993: *Job Mart,* an Ontario Public Service employment listing, posts an ad that reads: "The competition is limited to the following employment equity designation groups:

aboriginal peoples, francophones, persons with disabilities, racial minorities and women." Political groups are outraged at this blatant expression of "reverse" discrimination.

What Do I Read Next?

Darkness (1985) by Bharati Mukherjee is Mukherjee's first collection of short stories. It includes an interesting introduction by the author sketching out her conception of "immigrant" versus "expatriate."

Jasmine (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee is an outgrowth of the short story "Jasmine" in *The Middleman and Other Stories*. The story of a young woman who immigrates to America after her husband is killed by political terrorism in India. She goes through an agonizing but ultimately fulfilling process of personal development as evinced by her name changes from the dense, unpronounceable "Jyoti" to the spontaneous and casual "Jas" and finally to the stable midwestern, "Jane Ripplemeyer."

Junglee Girl (1995) by Ginu Kamani is a collection of short stories about the hold of oppressive Indian traditions on young women's awakening sexuality. "Junglee" is derived from the Sanskrit root "jungle" and is often used as an epithet to describe a reckless and uncontrollable woman. The work also touches upon intra-ethnic tensions among Indians.

Leave it to Me (1997) by Bharati Mukherjee is Mukherjee's latest novel. His work heavily explores the theme of violence, which Mukherjee has commented is central and necessary to an immigrant's experience, whether it be physical or psychological.

Masala (1993) directed by Srinivas Krishna is a bleakly humorous film account of the effects of the Air India bombing on a young man, Krishna, who has lost his entire family in the crash. Humorously criticizes Canada's clumsy policy of multiculturalism stereotypical image of Sikhs as violent terrorists.

Of Customs and Excise (1991) by Rachna Mara is a piece of short fiction exploring the conflict between rapidly westernizing second-generation children and their tradition-holding parents. Focuses on the cultural oppression of women.

Selling Illusions (1994) by Neil Bissoondath is a personal critique of Canada's official policy of multiculturalism. Novel writer Bissoondath argues in the same vein as Mukherjee that multiculturalism creates ethnic ghettoes, political and social divisiveness and a strata of secondclass citizens.

Further Study

Alam, Fakrul. *Bharati Mukherjee,* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.

A concise critical study of the various stage of Mukherjee's fiction writing, and her psychological transformation from expatriate to immigrant.

Bissoondath, Neil. *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* Ontario: Penguin, 1994.

A convincing, personal and political argument against Canada's official policy of multiculturalism.

Connell, Michael, Jessie Grearson, Tom Grimes. "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee," in *The Iowa Review,* Vol. 20, No. 3, Fall, 1990, pp. 7-32.

A casual and informative interview with Mukherjee and husband Clark Blaise. Conducted in the Thanksgiving of 1989, shortly after the publication of *Jasmine*. Mukherjee and Blaise discuss a range of Mukherjee's work including non-fiction co-authored with Blaise, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) and *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987). Mukherjee also discusses her political and personal vision of fiction writing.

Dhawan, R. K., ed. *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium,* New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.

A collection of critical essays that covers the span of her fiction up until 1996. Separated according to work, with sections devoted to *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), *Jasmine* (1989), and *The Holder of the World* (1993).

Frideres, James S., ed. *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations,* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989.

A collection of critical essays discussing the issues plaguing multiculturalism in Canada and the United States.

Mukherjee, Bharati and Clark Blaise. *The Sorrow and the Terror,* Ontario: Penguin, 1987.

A moving and thorough reconstruction of the bombing and possible events leading up to it, including interview of relatives of the victims and terrorismlinked Khalistani agitators. Criticizes Canada's policy of multiculturalism and differentiates the radical pro-Khalistani faction from Sikhs in general.

Nelson, Emmanuel S., ed. *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives,* New York: Garland Publishing, 1993.

A diverse collection of critical essays on Mukherjee's work with introduction by Nelson.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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