

**Identity Formation and Transformation – A Result of
Immigration in Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee**

Nandhini Devi,S

(12PEN010)

Thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education

for Women, Coimbatore – 641 043

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in English

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgement

The researcher thanks the Lord Almighty for the abundant blessings showered on her during the study period.

The researcher expresses her reverential gratitude to Dr. Thiru. **T. S. K. Meenakshisundaram**, M.A., M.Phil., Chancellor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for all the good wishes towards the successful completion of the study.

The researcher expresses her heartfelt thanks to **Dr. (Mrs.) Sheela Ramachandran**, M.Sc., PG.Dip., Ph.D., (Avinashilingam), Vice-Chancellor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for the invaluable help and motivation given during the time of the study.

The researcher records her sincere thanks to **Dr. (Mrs.) Gowri Ramakrishnan**, M.Sc., (Madras), M.Phil., Ph.D., (Avinashilingam), Registrar, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for extending all support for the completion of the study.

The researcher owes her profound sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to **Dr. Tmt. Saroja Prabhakaran**, M.A., Dip.Ed. (Madras), Ph.D., (Mother Terasa), Director, Hall of Residence, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore , for extending all the help for smooth conduct of the study.

The researcher offers her heartfelt gratitude and sincere thanks to **Dr. (Mrs.) B. Neelavathy**, M.A., Dip. Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D., Dean, faculty of Humanities, Avinashilingam, Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for her support and encouragement.

The researcher specially acknowledges her deep sense of gratitude to **Dr. (Mrs.) S. Kalamani**, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., (Avinashilingam), Associate professor and Head, Department of English (i/c), Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, to her keen interest in this study.

The researcher acknowledges her gratitude to her guide **Dr. (Mrs.) Chitra Sivasubramaniam**, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Associate professor, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, for her care, dynamic, excellent and inspiring guidance, valuable suggestions, ready help and enduring support and meticulous efforts contributed towards the successful execution of this study.

The researcher wishes to thank all the **Staff members** of the English Department, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, who rendered their help whenever required.

The researcher wishes her thanks to the **librarian** of both Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore, and SCILET, Madurai, and her special thanks and gratitude to her beloved Parents for their continuous encouragement and support in carrying out this modest work.

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CHAPTER I

Chapter 1

Introduction

Indian English literature has developed over a period of time. It took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Before the rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, wrote short stories and small plays. It is still believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of fables, story telling and more. In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in the English language. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writings and this affects the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicized novels presented by the new age women writers.

The work of Indian women writers is significant in making the society aware of the women's needs and demands in providing a medium for self-expression and assertion. The Indian women authors of the past have always been undervalued because they used to write about a woman's perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena. The 20th century, women's writing is considered to be a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related to women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long; they

handled things efficiently balancing tradition and womanhood. Women writers in their works depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers.

Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu who charm the readers with their writings. Authors like Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das and Anita Nair have used feminist themes. Contemporary Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande have focused on the psychological sufferings and oppressions of the frustrated housewives whose only option is to suppress the storm within the inevitable existential predicament of women in a male dictated society. The neglected women as characters in their novel attempt for better way of life mentally and physically.

The major themes that these women novelists explore are the gender issues, female exploitation and oppression, the theme of growing up from childhood to womanhood, liberation through self quest, human relationships, Indianness, migration, East-West confrontation, clash between tradition and modernity, and struggle for independence and partition. Indian women novelists in English have created a position for themselves, which becomes clear from the distinguished critical awards they have received in recent times.

Nayantara Sahgal is a conscientious novelist with her own well-defined views on the art of fiction. She emerges as one of the most significant voices among women writers in the contemporary Indian writing in English. She has written nine novels, two volumes of autobiography, and has contributed extensively to periodicals and is counted among the best political journalists of the country. Most critics consider her as a writer of political novels. Her first novel, *A Time to be Happy* (1963), is written in the background

in the aurora of India's Independence; *Storm in Chandigarh* (1988), is about the partition of Punjab; *Rich Like Us* (1985), confronts civil disorder, corruption, and oppression while detailing the internal conflicts in a businessman's family. Two of Sahgal's later novels, *Plans for Departure* (1985) and *Mistaken Identity* (1988), are set in colonial India.

Sahgal deals with man-woman relationship and shows her concern with the failure of marital relationships and the loneliness of living. She in her novels vividly describes how both the individuals and the society in the disruption of relationship exploit women during the modern times. Sahgal also traces out a slow and gradual deviation from the stereotype of the virtuous woman to redefine virtue. She points out that the virtue of modern woman is to build courage to live a life full of freedom.

Kamala Das, a bilingual Indian writes both in English and Malayalam. She is a skilled short story writer; an unusually powerful writer with a burning social conscience. Her works in English include the novels *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), a collection of short stories called *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992), in addition to books of poetry including Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descendants (1967), The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), The Anamalai Poems (1985), Only the Soul Knows How to Sing (1996), and Yaa Allah (2001), a collection of poetry with Pritish Nandy Tonight, This Savage Rite (1979), and her autobiography, *My Story* (1976). Her works are an exploration of womanhood and love. She is a writer and a poetess who inspired women struggling to be free of domestic oppression. She writes with an intension of breaking the century's silence and crossing the patriarchal threshold.

Anita Nair is another name amongst the emerging contemporary women novelists. Her first book is a collection of short stories called the *Satyr of the Subway* (1997). Her other works include *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Malabar Mind* (2002), *Mistress* (2005), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010). She has proved her potential by her consistent work. She has five published novels to her credit and the oeuvre of her work consists of understanding the psyche of men and women as well as her strong and in-depth knowledge of mythology, which she uses in her novels with expertise. Her novel, *Mistress* probes deep into the closed realm of Kathakali Dancers and gives a sensitive portrayal of their lives both from outside as well as inside. In the novel *Ladies Coupe* she strongly advocates the feminist concerns where she presents Ahkila, the protagonist in search of her identity. Her *Lessons in Forgetting* is a novel of hope and forgiveness, of a new life after calamities, thereby giving a second chance to restore life and move ahead. With her knowledge of South Indian culture, Anita Nair depicts realistic social settings to give authenticity to her background.

Anita Nair's ability to delve deep into human mind helps her to create an intensity, which keeps the readers spellbound. Her female characters depict the modus operandi by which they subvert the exercise of their male counterparts. It is done with a motive to win over them. She redefines the female role to crush and demolish the patriarchal mindset and seeks to achieve the central position. Women should not be ashamed of any stigma attached to them for eg., widowhood, divorce status, etc. They should realize their true potential and strength and this requires the capacity to manage differences and the willingness to respect them. Women should engage in a full-fledged

battle for survival and improve their relationships rather than submitting to harassment and suppressing the rights of an individual.

Anita Desai in most of her novels has tried to focus on the family life, its problems, the reason behind the estrangement of women and lack of warmth in marital bond. She made her debut with *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), which critically analyses the factors responsible for a nervous breakdown of the protagonist Maya. The writer through Maya voices the tragic, desolate condition of most women in India. The next is the *Voices in the City* (1965), a story of three siblings Amla, Nirode and Monisha and their ways of life in Kolkata. With *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1975), it is being noticed that her characters often adopt escapist way to cope with the boring day-to-day life; *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), won the 'National Academy of Letters Award' in 1978. It is a story about three women and their experiences in life. Desai has a deep knowledge of the tensions between family members and the fragile relationships of the siblings which are seen in *Clear Light of Day* (1980), between Tara and Bimla with the late realization that familial bond is indispensable.

The novels of Anita Desai depict feminine sensibility. She portrays the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family and society, the relationship among family members and the complexities between a man-woman relationship paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. A. V. Krishna Rao, in the book *The Indo-Anglican Novel and the Changing Tradition* says that he clearly sees a "creative release of feminine sensibility in the novels of Anita Desai" (50). She expresses, that in general life women like male counterparts want liberation

in all its approaches and recognition. They struggle for equality and for women rights historically and politically. She emphasizes on the value of women in the society and creates awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision.

Kamala Markandaya, an outstanding novelist on the contemporary commonwealth literary scene has initiated the lead of women's transformation from possession to person through her writings. She has shown the new face of her women who seek self-fulfillment through self-expression in a milieu where there is a mutuality, understanding and tenderness. Although her women do not rebel, they make the society to realize their presence as a person and not as a mere possession. The new woman, clinging to her basic values and changing herself according to the changing circumstances, goes ahead on the way seeking for her own identity with new depth and getting recognition. She has realistically presented the emotional, moral and spiritual problems of a new woman. She uses fiction as a vehicle for communicating her vision of life.

Kamala Markandaya's first novel is *Nectar in a Sieve*, published in the year 1954. This novel depicts the difficult life of an Indian peasant. It wonderfully depicts the clashes between the urban and rural societies of India. Next book of Kamala Markandaya is *Some Inner Fury* (1955), which reflects the distressed relationship between an Indian woman who is highly educated and a British government servant, who is in love with her. In her next book, *A Silence of Desire* (1960), the author portrays the setting of a clash of values when a middle-class woman from a religious family seeks medical help from a Hindu faith healer and not from any doctor without her husband's knowledge. Apart from

these novels, she has also penned down several other novels, establishing her identity in the writing arena.

Kamala Markandaya portrays a realistic picture of contemporary women through her characters – Rukumani, Nailini, Ira, Mira, Roshan, Helen, Lalitha, Mohini, Usha, Valli etc. Her heroines are in constant search for meaning and value of life. They are ready for sacrificing themselves. They move from self-denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation. She explores the emotional reactions and spiritual responses of women and their predicament with a sympathetic understanding. The feminist voice is heard in all her novels.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a unique place in contemporary Indian English fiction because of her indisputable feminist attitude. In the first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), Sarita, the protagonist, challenges her mother to become a doctor, and challenge the caste restrictions by marrying the man she loves. The next novel, *If I Die Today* (1982) contains the elements of detective fiction. *Root and Shadows* (1983), describes the break-up of a joint family, held together by money and the authority of an old aunt, a childless widower. Deshpande's best work is her fifth novel *That Long Silence* (1988), which reveals the marital incompatibility. The protagonist, Jaya becomes hapless victim of marriage life and its responsibilities there by losing her identity. Her struggle throughout is to attain wholeness, completeness and an authentic selfhood. *A Matter of Time* (1996), is the tale of a woman abandoned by a man.

Shashi Deshpande's novels reflect the lives of suffocated women in search of a refuge from suffering. The women protagonists strive for and obtain certain autonomy and there by realize their immense potentialities for action and self-actualization. Their

return home is not defeatism but the triumph of the independence of women. They learn to live in the modern society with self-identity and self-realization.

The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women towards conflicts and female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships.

Diasporic women writers start questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They feel that they are no longer puppets in the hands of man. The chief characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt etc. Diaspora is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. There is an element of creativity present in the diasporic writings and this creation stands as a compensation for the many losses suffered.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Gita Mehta, Jhumpa Lahiri and Bharati Mukherjee are known for the contemporary approach in their novels. They have made their name while residing abroad. These female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Loss of identity is a theme discussed in their novels; they are of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. The expatriate writers are often pre-occupied with the elements of nostalgia as they seek to locate themselves in new cultures. They write in relation with the culture of their homeland and at the same time adopt and negotiate with the cultural space of the host land.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, believes that she has a social responsibility and so focuses on the life of immigrants. Thus she takes the opportunity to re-evaluate her homeland's culture, stressing on the status of women and unfolding its ancient myths and ethnicities. In her two novels *Sister of my Heart* (1999) and *Vine of Desire* (2002), the widowed ladies have renegotiated their status and located themselves in their chosen sites of psychological and spatial space. Their dreams are not fulfilled and they are transformed to darker characters. They lose their early innocence and so prepare themselves to deal with life's tragedies and betrayals.

Gita Mehta is a diasporic writer settled in America at present, is an eminent novelist and emerges as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relation, she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in family. Her novel reveals the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. She uses this point of view to present social reality as it is experienced by women. *Raj* (1989), Mehta's first novel highlights the issues of Hindu women in pre- independent and post-independent India in a very realistic way. *Raj* is not only a historical fiction but also a story of a woman's struggle to set her identity as a human being. It represents Jaya's constant struggle to live with dignity. She learns the lesson from the renaissance in her childhood. After marriage, she struggles very hard as her husband does not treat her as a genuine life partner. Eventually she loses her husband and her son but she is not disappointed. Ultimately, she identifies her identity as a human being in the 'New India.'

Mehta's second novel *The River Sutra* (1993) mainly explores the nature-woman relationship. It is a concept of eco-feminism and it is all about woman's equation with

nature and her act of reaching out to nature in her crises and despair. Coming close to nature, the woman imbibes the serenity and strength of this unchanged immortal nature. In the journal *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* Priti R. Patel in her article “Feminist Perspective in the Novels of Gita Mehta” writes “. . . woman and nature have been made to appear extensions of each-other. The woman so long as she is under the clutches of the cynical society is crushed and tortured. But once she is allowed to come to nature, as ascetic, she is restored to the process of being, becoming, and fulfillment in which she becomes a representative of the great river itself” (7).

Jhumpa Lahiri, a diasporic writer settled in America, got the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for her debut story collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), that explores the issues of love and identity among immigrants and cultural transplants. These stories address sensitive dilemmas in the lives of Indian immigrants, with themes such as marital difficulties, miscarriages, and the disconnection between the first and second generation United States immigrants, especially women. In three of her stories in the *Interpreter of Maladies*, namely “Mrs. Sen”, “This Blessed House” and “The Treatment of Bibi Helder” highlight the identity-crisis of these often unvoiced and elided diasporic female subjects.

Jhumpa Lahiri’s first novel *The Namesake* (2003), deals with immigrant woman named Ashima who like many immigrant Bengali women is not culturally immunized by America’s multiculturalism, but is a strong follower of Indian culture and gives importance to family and relationships. *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), is Lahiri’s latest story collection about the diasporic experiences of first, second and third generation of immigrants in India. Her stories deal with the suffering, pressure and possible failure or success in the

adaptation process of the female characters in reconstructing their subjectivity, reasserting or negotiating their identities through silence, resistance, negotiation, acculturation or assimilation.

Diasporic women writers concentrate on the problems of women and explore with a view to discover how far they support women's struggle for liberation from patriarchy. Diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, protest, assertion and the quest for identity. Like the other diasporic writers, Bharati Mukherjee focuses on the rootlessness caused by diaspora.

Bharati Mukherjee is an award winning Indian born American writer. She is one of the remarkable women writers to have contributed explicit fictions to the much-debated rein of post-modernist literature. Her remarkable works are *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004). Her two short story collections are *Darkness* (1985), *The Middle Man and Other Stories* (1988). She has also written two fictional works along with her husband Clark Blaise – *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) and *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1987). Mukherjee's works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by Indian women immigrants and their struggle. The cross cultural dilemma, alienation and ethnic struggle of diasporic women are revealed in her writings. Her depiction of women and their different relationships portray the dominance of patriarchal practices in traditional society, as well as the forms of liberation and empowerment, which are available to women in their diasporic situations.

Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* is divided into four parts to present the dangling personality of Tara. The first part deals with the family background and the past of Tara and interferences of native soil of Calcutta in the process of her settlement in New York. This part addresses Tara's personal difficulties of being caught between two worlds, home and culture and is an examination of who she is and where she belongs to. The second part deals with Tara's visit to India, after marrying an American and faces a different India than the one she remembers leaving. It also talks of her journey from Bombay to Calcutta and her reactions to India. The third one narrates Tara's life at Calcutta with her Catelli- Continental friends. The last part deals with Tara's visit to Darjeeling, her boredom and alienation at coming back to Calcutta and her victimization in a mob and her tragic end, which remains mysterious.

Tara Banerjee, is an autobiographical representation of authoress herself, like Bharati Mukherjee's in her *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, is an outsider in India because of her decision to leave the subcontinent, to live in North America, and to marry an American. She represents the image of women who try to assimilate the alien culture and to accept the changed identity, over throwing their own Indian culture. Her spirit is different with which she overthrows Indian culture and adjusts with the American one. She feels tension between the two socio-cultural environments – between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia as an outsider in a no-man's land where she is struggling for survival.

There Tara carves her own new territory and develops a new personality with emotional ties with both homeland and adapted land. This new self makes her forget her native culture and the return to India results in a feeling that it as an alien country as she

has lost her native taste and touch. In fact, her new self is responsible for the disruption of her pleasures, but along with it the deteriorating social change and her new perspective towards Indian poverty and dirtiness culminate in her discomfort, frustration and disgust.

In the second novel, *Wife*, the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple, a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl, is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waits for marriage. But there she is frustrated by many ways. She aspires for self-recognition and dream fulfillment. In this novel, Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and live. The central character Dimple is a symbol of alienation and depression and also articulates a bleak vision of an immigrant woman's failure to assimilate into Western culture.

In *Jasmine*, a Punjabi girl born in a rural Indian village called Hasnapur, tells her story as a twenty four year old pregnant widow, living in Iowa with her disabled lover, Bud Ripplemeyer. Jasmine also relates biographical events that cross the distance between her Punjabi birth and her American adult life. These past biographical events inform the action set in Iowa. Her odyssey encompasses five distinct settings, two murders, at least one rape, a maiming, a suicide, and three love affairs. Throughout the course of the novel, the character's identity, along with her name, changes again and again: from Jyoti to Jasmine; Jasmine to Jazzy; jazzy to Jassy; Jassy to Jase, and Jase to Jane. It reveals a more positivistic approach to the problem of immigration. It is written after Mukherjee migration to the US and it is a poignant story of survival, convenience, compromises, losses and adjustments involved in the process of cultural barriers and

misunderstandings. Bharati Mukherjee through Jasmine talks about the strength of a woman and not of her weakness.

In Bharati Mukherjee's novel *The Holder of the World*, the protagonist, Hannah Easton, a white Puritan woman from Salem, Massachusetts Bay Colony makes a journey to the exotic Coromandel shores in the late seventeenth century and finally becomes the mistress of an Indian potentate, Raja Jadhav Singh. Hannah's voyage to the orient is a pre-determined truth, which effectively voices and manifests the latent tensions, aspirations and ambitions of the protagonist. She becomes an expatriate as a result of quest for the vital life of feeling and emotions. She is a woman of energy and boundless hope. Hannah's life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways of defining reality in a world, which is essentially orthodox. Mukherjee through her protagonist Hannah Easton focuses on immigrant women on their freedom from relationships to become an individual. Mukherjee uses female characters to explore this spatiotemporal connection between different cultures. Mukherjee's concentration continues to be on immigrant women and their freedom from relationships to become individuals. It has the theme of both transformation and migration.

The work *Leave it to Me*, continues with the theme of immigration. It is a story that deals with a young woman named Debby DiMartino, who seeks revenge on her parents who neglects her. The story reveals her unappreciative interaction with her kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. It also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and mother-daughter relationship through the political and emotional topics by Debby in her quest for revenge.

Bharati Mukherjee's another novel *Desirable Daughters* is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of dealing with situations. The protagonist, Tara working as a volunteer in a pre-school finds that her married life is not fulfilling and she moves out of her traditional life, and a typical American divorce settlement follows. She sends her son with his father as a divorce settlement. Finally Tara returns to her father's house for comfort. It not only creates both intrigue and suspense but also initiates a quest for Tara's identity.

The Tree Bride, the second in a planned trilogy, is an eloquent portrait of a family steeped in ancient culture and conservative traditions. A brief account of Tara Lata's childhood is found in *Desirable Daughters*, the first part of the trilogy. Tara Lata is one of the three daughters of Jai Krishna Gangooly, a lawyer in the Dacca High Court. Her father decides Tara's fate in her life when she is very young. At the age of five, she is expected to marry a thirteen-year-old Surendranath Lahiri who belongs to a wealthy but greedy family of a nearby village. Her father has observed all the ancient Hindu practices – the giving of dowry, caste consciousness, the star charts, and the observance of auspicious days. While the wedding party travels through a jungle, the bridegroom dies on an account of snakebite. Tara Lata is held responsible for his demise and is bitterly cursed. In order to save her from the fate of a woman who brings misfortune, Tara Lata's father decides to tie her knot with a sundari tree so as to begin her life of life-long virginity. Tara Lata is an embodiment of the traits of a 'New Woman'. She transcends the limitations of the cultural setup in order to make her voice heard and also to be fit in the mainstream of the world.

This dissertation is on the select novels of Bharati Mukherjee – *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine*. Mukherjee attempts to express the newfound identity of immigrant women who struggle to survive in an alien land. She asserts that in an age of diaspora one's biological identity may not be one's real identity as emigration brings changes. Indira Nithyanandam in her book *Indian Women Novelists* says Bharati Mukherjee is "writing about the here and the now of America" (63).

In *The Tiger's Daughter* the main theme throughout Mukherjee's writing centres on the condition of Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention to the changes taking place in South Asian women in a new world. Tara is a typical representative of a young woman, particularly of the third world countries, who cherishes the dream of immigration to America for higher education. Tara's shifting to USA as a Bengali Brahmin woman has resulted in her self-contradiction through a series of incidents. In her exile, Tara has got married to a man who is rooted in the American soil. The changed name of Tara after her marriage is Tara Banerjee Cartright. The name itself gives the hint of the mental state of an exile. The name is a fusion of the Americanness and deep-rooted Indianness in the psyche of Tara.

Tara has been partially educated in Calcutta for learning the traditions of her caste and later on sent by her father, the 'Bengali Tiger,' to Vassar. Though she gets married in America, yet she cannot fully assimilate in American culture. Thus, on her return home to Calcutta alone, Tara sways back and forth between Bengali Brahmin and American cultures. She is trapped between the two worlds – the old and the new. Mukherjee shows Tara's new routes and new modes of thinking for the 'new world' in connection with the fast changing political, social and cultural global scenario.

Jasmine is an account of the protagonist's various transformations from Jyoti to Jasmine from Jase to Jane. The Indian immigrant, Jyoti is a village girl of Hasnapur in Punjab. She being the seventh child of her parents is undesirable and a curse for them. She grows amidst communal violence. She begins her life as Jyoti and marries Prakash. He opens out a world of opportunities to her and makes her think beyond tradition. Prakash wants to make her a new kind of city woman, for which purpose he renames her. This renaming goes to continue every time she became a new woman. Unfortunately he is shot dead before he could leave to Florida. Jasmine as he called Jyoti vows to proceed with his mission, shoulders the responsibility of fulfilling his dream. Unpleasant as the initial experiences in America may have been, they gave her an impetus to live. The suspension she feels in crossing the small gap between Jyoti and Jasmine seems to have been bridged when she is tempered with American experience. All the while she never totally loses her Indianness. She is neither shackled in old custom nor drowned in the rapid flow of modern life. The synthesis of cultures is mapped clearly by Mukherjee as she portrays Jasmine both as an Indian and an American. In her quest for identity she learns to give and take and recognizes her potential for life. Prakash led her out of Hasnapur and Taylor leads her West.

In Mukherjee's novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine* the central figures Tara and Jasmine respectively fight two simultaneous battles against marginalization during their early expatriate experiences in America. As they come from the other world, their identities are in question in America, calling out for a re-visioning and a re-defining at the start. In the journal *Literary voice 2* Enakshi Chowdhury in her article "Images of Women in Bharati Mukherjee's novels" writes ". . . all her women characters are people

on the periphery of the society in which they have chosen to spend their lives; they are all immigrants and new ones at that” (81).

Tara survives racial discrimination on alien soil but gets victimized on her native soil. The story runs parallel to Mukherjee’s own experience as she is distinctively afflicted by the chaos in India as well as by the mistreatment and exploitation of women in the guise of tradition. Husband-wife alienation figures conspicuously in the novel. American life has driven her to despair and feels completely insecure in an alien atmosphere. So Tara decides to return to her native land Calcutta with an expectation that there would be a lot of change. She desires to see a new and better place but shockingly she finds Calcutta to be simply disgusting and repelling. She becomes estranged, and her alienation is aggravated when she finds that her mother as well as her relatives does not love her. Tara is unable to find a perfect place for herself in America as well as in India, feels a misfit.

Tara’s mind is constantly at conflict. Caught in the gulf between these two contrasting worlds, Tara feels that she has forgotten many of her Hindu rituals of worshipping icons she had seen her mother performing since her childhood. It is the American culture that has covered Tara like an invisible spirit or darkness. Throughout the novel, Tara has been shown as shuttling between the world of alienation and the world of belonging – the European world and the Indian world. This shuttling between the two worlds contributes to her split personality. She is internally split into two parts, which have become alien to each other – the Indian and the American.

In *Jasmine*, the young Indian widow attempts to reshape her destiny and achieve happiness. Mukherjee through her protagonist Jasmine, makes an attempt to give a

picture of women who suffer from manmade cultural and traditional prescriptions as well as sanctions which do not allow them live a free life from such constrains. The picture that emerges from the study of the novel is not only that of female being victimized by male but also that of female coming out as strong character to face challenges that come on her way. In spite of the strength and determination Jasmine has, she is still threatened by dangers, challenges and many barriers in her quest for identity. Although she has the ability to grasp the ideas of power and control, she is cultured by the society in which she is born.

Quest for the definition of self and search for identity are the main features of Indian immigrant women who are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. Tara and Jasmine leave their respective countries in search of their dreams. Their migration leads to a crisis of identity and a final reconciliation to the choice. *The Tiger's Daughter* is a fine manifestation of quest for identity. It is conceived in a very difficult phase of life when she struggles to determine her own identity in the Indian heritage. *Jasmine* is a novel of emigration and assimilation, both on the physical and psychological levels.

Tara nostalgically plans a trip to India in search of an Indian dream while Jasmine leaves India in search of an American dream. The process of finding their identities is the matter of intense struggle – with the self, tradition and horrors of new culture and with growing aspirations, hopes and desires. The author depicts this transformation and transition as a positive and an optimistic journey. Jasmine creates a new world consisting of new ideas and values, constantly unmasking her past to establish a new cultural identity by incorporating new desires, skills, and habits. This transition is

defined not only in the changes in her attitude, but more significantly in her relationship with men.

Chapter 1 “Introduction” of the dissertation deals with the diasporic writers and their account of the experiences of the diaspora and its effects upon women. The study in the select novels of Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Jasmine* reveal that the female protagonists who are immigrants are unable to adapt to their new surroundings. The study is also about the individual’s struggle; the quest for the definition of self, search for identity and transformation which are the main features of Indian immigrant women who are caught in the flux of tradition and modernity.

Chapter 2 entitled “Voice of the Displaced” explains about the immigrant experience and issues of an immigrant woman, Tara in the novel *The Tiger’s Daughter*. The chapter describes about the issues faced by the protagonist. She faces a lot of problems – of the loss of culture and endeavouring to assume a new identity in the US. In the process she goes through trials and tribulations while settling down in the adopted land – fighting discrimination, getting married, and finding work – in short, integrating into the county of adoption. Typically, the protagonist of an immigrant novel goes through the phases of desire, control, displacement, and integration. At every step, Tara revolts against her fate and the path drawn for her. With the exposure to an alien culture and the oddities, Tara finds the emergence of a new self. She develops qualities such as courage, determination and strength. She transforms to a strong woman who thinks individualistically giving importance to her desires.

In Chapter 3 entitled “Impact of War between Fate and Will” Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Jasmine* takes up the theme of search for identity. She writes how the female

protagonist tries to tackle the problems of loss of culture and endeavours to assume a new identity in the U.S. The protagonist, Jasmine leaves her country to fulfill her wishes. On reaching America, she begins to search for self-independence. She struggles hard to achieve it and at last she realizes that self-independence is not to be an Indian or American but to be at peace with herself. The novel is in fact, saga of suffering or immigrant women in an alien culture. Yet, it is a journey towards the fulfillment of wishes what she cherished in her heart.

Chapter 4 entitled “Conclusion” mentions how Bharati Mukherjee has thus canvassed the cross-cultural confrontation through her characters, Tara and Jasmine. As immigrants, the women characters undergo culture shock that leads them to frustration and depression. They also experience a sense of loneliness and alienation. Tara journeys to India to recover her roots. The cultural confrontation makes Tara realize that she belongs to a soil where her husband lives – a true Indian spirit. Jasmine survives the cultural confrontation not only to become an American but also retains her Indianness.

Through the analysis it is clear that an immigrant like Tara or Jasmine always faces difficulties in assimilating with the alien culture. When subjected to cultural confrontation, naturally the immigrants tend to lose a certain degree of their culture and imbibe the qualities of another culture. Such assimilation or acculturation is the only way to keep a fine balance between illusion and reality and lead a meaningful life preserving one’s identity.

Mukherjee’s Tara and Jasmine have to create a home away from home. The protagonists are able to face and overcome or succumb to the traumatic experience of “unhousement and rehousement”. Indira Nithyanandam writes in her book *Indian Women*

Novelists that Mukherjee has admitted that an issue very important to her is the finding of a new identity is a “painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture” (63).

Tara and Jasmine are inevitable victims of psychological insecurity of immigrant life and violent contact with American society. The novelist has opened up wide horizon of scope for the study of contemporary issues, human values, dry relationships among family members, to bring forward the issues of women’s rights, identity, freedom, etc., which is prevalent in every part of the world. They cannot remain in a stable life because disruption and change are the means of their survival.

CHAPTER II

Chapter 2

Voice of the Displaced

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, the novelist shows that nostalgia and cultural memory are integral parts of an expatriate's mental state but as one spends some years in the adopted country, the effectiveness of these gradually wear out. One then finds it difficult to adjust to the ways of life and habits in the 'home' country one has left years ago, particularly when the country goes through a serious socio-political crisis.

Mukherjee herself in the article "Beyond Multiculturalism" writes about the novel as

My first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, embodies the loneliness I felt but could not acknowledge, even to myself, as I negotiated the no-man's land between the country of my past and the continent of my present. Shaped by memory, textured with nostalgia for a class and culture I had abandoned, this novel quite naturally became my expression of the expatriate consciousness (456).

The Tiger's Daughter moves on with the independent story of Tara Banerjee, the great grand daughter of Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal tiger (named so for his temperament), the owner of famous Banerjee & Thomas (Tobacco) Co. Ltd. After the marriage of his daughters, Hari Lal Banerjee, the Zamindar of the village, Pachapara falls a prey to an unseen assassin. With his death, the reputation and influence of the

Banerjee family also dies. No one knew at that time that,

Years later a young woman who had never been to pachapara would grieve for the Banerjee family and try to analyze the reason for its change. She would sit by a window in America to dream of Hari Lal, her great-grand father, and she would wonder at the gulf that separated him from herself. (9)

Tara's father afraid of the situations at his motherland and so sends her to America at a tender age of fifteen for higher studies where she encounters American life. Tara is desperately homesick, feels lonely and desperate to belong when she first landed in America. She is in the typical position of an immigrant. A sense of rootlessness clinches Tara and so she yearns for a life at St. Blaise with her friends and the school nuns. The narration claims that her privileged Bengali upper class background and an effective training by the nuns at St. Blaise School in Calcutta helped her to survive initial problems of cultural adjustments. Mukherjee writes,

For Tara, Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake. If she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great grand daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise's to remain composed and ladylike in all emergencies, she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week. (10)

Tara feels homesick in the school at Poughkeepsie, New York. To her New York . . .had been exotic . . . there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her . . .were

being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings . . . the only pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair. (34)

The dreariness, vacuity and desperation are evoked by her American life. She keeps contact with her parents, relatives and friends through correspondences, which at the initial stage is of great emotional help. She is shocked by the callous attitude of her American friends and complaints of homesickness in her letter to her mother. Tara's attempts to communicate with fellow students are largely futile. There exists an invisible wall between Tara and the white students. Homesick and scared, she tries to adjust to the demands of a different world. She senses discrimination when her roommate does not share her mango chutney. As 'each atom of newness bombarded her' (13) at Vassar, she longs for her usual life in Calcutta. Even in discussions she defends her family and country very strongly.

Tara always prayed to the Goddesses for power and that she should not break down in front of the Americans. She clings to the religious icons and old cultural habits, which confronts her in small ways. When external pressure becomes unbearable, Tara, in order to overcome psychological crisis of her identity, often clings to her past and to her community. With no one to alleviate her tension, Tara clings to her India when the extraordinary nature of New York drives her to despair and nostalgia. Mukherjee says "On days when she had thought that she could not possibly survive, she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more Indian" (34). Her Indianness is found in her use of typical Bengali terms and her habit of retaining her

maiden surname after marriage. Later her association with Indian students helps her to ward off loneliness to a certain extent. The socially, emotionally and spatially disturbed psyche caught between the pulls of different polarities harbours all hopes on marriage.

By origin Tara is Indian Bengali Brahmin. It is her given identity. But her migration and marriage makes her American. This is her made identity. She falls in love with David Cartwright, an American, painfully a Western man and marries him. Though David is her husband, she still floundered for words with him which she could aptly ventilate her deep-seated emotional attachment to him. She finds it hard to tell a foreigner that she loves him very much. She feels insecure even after marriage, as she could not communicate even to her husband, David. This is because both are alien to each other and the foreignness of spirit lie within them. In this connection, Nagendra Kumar in the book *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective* observes, “Her failure to do so is rooted in their cultural differences. In India, marriage is not simply a union of two individuals, it is coming together of two families as well. But in western countries like America, a marriage is simply a contract between two individuals” (30).

Tara’s marriage aggravates her discomfort and unease and hangs on her heart in burden. Her confusion results from her own unstable self, as she remains constantly nervous regarding her role as a Bengali wife of an American man. Like true Indian wife she is very dutiful, but devious in her marriage, she always fails to communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta at her husband’s naive questions about Indian customs and traditions. Tara as an Indian is rooted in tradition while the Westerner is grounded on reason and practicality. She is forced to hide a part of her personality from her husband who expects everything to be meaningful. Seeing India as

an intellectual outsider, David finds many Indian customs and habits foolish. Outraged by the class and caste differences in India, he objectively analyses her class as steeped in superstitions and callousness. While David's analysis of India, coloured by the attitude of the colonizer, concentrates on the squalour and poverty of India, accustomed to the opulence of her class and family, Tara has seen only the glamorous side of it. Hence on her return, for the first time, Tara looks at the familiar through the eyes of an outsider.

Tara Banerjee Cartwright is in an intermediate stage when she is unable to negotiate the cultural terrain of Calcutta she has left behind seven years ago and is looking forward to overcome the loneliness she feels in the alien space and to be part of her own nation. Her perspectives about India are refreshed and cleared by Antonia Whitehead's decision to make India a home, as she believes that India needs help. In Mukherjee's words "For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta" (25). Tara, instead of wrestling with her predicament, she visits her native place armed with a changed perspective.

Tara returns to India with a hope of recovering her roots and the stability of her cultural identity as an Indian. Her trip to home after seven years is to soothe her ruffled feathers but becomes painfully aware that her memories of a genteel Brahmin lifestyle are usurped by her westernization. Her visit to Calcutta is designed to highlight her expatriate sensibilities and to show the extent of psychological distance created as a result of physical separation from her 'home' country and its culture.

Tara comes with a changed outlook to India and on her return sees India through the eyes of a Western imagination rather than through her own childhood eyes. She

desires to see a new and a better Calcutta but shockingly all her anticipations are frustrated when she sees Calcutta in a wretched plight-full of poverty and squalor: “ she had seen three children eat rice and yoghurt off the sidewalk” (84). The moment Tara arrives at the railway station, she develops in her a nauseating feeling of isolation. When she reaches the Howrah station she is surprised by the coolies and beggars, “Coolies in red shirts broke into the compartment and almost knocked her down in an effort to carry her suitcase. . . . A blind beggar who had slipped in and had begun to sing and rattle his cup was thrown bodily out of the train by Tuntunwala” (27).

After experiencing all these things Tara meets her relatives, with an expectation that they would welcome her very happily, but they did not do so; and so starts to feel alienated. The novelist writes “For days they had chattered about welcoming little “Taramoni”, whom they claimed to remember vividly. But now that they were actually in front of Tara, they had nothing to say to her. Surrounded by this army of relatives who professed to love her. . . Tara felt completely alone” (28).

Tara’s very first landing at Bombay fills her with disappointment. She is introduced as ‘the American Auntie’ to children. They insist on calling her ‘Tultul’ and feel diffident at her disappointment. Her marriage to a foreigner is still unacceptable to her relatives, so she is not able to interact easily with them. More over her Bombay relatives could not accept a woman who is not accompanied by her husband, David. Travelling alone, living alone and moving alone are part of unfamiliarity in many parts of India. According to the Indian tradition, a man should lead the woman. He plays a protective role. The relatives readily sense her American attitude to life. They find her

‘stubborn’ and “the relatives attributed Tara’s improprieties to her seven years in America”(19).

Tara’s supercilious attitude in air-conditioned compartment makes her ironically observe the travelling companions – “The Marwari . . . a circus animal who has gotten the better of his master, and . . . the Nepali was a fidgety older man with hair . . . Both men, Tara decided could effortlessly ruin her journey to Calcutta” (20). When she travels in the general unreserved compartment she feels irritated because of the co-passengers like the Marwari and the Nepali families quarrel with each other to occupy the seats. Mukherjee writes, “Before the train had made its first stop the Marwari and the Nepali were starting to bait each other. It began with a quarrel over luggage space” (20). Tara feels irritated with their quarrel and tries to avoid the situation; and so she starts to look outside the window. Such instances and situations force her to realize that she is in India. She says “I have returned to dry holes by the sides of railway tracks, . . . to brown fields like excavations for a thousand homes. I have returned to India” (21). Tara’s rootless self makes the scenery outside ‘merely alien and hostile’. Here again it is America’s influence on her that makes Bombay railway station ‘more like a hospital’ (19).

Marine Drive which was once fashionable to Tara is now appalling in its shabbiness. In her hurry to reach Calcutta she insists on travelling alone by train instead of waiting for plane reservations. On her journey from Bombay to Calcutta she recalls all the incidents and things related with her mother and feels that she is alienated from both the cultures. She thinks that she is an Indian and her inner heart says that is not so.

Tara likes India and likes to visit India her mother country, but the circumstances and atmosphere make her irritated and she starts to think about the American way of life

and its atmosphere. Instead of rejoicing, she becomes saddened on taking her first step on the soil of her motherland, India. It shows that the alien land has become far better as a real home, than her homeland. She repents that she has come to India without her husband. She is unable to keep him off her mind.

The Calcutta she finds now is totally changed under the grip of violence between different classes of society, which to her is disgusting and repelling. Everything has undergone a drastic transformation and at the same time a total deterioration. Such a picture of Calcutta shatters her dreams and turns her negative; she becomes estranged from the cold and humiliating milieu. She finds nothing of her liking in India – could not find the Calcutta of Satyajit Ray, the Calcutta of children running through cool green spaces, of aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces; instead she sees Calcutta “. . . losing its memories in a bonfire of effigies, buses and trams” (9). An appetite for the grotesque has taken over the city and her homesick eyes are outraged to notice the changes. Due to various economic and political changes, the nature of Calcutta’s social life has also undergone a radical transformation. There is nothing called a single entity in Calcutta anymore. It is comprised of different kinds of worldviews, lifestyles and tribulations and all these add up to form the unified social image of the city. Her regular visit to the Catelli-Continental Hotel evokes emotion of escape from Calcutta.

Tara herself wonders at the foreignness of her spirit, which does not permit her to establish emotional kinship with her old relatives and friends. She tries to sympathise with aunt Jharna but is gravely mistaken as she insults her. On one hand she cannot sympathize with the aunt’s religious attempts to heal her child, on the other she thinks, “I

don't hate you, I love you, and the miserable child, the crooked feet, the smoking incense holder, I love you all" (38). She wonders,

How does the foreignness of the spirit begin? . . . Does it begin right in the center of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white headdresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun?" [or] Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls . . . (37)

Similar antithetical feelings beset her in the company of her friends. Mukherjee says "Seven years ago she had played with these friends, done her homework with Nilima, briefly fancied herself in love with Pronob, debated with Reena at the British council" (43). Her friend Reena comments: "How is it you've changed too much, Tara? I mean this is no moral judgment or anything, but you've become too self-centred and European"(105). Reena accuses her of having become too self-centred European; Reena's mother calls her 'our love Americawali'. People think of her as being too American. She fails to find a niche for herself even within her own circle of friends and relatives. Tara feels totally isolated and lonely.

Tara's friends expect her to tell about the fantasies of American life, but Tara knows the facts of violence and ghettos in the American life and could not escape from them. Among her friends she is a foreign-return; a woman enriched with many romantic experiences at America; but she feels that she is a woman only to clean bathrooms at home in America. The reality is stated in the lines below:

Each aerogramme caused her momentary panic, a sense of trust betrayed, of mistakes never admitted, . . . Tara thought. In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac Street; her friends were curious only about the adjustments she had made.”(62)

The conversations among her friends aggravate her discomfort and unease in her marriage burdening her heart. It seemed to her that by marrying a foreigner she has committed all the seven deadly sins. Her friends approved her foreign manners, foreign etiquette and foreign fashion; but as a conservative racial purists they never approve her foreign marriage. Thus, her communication becomes devoid of significance. Tara’s every attempt to adjust with her friends fails and she strongly feels the breakdown and the invisible gap between them. Tara says

They liked foreigners in movie magazines – Nat Wood and Bob Wagner in faded *Photoplays*. They loved Englishmen like Worthington at the British Council. But they did not approve of foreign marriage partners. So much for the glamour of her own marriage. She had expected admiration from these friends. She had wanted them to consider her marriage an emancipated gesture. But emancipation was suspicious – it presupposed bondage. (86)

While avoiding the temptation of glorifying the native country and belittle and degrade the adopted one, Mukherjee has presented the problems of a displaced person like Tara in the adopted as well as at the native country.

Tara narrates about her strange experience in America to Sanjay: “New York, she confided was a gruesome nightmare. It wasn’t muggings she feared so much as rude little invasions. The thought of a stranger . . . looking into her pocketbook, laughing at the notes she had made to herself, observation about her life and times, . . . transformed shoddy innocuous side streets into giants fangs crouching . . .” (69).

Tara feels that her mother’s attitude towards her has been changed, as she is not happy with her daughter’s marriage. It becomes clear through the following lines:

Perhaps her mother, sitting serenely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of sacred room, dipping like a crow. She thought her mother had every right to wary of aliens and outcastes. (50)

In the presence of her mother, Tara feels alienated. Her old milieu, her families, her ideas of yore seems to confront the ‘American’ Tara. She finds herself a misfit in her parents’ home and among her friends. She wants to be happy but finds that she cannot be so and realizes that the state of happiness is never the outcome of strenuous exercise to bring it on. So she is found marginalized on the psychological level.

Caught between two contrasting worlds, Tara has forgotten many of the Hindu rituals at worships. In fact she always stands besides her mother at performing Pujas since her childhood, but now she has forgotten the steps of the rituals during the prayers. The incident at Shiv puja alerts her about the loss of religion and own cultural heritage:

When the sandalwood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl.

But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and centre. But her mother came quickly with the relief of words. (51)

Tara is unable to sing the bhajan, which she used to sing in her childhood very fluently. This seems to be a partial loss of her religious self, leading to the disintegration and fragmentation of her identity. Thus Tara has become estranged from her society and the cultural values it carries since the religious values are a part and parcel of Indian culture. The American culture works as an 'invisible spirit or darkness,' which kills her simple desire to behave like an ordinary Indian. This gradually leads her to develop a split personality. She begins to rethink over the validity of her identity.

Torn by a sense of guilt for what she did, she tries to find some relief by accompanying her mother for a 'darshan' of the holy woman, Mata Kananbala Devi in Darjeeling. In her depressed state of mind, Tara feels close to her. Like her mother, she too starts to believe in miracles and religious experiences. Thus she feels protected in the mountain shrine than the favourite city now filled with unpredictable violence. For the first time Tara feels protected and greatly at ease.

This phase, unfortunately does not last long, when Tara experiences sexual onslaught from a corrupt politician, Tuntunwala during a picnic to Mayapur. This sexual exploitation proves to be her breaking point, and the fragile identity breaks. Tuntunwala seduces her, taking advantage of her passive femininity; what he calls her liberated status

and tells her before the outrage, “you’re liberated and advanced and I admire you greatly” (198). She does not disclose her molestation by Mr. Tuntunwalla to her friends and family for the fear that they would be horrified to learn about this and would treat her as if she is an untouchable person. Tara is nostalgic of her past but she does not want to belong to her native land. She dislikes the conservatism of the Indian culture and hypocrisy of the Indians.

Tara is troubled by the strange, absurdly incongruous figure of Joyonto Roy Chowdry, the owner of a tea estate in Assam, whose compound is taken over by squatters. Like Tara’s friends, Joyonto refuses the gesture of philanthropy. Indeed, his presence suggests the impossibility of any kind of amelioration. His life, one of distrust, culminates one day on the roof of the Catelli in an almost religious revelation of the failure of love. What he has to show Tara therefore is an image of death – he takes her one evening to the funeral pyres by the river and on another occasion to see the ruin the squatters have made of his house.

Joyonto Roy shows her the vast compound of Tollygunge, which is now occupied by the refugees:

Tara was bewildered by her first view of the large and dusty compound. She thought if she had been David she would have taken out notebook and pen and entered important little observations. All she saw was the obvious Goats and cows grazing in the dust, dogs chasing the friskier children, men sleeping on string beds under a banyan tree. Children playing with mud beside a cracked tube well. Rows of hovels and huts. (116)

Tara loses her balance of mind when she sees a little girl suffering from leprosy and she almost screams out of fear of touching her. Disease, suffering and poverty are part of Indian existence and a common Indian ignores it or rather accepts it as an integral part of life. Tara has never been a part of the crowd. She has always been protected as a child and later as a woman. The seven years spent in the West, inevitably alters Tara's angle of vision. She realizes that America has transformed her completely. Her stay in the United States creates a gulf between the lives of the poor and those of the rich in her own country. She is not able to give an Indian outlook to her own country. Like the people of the West, now she has started to look at India as a land of poor people living in hostile, unhygienic conditions, quite accustomed to sufferings, starvation, decay and disease. Now she finds only disease, despair, riot and poverty in India and it is the ugly aspect that borders her consciousness.

In Tara's mind there is always an ongoing conflict between her old sense of perception for country and her changed outlook. To quote Jasbir Jain, a critic, who in the article "Foreignness of Spirit: The world of Bharati Mukherjee Novels" writes "Tara's consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India anew it is not through her childhood associations or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David. Her reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner" (13).

Slowly, Calcutta as seen by her husband comes more into her focus. She is shown as being an Indian-American for she now looks at India with the eyes of an American. She feels "The collective future in which garbage, disease and stagnation are man's estate" (201). Calcutta suddenly seems to become 'more dangerous than she

remembered' (113) and 'the deadliest city in the world' (168). Depressed and disgusted with deteriorating situations of India, finally she determines to leave for USA to her husband, David because she feels that she would be more at ease. She would have been mute had she stayed in the protected milieu of Calcutta. Her decision to return to David is not a positive realization or finding of roots away from home, but instead an escape from the present.

Tara's sudden resolve to leave Calcutta is determined by four interlinked incidents. The first of these is her visit to the burning ghats with an eccentric old man Joyonto Roy Chowdhari, a tea estate owner, whom she meets at the Cattelli. He decides to save her from the chaos surrounding the traditional ways of life of his class in Calcutta, but in the process, unwittingly administers the first serious shock to Tara's sensibility. The second is the picnic to the factory organized by Tiger Banerjee for the entertainment of his daughter and her friends. A small snake is found in the swimming pool where they frolic for some time that she reacts by screaming loudly, which surprises even her parents. The third is the shocking and unpleasant experience at the summer resort in Darjeeling, where a group of middle-class Indian tourists behave rudely with her friend Pronob and the English girl they meet at their hotel. Finally, is the seduction by Tuntunwala at the Nayapur Guest House, where she goes at the suggestion of her father, to calm her nerves after the Darjeeling experience. Everything appears frustrating and horrible to her on finding that conciliation is impossible and she frets to go back to David.

Tara's experiences leaves her bitter, but she never shows any reaction. Tara visits a funeral with Joyonto Roy Choudhury where she has an encounter with a Tantric who

asks her hand for forecasting but she misunderstands his intentions and thinks that the man needs *bakshees*. This misunderstanding again shakes her belief in her identity. The trip to the funeral ghats shows her inability to adjust with the unfamiliar. The depression, which fails to be immersed in the delicacies of the Kapur's restaurant, is only amplified by the trip to the factory. It augments her awareness of segregation. Even her tongue gets conditioned to the taste of the West. Because of her hypersensitivity, the picnic arranged to boost her spirit turns to be disastrous. Her disillusionment with an Indian upheaval is complete and she concludes that it would not be possible for her – though born, bred and educated in Calcutta – to adjust to the changed condition after her exposure to life in the West. Like the authoress, Tara too is caught in a cross-cultural turmoil.

Through a series of adventures and misadventures she reaches to a final self-realization and reconciliation. It is at that moment she excruciatingly realizes that she is neither an Indian nor an American. Tara is the 'nowhere woman.' She finds herself wandering between the two worlds – homes and cultures and is an examination of who she is and where she belongs.

Tara belongs neither to the 'occident' nor to the 'orient'. Her roots are scattered and dispersed in both America and India. Her mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities – one of an Indian and the other of an American. The fusion of Americanness and Indianness in Tara's personality results in the inability to take refuge either in her old Indian self or in a newly discovered American self. Alienation and self-estrangement dogs her in both the countries.

Isolated and denied the right to be mentally free, her existence becomes restricted and circumscribed. When Tara realizes that India no longer yields her recognition, she

decides to return to New York and books Air India flight ticket for herself. Such is the intensity and acuteness of her anguish and alienation when sitting in a car, to leave Calcutta she doubts if ever she would succeed in releasing herself from the monstrous grip of Calcutta. Tara on the way out remains wondering “whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn’t, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely” (210). With the advent of globalisation, diaspora, in particular, has attained new connotations, significance associated with design such as global deterioration, transnational migration and cultural hybridity.

Mukherjee seems to justify Tara’s efforts to adapt to American society is measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life. She attempts to imitate the master narrative of the First World. She suggests that in India the age-old social and cultural structure is very strong and discouraging so much so that life in India is always dominated by the ideas of caste, gender and clan. She wants to cut off her cultural ties with the native land by becoming the cultural citizen of America by aping the Western ways. This is the escape she has planned, but destiny does not allow her to escape. Before she takes off for America, she becomes a victim of violence. The violence starts as the marchers proceed towards the Catelli-Continental hotel. The hotel serves as the symbol of her ‘pointless’ and ‘rootless’ existence.

Tara is involved in a violent demonstration in which Joyob Roy Chawdhury, a symbol of the old world order is brutally beaten to death, as if, it is suggestive of killing the past to provide space for new to take birth and grow. During the process of such cultural transactions and replacements the relations are damaged, which is symbolically suggested as Pronob, the friend of Tara also gets injured while trying to save her. This is

a course of history, which can not be stopped. In this way Tara's search for her dreams turns out ironically frustrating and results in her disillusionment, alienation, depression, and her tragic end.

Tara comes to India in quest of peace but ironically she has to make peace with the city, to compromise with its raucous and violent nature, its intolerably menacing reality. She ". . . felt she had made peace with the city, nothing more was demanded. If she were to stay, she thought, there would be other concessions, other deals and compromises, all meaning and unbearably real, waiting to be made" (202). She does not realize that it is not possible on the part of one to harmonize one's moorings and one's roots with another. The writer questions as to how it could be possible on the part of Tara to be at peace with the chaotic milieu, to compromise with the turbulent metropolis and find love and security for her anguished and nostalgic self? To her "It was vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India" (130). Mukherjee brings in the fact that Tara gradually blooms into an independent person and learns to adjust to things, which has been outside the purview of her previous idea of life as a whole.

Tara's end is mysterious; it is suggested that she does not survive in the violence. Homesick at New York, she comes to India seeking peace and finds her final peace in death. This is suggesting that a person can escape from the roots either through death or by keeping on hanging forever. It is ironic that she survived in the racial discrimination and hardship in the foreign country like America, but becomes a victim of violence and tragic death in her native country India. When death is approaching she thinks about her American husband. This symbolically presents that she finds greater love and security with a foreigner, instead of finding it in the arms of her father and mother.

Tara's stay at America has totally changed her nature. With the exposure to the alien culture and its oddities, Tara finds the emergence of a new self. She develops qualities such as courage, determination and strength. She thinks individualistically. She comes across cultural conflicts and ponders over it to resolve independently. She is made as a strong woman.

Tara after time travelling finds that she is comprised of multiple selves accepting or rejecting certain aspects of both Indian and American culture. She comes to terms with the idea that she will never have a single identity but rather be dispersed between being an Indian and an American. She does not fight with her multiplicity but rather accepts it as a part of her progressive capacity. Mukherjee investigates Tara's notion of home and argues that her identity is transformed as a consequence of her displacements from it and of the enforcement of gender relations within that location. Thus Mukerjee explores the possibilities for liberation through transformation of Tara who negotiates her identity in a New World. Mukherjee's work emphasizes the need for immigrants like Tara to choose their home by constantly adapting themselves to the new homeland and by constantly renegotiating their relationship with the old homeland.

CHAPTER III

Chapter 3

Impact of War between Fate and Will

The female protagonist presented from the Third World country in Bharathi Mukherjee's much celebrated novel, *Jasmine* charts a long and arduous route to reach the shores of America on a makeshift trawler. In the novel *Jasmine*, the novelist takes up the theme of search for identity. The novelist in first-person narrative records the protagonist's progressive movement from a rustic girl in an Indian village, Hasnapur in Punjab, to a westernized person in America. Jasmine's search for identity and her true self begin from the day she is born. Born as Jyoti in the village of Hasnapur in Jullandhar district of Punjab eighteen years after the partition riots, which means she has already inherited a tradition of exile and migration from her family.

Jyoti is an unwanted child to the family because she is the fifth daughter and the seventh of nine children. Jasmine's mother wanted her to be killed when she is born because she does not want her daughter to suffer the pains of a dowryless bride. As a girl child she is almost strangled to death so that her parents might free her from the problems of marriage. But she survives that attack and Jasmine remembers: "I survived the sniping. My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter" (40). From that very incident, it is seen that Jasmine has the capacity to struggle, survive and establish her true self.

Jasmine never gives up her childhood memories. In fact, her childhood memories become the instrument in her fight against the fate and her search for self-identity. An astrologer predicts her of widowhood and exile when she is only seven years old.

Mukherjee writes it to be “Fate is Fate” (4). Jyoti reacts to the astrologer’s attempt to reduce her to nothingness by falling down and making a star shaped mark on her forehead, which she interprets as “my third eye”(5). She is not dismayed down by fate. She starts the war “between my fate and my will” (12) and always tries to raise herself above blind beliefs and superstition. She feels like the esoteric sages who could see invisible worlds and she too could peep into the future with the third eye. She says, “I always felt the she-ghosts were guarding me. I didn’t feel I was nothing” (4).

The milieu to which Jyoti belongs allows little social mobility to a woman. She who is impelled by her will for freedom since childhood, grasps every opportunity that comes in her way. According to Mukerjee “Even in childhood, she knew that she had the potential to fight, win all battles and establish a strong identity. Her fight with the dog using a staff giving her a buzz of power,” (54) her rejection of a marriage which is almost finalized by her father and grandmother, her affection of the electric switch in Vimla’s house which makes her feel “totally in control,” (44) all shows her confidence to go towards the realization of her potential. Through these incidents, Jyoti shows that she is different from other village girls who have no mind of their own, “village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go,” (46) but Jyoti knows what she wants to do. She said, “I know what I don’t want to become” (5). In search of her true self, she is taken in various directions until the time she could view the future “greedy with wants and reckless from hope” (241).

Inspite of the strength and determination Jyoti has, she is threatened by dangers, challenges and many barriers in her quest for identity. Although she has the ability to grasp the ideas of power and control, she is cultured by the society in which she is born.

And this is the main reason, which makes her to disguise her true identity at most of the times and live accordingly to the images fashioned by others. It is her father's statement "that bright ladies are bearing bright sons, that is nature's design," (51) she offends her father by disclosing her ambition: "I said, "I want to be a doctor and set up my own clinic in a big town." Like the mustached doctor in the bazaar clinic, I wanted to scrape off cataracts, fit plastic legs on stumps, work miracles. My father grasped, "The girl is mad! I'll write in the back of the dictionary: The girl is mad!" (51).

Initially she is inspired in her village by a school teacher, who, despite his limitations introduces her to the exciting world of English literature and language. Later Jyoti achieves a small part of her dream by falling in love and marrying Prakash, a very young and ambitious engineer. He is a modern enlightened man who refuses to live with his extended family and moves with Jyoti to Amritsar, the biggest city in Punjab. Prakash is a progressive minded husband who takes her out of the closed life of Hasnapur, and helps her to broaden her vision. He sows the seed for liberation in Jyoti. He wants her to shed off her past and make her a new kind of a woman. He says, "You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume" (77). He believes in trashing traditions. He relates feudal mentality with India's malaise and cautions Jasmine against it. More over he believes that Indian women will redeem India from its 'backwardness.'

To break off the past, Prakash renames her as Jasmine to remove from her any trace of traditional dutifulness since as he says to her "Only in feudal societies is the woman still a vassal" (77). She is not a village girl anymore but a modern city woman. This is the beginning of a new journey for her. Through this transformation, Jasmine learns a lesson that later empowers her voice with speech because she becomes bold

enough to argue and fight whenever she disagrees with her husband. He encourages her to read his manuals to improve herself and cherish a better future for them both, probably in America, the land of possibility, in order to break away for good from the Indian atavism and immutability.

Prakash takes Jyoti to create Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. Mukherjee here sets her free from the claustrophobic and culturally absurd native place. She is also aware of her husband's obsession. She said, "My husband was obsessed with passing exams, doing better, making something more of his life than fate intended" (85). Then she realizes that she too could fight to prove the prediction, which has been following her footsteps since her childhood, which she has been trying to run away from it. She thinks, "If we could just get away from India, then all fates would be canceled. We'd start with new fates, new stars. We could say or be anything we wanted. We'd be on the other side of the earth, out of God's sight" (85).

After getting a new identity, Jasmine takes care of her husband's driving ambition. She shares the ambition of her husband happily. Renamed as Jasmine, she looks forward to go to America with her husband to pursue his further education. Emigration to America where Prakash wanted to study is part of the vision, but he falls to the bullet of a Punjab extremist on the eve of their departure. This makes Jasmine grief-stricken and frustrated and her dream is shattered. Instead of succumbing to fate and spending the rest of her life as a helpless widow at Hasnapur, she decides to go to America and commit Sati after reaching the campus of the University where her husband is supposed to study. She says " Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities" (77).

Jasmine migrates illegally to the U.S. It is a way of protest to express her anger for shattering her husband's dreams. These kinds of inner will in such a kind of situation help her to fulfill her mission successfully. Mukherjee writes, how the female protagonist tries to tackle the problem of loss of culture and endeavours to assume a new identity in the U.S. Jasmine's passage to America is characterised by a traumatic experience, the first and the worst, in a long series of adaptation, which requires her to improvise morality in order to survive. She adjusts herself pragmatically to the new ways of life and is most receptive to American values. Thus Mukherjee presents her as an immigrant woman with the right type of mindset for acculturation and integration.

Jasmine goes to America on a forged passport. She is one of the many 'boat people' who enter the borders of the United States of America and encounter the reality as a 'Fresh off the Boat'. She leaves India to survive against the forces of destiny but unfortunately her American journey begins on a sad note. After reaching America, she is brutally raped by Half-Face in a motel. Half-Face is the Captain of the ship in which Jasmine reached America. She disintegrates and becomes heart-broken at this incident; benumbed with shame and despair, she thinks of suicide for a brief moment but does not kill herself as she feels that her 'holy' mission is not yet over: "I didn't feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover's caress. I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission" (117). She decides to take a quick revenge on the man who disrespects her in all possible ways. As Ruppel in the article "Re-Inventing Ourselves a Million Times: Narrative, Desire, Identity, and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" states "instead of killing herself and passively conforming to an identity politics that would define her solely as a victim, she decides instead to kill her

attacker” (186) which means reclaiming her body. Her first encounter with an American results in a sort of regeneration through violence.

At another moment, American outlook redeems her and is enlivened with the spirit to survive through eliminating the American evil and is mad to emerge like Indian goddess Kali to slit the throat of her rapist as a symbol of complete eradication of evil of consumerist culture. Jasmine is surprised at her own desire for survival. She feels that the dirty hands of Half-Face invade everything that is dear to her. She wipes out the fingerprints, burns the unwanted luggage in a metal trash bin imitating *sati* ritual and walks into the streets of the American dawn. This murder awakens her to define her identity on the alien soil and makes her give up the idea of *sati*. Her progress is marked by supreme confidence says Mukherjee, “With the first streaks of dawn, my first full American day, I walked out the front drive of the motel to the highway and began my journey, travelling light”(121). She metaphorically kills her Indian identity and her past to find a new identity and a future in America which is why she defines herself as “. . .walking death. Death incarnate”(119).

Jasmine is reborn by killing Half-Face. It is the death of her old self and the birth of a new self. The trauma of her rape results in the greatest change in her identity; the experience that breaks her down the most is also the one that builds her up and allows her to come into her own. She also performs a kind of death for her by burning her dishonoured clothes symbolically. Jasmine’s full transformation, from the victim into a vengeful Goddess, seems to be reinforced by imagining herself as the reincarnation of Kali. Thus, Jasmine’s identity is paradoxically formed not through constructions alone, but also destructions of her existing self. Jasmine expresses more of a transformation of

'self' after this incident. The novelist portrays the transformation of identity from dutiful submissive widow into assertive, criminal and individualistic American woman.

Bharati Mukherjee writes to this death of the old self by bringing the image of the broken pitcher: "I said my prayer for the dead clutching my Ganapati. I thought. The pitcher is broken. Lord, Yama, who had wanted me, who had courted me, and whom I'd flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for" (120-121). For the death of the old self R.K. Dhawan in the book *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium* quotes C. Sengupta, who opines that it is a " . . . kind of death for her . . . : the death of her old self (through the symbolic burning of her dishonored clothes) and out of the ashes rises phoenix – like a new self" (157).

Thus Jasmine begins her journey into America. From that journey of Jasmine to America, to fulfill her mission comes out her inward quest – to unfold her true self and identity. That journey defines "What a girl from a swampy backwater could accomplish" (160). Jasmine is a modern girl who faces the challenges of life boldly and struggles hard to survive against all odds. America is, however, open only to the brave who is not afraid of looking forward, leaving his or her cultural baggage behind.

Jasmine's following days in America brings her new people, a new life style and the troubles caused by the new culture she is living in. Jasmine meets Lilian Gordon who enters into her life as a hope. She begins her process of assimilation by learning how to become an American. Lillian bestows upon her the nickname 'Jazzy', a symbol of her entrance into and acceptance of American culture, which she welcomes gladly. Mrs. Gordon educates her, makes her free from her past memories and strengthens her will to

survive. She advises jasmine, “Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you” (131). Her advice helps Jasmine physically and mentally. With her help, she goes to meet Professor Vadhera who helped Prakash in securing admission in an engineering course.

In the beginning, Jasmine stays at Professor Vadhera’s house. But she is disappointed when she learns that Mr. Vadhera is depended not only on his living on teaching but on trading in human hair. She does not earn by the strict ethnicity in the house that she is to follow as a widow. So she decides to leave that house. This move indicates that self-actualization is developing in her life and it might be due to the acculturation to the American way of thinking and dressing. The authoress states, “With the actualization of the desire for independence the door is shut to the passive resignation extolled by her grandmother since individual effort counts for nothing” (57). That is a protest made by Jasmine not against Indian culture but against its retentiveness.

After a short time, Jasmine works in the house of Taylor and Wylie Hayes in Manhattan as a caregiver to their little daughter Duff. While living with the Hayes, Jasmine begins to master the English language, empowering herself to further appropriate American culture. Also, for the first time in the Hayes household, Jasmine becomes aware of her racial identity because Taylor and his friends understood that she is from South Asia and tries to associate her with that community. There her name is changed from Jasmine to Jase. Changes in the protagonist’s first name indicate a progress towards the culture of the West. Taylor turns Jasmine’s colonial subalternity into American subjecthood through renaming and educating her. Taylor begins to call her as ‘Jase’ suggesting that she does not have an agency in the creation of her new self since Taylor

constructs it for her. She muses: “. . . Jyoti was now a *sati*-goddess; she had burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for the future for Vijn & Wife. Jase went to movies and lived for today” (176).

Jasmine has a positive attitude because she confesses that she desired the change herself. She admits that she has changed because she wanted to do so, feeling that it would be cowardice otherwise.

Jasmine creates yet another identity upon a new perception of herself. Though Jasmine creates a new identity for every new situation, her former identities are never completely erased. They emerge in specific moments in the text and exacerbate the tension, thereby causing Jasmine to create another more dominant identity, different from all those that came before. While she works as a care-giver, she also takes up part time jobs like answering phones and tutoring graduate students in Punjabi in the University. Rather she absorbs the alien culture greedily. At this phase of life, Jasmine is able to gain a personality and becomes very confident about her personality. In this context, R. K. Dhawan in the book *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium* quotes the remarks of S. Indira who opines that “With the healing touch of people like Lilian Gordon, Kate and Taylor, who treated her as an intelligent, refined, sincere and affectionate person, Jasmine blooms from being a different alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase, living only for the present” (70).

The pulling between these two opposite forces – the Indian and the American does not frighten her but it makes her excited. Even if the other immigrants remain suspended between these two forces, Jasmine is happy that she is able to assimilate the new culture. The alien country teaches her to live with ease and confidence, inspite of her

unstable identity. Jasmine looks after those people who need her, who believes and helps her, with love and care. Taylor helps Jasmine very much irrespective of what she is; he teaches her about all the advantages of democracy. He helps her transform herself from a diffident alien with forged documents into an adventurous Jase.

After Taylor's wife, Wylie leaves him; he feels that he needs emotional support and confesses his love to Jasmine. She is overwhelmed by his sincerity and gentleness and becomes closer to him. Her immigrant status does not give any hindrance to the emotional bond between them. When Wylie moves out of the family home to move in with the wealthy Stuart Eschelman, Jasmine registers the change as a drama:

In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate. (181)

The negative side of American culture does not deter Jasmine from looking at its positive side. Jasmine profits very quickly from the new situation, she adapts. Taylor gets romantically involved with Jasmine. She transforms, but this time the change is not from a reaction, but rather from her very own yearning for personal change. In becoming Jase, Jasmine gets increasingly comfortable with her sexuality, which she always tried to repress earlier, more so, after her traumatic experience. But the relationship between Taylor and Jasmine ends abruptly when the past creeps upon her, once again manifested in the form of Sukhwinder, the murderer of her husband. When she sees Sukhwinder, she becomes restless for the security of Taylor and Duff and recedes to Jyoti culturally for the

safety of her beloved and his child and instantly decides to run away from their life for their betterment and for herself. The inescapability of memory, and the boundless nature of time and space are stressed once again and Jasmine finds her life distorted by the different consciousness through which she now experiences the world. She loses even her sense of self-expression. Unable to live with this plethora of conflicting identities she flees to Baden County, Iowa to give her life a new beginning. She prepares herself physically and psychologically for a another transformation of identity. Bharati Mukherjee, through this affirmative novel, presents Jasmine as a Phoenix who rises from her ashes.

Another opportunity after bidding impermanent farewell to Taylor knocks at in the form of Mother Ripplemeyer, whose kind offer of finding employment for Jasmine in the bank owned by her son, Bud, the estranged man from his sons and wife, Karin.

Bud falls in love with Jasmine. She is happy of getting a new job and completely content with her new life and status as a step-mother to Du, the sixteen-year old Vietnam War victim adopted by Bud.

Jasmine tries hard to settle down to a peaceful life in Bud's house but her inherited sense of reliability and dutifulness doesn't set her completely free. When Karin calls Jane as 'tornado' because it causes destruction whenever it passes, Jane wonders what she really is? She utters "I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve, be allowed to join, but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says, I am a tornado. I hit the trailer parks first, the prefabs, the weakest links. How many more shapes are in me how many more selves, how many more husbands?" (215)

Violence strikes her life again after a disgruntled farmer shoots Bud from a point blank range, which leaves him crippled waist downwards. Jane serves him lovingly and caringly after he is crippled. She tries to comfort him and make him confident. Bud's miserable condition makes Jane to render wifely devotion in order to comfort him, which ought to have been done by his wife, Karin. Here again she disintegrates. She considers herself to be a catalyst and not the reason for the divorce of Bud and Karin: "Bud would have left Karin on twisted in mid-life until he dropped. I was a catalyst, not a cause"(200). She makes Karin understand that she is not her enemy but it is Bud's happiness that mattered to both of them. She becomes pregnant carrying Bud's child but does not wish to marry him.

Bud and Jasmine eventually marry and Bud renames Jasmine as 'Jane'. She appropriately calls, "Calamity Jane. Jane as in Jane Russell, not Jane as in plain Jane" (26). This is yet another sign of her evolution. She assumes a new identity. Jane finds it hard to solve this perplexing problem of multi-identity. Living for today becomes Jasmine's motto in America. She learns how to live for herself and for the day and bringing her fragmented self together is her challenge. She comments on her predicament:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's *au pair* in Manhattan; *that* Jasmine isn't *this* Jane Ripplemeyer. . .
And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster,
which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped
and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (127)

Bud encourages Jasmine to freely change roles from care-giver to temptress whenever she feels the desire to and views her sexuality through the lenses of his own oriental fantasy. This, instead of denigrating Jasmine serves to imbue her with a sexual confidence and she thrives on it. Her racial identity also morphs in Baden, for here her difference is recognized but not comprehended or openly acknowledged. The community attempts to see her as a familiar instead of an alien. This new perception of her race is an essential portion of her identity as Jane because now she feels assimilated and in fact becomes a typical American, she always wanted to be.

Jane has fully accepted the American family but she waits for real love. Suddenly she gets a letter from Taylor informing her that he would shortly come to take her. It is a welcoming surprise for her. She is worried about the impact on Bud when Du decides to go to California and stay with his sister and her family. She understands Du's condition as she herself is an exile and tells the news to Bud gently. At this point of time, Taylor comes to her life again and convinces her that there is nothing wrong in leaving Bud. Jasmine bidding farewell to Bud's life is not a wanton act of utter selfishness rather it presents her in a state of confusion as she is dangling between the morality of India and the practicality of America. Jasmine does not feel any guilt.

Jasmine's desire – "I want to do the right thing. I don't mean to be a terrible person" (239) proves that she does not feel guilty and no longer thinks of herself as Jane. She has survived the worst part of her life in America and now is free to make her place in Taylor's life. Jasmine has a sense of relief at leaving Bud and walks out of his life and agrees to go with Taylor and Duff to work for them. Until then, she has been serving her duty toward others, but now she thinks of her love and herself. Her two remarks, "The

moment I have dreamed a thousand times finally arrives” (237) and “I am not choosing between two men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness. A care-giver’s life is a good life, a worthy life” (240). It is a clear response to her courage.

Jasmine only does what she thinks is right for her. She is happy to do what she has been wishing to do from a long time. In her words, “It isn’t guilt that I feel it’s relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove” (240). This indicates the fact that she acts boldly to fulfill her identity in an alien country at the prospect of adventure, risk and transformation.

Jasmine’s, struggle symbolizes the restless search of a rootless person irked by a depressing sense of isolation all around. Her journey through life leads her through many transformations in various locations. In her ‘Land of Opportunity’, Jasmine is thrown from one state of insecurity to another and she lets go her hold on things, which she has held dear in India. She realizes that she has become a drifter moving in a world of uncertainties: “I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I’m on. Down and down I go, where I’ll stop, God only knows” (139). Bharati Mukherjee ends the book on a novel note, and re-emphasizes the complex and alternating nature of identity of a woman in exile, “Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out of the door in the potholed and rutted driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and

reckless from hope” (241). From this comment, it can be seen that at last Jasmine is out of bonds and has gained her true self.

Hence Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* is the movement of Jasmine’s life towards achieving a true identity. Her journey to America is a process of her quest of true self. Even when the protagonist goes through the worst experiences of her life, she is able to come through the obstacles and attains self-awareness and a new identity and overthrows her past life.

Jasmine repositions her stars in the adopted country by deciding to remain as a care-giver to men like Duff, Du, Taylor and Bud in which she gets her peace of mind. For each of her identities is inevitably linked to a man, a space and a time. Past, present and future coalesce with magnificent incoherence in the narrative pattern. As Jyoti, she remains an intelligent village girl of Hasnapur bound by native culture; as Jasmine, she spreads her wings as a young wife of an upwardly mobile man in the city of Jullundhar; as Jase, she becomes a cultural refugee in the U.S with a developing sense of self; and as Jane, she is determined to be successful in the alien land. She has a man for each of these identities: “Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Base. Bud for Jane, Half-Face for Kali” (197). R. K. Dhawan acknowledges Jaiwanti Dimri, in the book *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium* who states that “She brings death to Half-Face as goddess Kali, she brings happiness to Duff and Taylor as a traditional, self sacrificing Indian lover and she is offering love to Du as a loving Indian mother who exults in her motherhood”(75).

In the end of the novel Jasmine moves to California with Taylor, uncertain of what the future will bring about but nevertheless confident in her decision to leave. This

sense of movement further reinforces the notion that her identity is forever evolving; she cannot remain in a stable life because disruption and change are the means of her survival. The surrounding environments influence her formation of her identities and she navigates between temporal and spatial locations, her perception of herself changes, thereby resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. These create a tension within her and she feels the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions so that they do not wage a psychological war inside her. Thereby Mukherjee portrays her in such a manner that she reinvents her identity completely.

The route that Jasmine takes is significant. She arrives in Florida, moves on to New York, then travels to Iowa and decides to shift to California. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of isolation all around. Himadri Lahiri in the article “Nation, Nationalism and Cultural Citizenship in Bharati Mukherjee” says that Bharati Mukherjee speaks of the non-white immigrant characters in her story, and observes, that they “. . . have experienced rapid changes in the history of the nations in which [they] lived” (49).

Jasmine uproots herself from her own country and goes to America either by choice or out of necessity. On reaching the U.S., she learns to adapt to the American society and begins to search for self-independence. Himadri Lahiri in the article “Nation, Nationalism and Cultural Citizenship in Bharati Mukherjee” reiterates the words of Bharati Mukherjee who says that immigrants “. . . take risks they wouldn’t have taken in their old, comfortable worlds to solve their problems. As they change citizenship, they are reborn” (49).

Jasmine is reborn several times. The body becomes a mere shell, soon to be discarded and what she discards is her Indian psyche and is reborn in America as Jase and Jane. Hence Jasmine's transformation of identity occurs not only through construction, but also by the destruction of her existing self. Jasmine achieves a new identity every time by not neglecting her cultural past but by merging it with her present.

Jasmine fights not only against the male dominance both in India and in the States but also the hostility between her Eastern and Western characteristics with the hope of total freedom and unity in her self. In other words, in order to survive as a woman from the Third World country under the pressure of the male-centred Western culture, Jasmine sacrifices a lot proving the power of globalization mentioned at the beginning. The dominant values of the global world force Jasmine to conciliate all the elements of her multicultural identity. However, this conciliation does not mean the celebration of the wealth of her identity but unfortunately it is the victory of globalization, which pushes her into a standard identity. The only but the most significant promise of globalization for Jasmine is its conformity, which means she can have a place on the world as an American rather than being an outsider.

Jasmine has a willing and a moderate approach. She does not resist transformation but embraces the changes to adapt to the new conditions. She lives through many lives in her short lifespan similar to the Hindu belief of death and rebirth cycle and transformations finally to reach a united identity. At every step of her life, Jasmine is a winner, she does not allow her troubles and struggles to obstruct her progress in life and she is finding a place for herself in the society. In other words, Jasmine is a true feminist who fights every challenge in life to establish herself in the society. Jasmine realises that

the true identity of a person does not lie in being an Indian or an American but it lies in the inner spirit of the person to be at peace within.

Bharati Mukherjee has employed metamorphosis transformations in the life of Jasmine in the process of her search of her true identity. As Ruppel in the article “Re-Inventing Ourselves a Million Times: Narrative, Desire, Identity, and Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*” puts forward “she must change to survive and to continue her journey” (183). Longjam Monika Devi in the article “Search for Identity in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*” reiterates the words of Sumita Roy who remarks is significant: “Consequently, to read Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* as an ambitious endeavour to outline the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values is rewarding”(252).

CHAPTER IV

Chapter 4

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee as an immigrant, writes about different experiences of the immigrants. The writer explores through her fiction the meaning of life. All her works have a main theme of immigration, but in different perspectives. Her novels are female-centred and the characters are people on the periphery of the society in which they have chosen to spend their lives. To a question by Hancock in an interview on a wide range of characters – illegal, rich, poor, a psychiatrist they as protagonists in her works, she observes that “there are a hundred thousand voices in my head waiting to be heard” (24). She seeks to emphasize the unique nature of each individual experience especially women in her literary examinations of immigrant lives.

Mukherjee’s female characters are real, modern life like. They are typical representatives of young women particularly of the Third World countries who cherish the dream of emigrating to America for higher education and in turn higher wages, and then after the arrival there, aspire to settle there permanently. The situations and the difficulties they face are also realistically portrayed.

The female protagonists Tara and Jasmine in Mukherjee’s select novels in *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Jasmine* respectively fight two simultaneous battles against marginalization during their early expatriate experiences in America; coming as they are from an other world, their very identities are in question in America, calling out for a re-visioning and a re-defining at the start. The process of finding their identities is a matter

of intense struggle – with the self, with tradition, with the wonders and horrors of a new culture, with growing aspirations, hopes, and desires.

The psyche of the immigrants like Tara and Jasmine are always tragic as a result of the tensions created in the mind between the two feelings of rootlessness and nostalgia. When the individuals visit the unknown land, they are outsiders in a no-man's land and there, they struggle a lot for their survival. Conquering the new feeling of nostalgia, they carve out a new territory and wrap themselves totally with the lure of the West. They create a new personality and form emotional ties with the place they live in. This discovery of a new self slowly makes them forget their own culture. On their return to the native land they find that their native taste and touch have turned alien to them as in the case of Tara. Their mind is again torn apart between the cultural clash of two environments and is forced to fight with their split personality.

The protagonists Tara and Jasmine as expatriate and an immigrant respectively try to adapt to American society and in consequence are rootless. The protagonists run through a whole gamut of emotions on their way to adjust to a new world. The outcome of migration is very different in Tara and Jasmine. The assimilatory process fails for Tara, whereas a synthesis of tradition and modernity, the past and the present, the East and the West equips Jasmine to carve enough space for her even in an adverse environment. Bharati Mukherjee has carved out the assimilation of the Third World immigrants into the American 'melting pot' which is enriched by those, whom she describes as pioneers. Jasmine is one of these pioneers, a survivor with courage.

In the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara's father packs off her at the age of fifteen to America, because he is prompted by suspicions and pain about his country. She feels

homesick in Poughkeepsie. Tara away from home idealizes her home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it. She admires the sanctity and peace enjoyed by her mother and so could not entirely discard the role model of a traditional Indian woman because her consciousness has been built by seeing her mother. This constituted centuries of religion, myth and culture, an insidious influence that no child can avoid while growing up in an Indian home.

Tara's early experience in America; her sense of discrimination; her loneliness resulting in her vehemently taking out all her silk scarves and hanging them around to give the apartment a more Indian look; her attempt to stick to Indian ways by praying to Kali for strength so that she won't break down before the whites; retaining her maiden surname after her marriage – all portray the cultural resistance put forward by an innocent immigrant who refuses to be completely sucked into the alien land. Tara hopes that her return to India would remove her displeasure of staying abroad which is described in the following lines:

For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quiet magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggars in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. (25)

After seven years in America Tara visits India. Seven years ago she admired 'the house on Marine Drive' but her stay at Vassar has changed her outlook on Indian life. What she admired then lost their loveliness and 'now their shabbiness appalled her' (18).

Her relatives sense her American attitude of life. They find her 'stubborn.' Tara's journey from Bombay to Calcutta brought an equally disgusting experience to her. Bharati Mukherjee analyses the anatomy of change, the transformation of Calcutta from an oasis of peace and joy to the storm centre of a political turmoil.

The alien western culture, which has almost become a second self to her, is constantly in clash with the culture of her native soil. The clash is deeply felt in the psyche of Tara who finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India; and sometime with the traditions of her own family. The loss of her own cultural heritage is ironically reflected in her inability to sing the 'bhajan,' which she sang in her childhood. The greatest irony of her return is that she feels lonely in her own native land. Her new self is no doubt responsible for this disruption of her pleasure, but deteriorating social changes and her new perspectives towards poverty and dirtiness in India aggravates her discomfort, frustration and distrust. Tara's efforts to adapt to the American society are measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life.

Tara is unable to become assertive, as she is confused about her status and identity. She is trapped and abandoned. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. This difficulty of choosing is due to her refusal to condemn any one world. The outcome of this confrontation is her split personality.

In the novel *Jasmine*, the central character, Jyoti whom her mother tries to throttle at birth because she is her fifth daughter fights bravely the forces that try to crush her personality and blur her identity. In India, as Jyoti, Jasmine is seen against the backdrop of the rigid and patriarchal Indian society. In America, her self-awareness is reflected in

the relationships with Bud, Taylor, and Du. Jasmine juxtaposes in her memory each of her identities – as Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase and Jane, implying that she evokes and revises her past in articulating her identities. The author depicts this transformation and regeneration as a positive and optimistic journey.

Journey is a metaphor that advocates the ever moving, regenerating process of life itself. Jasmine creates a new world consisting of new ideas and values, constantly unmasking her past. She tries to establish a new cultural identity by integrating new desires, skills and habits. This regeneration is defined more significantly in the changes in her attitude. However, her first husband Prakash initiates her transformation from traditional Jyoti to self-assured emancipated American woman, Jane. Jasmine can face all the challenges, whether it is killing a mad dog in Hasnapur, or travelling round the world as an illegal immigrant, being repeatedly raped, without suffering any bad consequences, she calmly takes on a new name for each role. In this novel, the womanhood has been depicted not as an incarnation of weakness but as a personification of strength.

It is explicit that Jasmine cannot remain in a stable life because disruption and change are the means of her survival. Jasmine is always disrupted, for destruction is the manner in which she ultimately transforms and recreates herself. The surrounding environments influence her formation of her identities and she navigates through various locations, her perception of her own self changes, thereby resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. These create a tension within her and she feels the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions, so that they do not wage a psychological war within her. Thus she reinvents her identity completely. The transformation of Jasmine from tradition to modernity satisfies her inner self rather than the society. This change in her is a proof to

portray the courageous nature of Jasmine who acts according to the self-consciousness and also according to her own wish. Mukherjee's novel finally attains the theme of fulfilment within the inner self.

Bharati Mukherjee, an exponent of immigrant sensibility, exemplifies the ambivalences caused by the sudden transplantation from the familiar to the exotic. Migratory experience, though a common contemporary phenomenon, varies from individual to individual depending on one's background, education and nationality. It is not a mere physical or geographical journey from one land to another shore, but a severing of the spiritual and symbiotic ties with one's mother country. Moving from one culture to another, the protagonists Tara and Jasmine often find it hard to relocate themselves in relation to the centre. The quest to belong to a space to which one can relate emotionally is indeed an excruciating endeavour. The transition from the familiar frame of reference and relationship to an exotic environment demands a break up with the past. The uprooting and absorption is a continuing process passing through various stages of rootlessness, enchantment, bewilderment and nostalgia.

For Tara, Vassar is almost an unsalvageable mistake. The alien soil troubles her and she faces it on the strength gained through her upbringing. Tara comes to India expecting admiration, glamour and heroism. But when she doesn't get all these, she is stung and depressed. In other words Bharati Mukherjee says, "The years away from India had made her self-centred. She took everything, the heat, the beggars as personal insults and challenges" (86). In the beginning, Tara lacks the capacity to probe into the difference between the two cultures, accept the merits of both or one and then to adopt the necessary changes. The immigrant sensibility is always torn between the two different

socio-cultural environments. Like every other immigrant, Tara too finds it difficult to adapt to the new culture. Confrontation with another society starts the process of deconstructing and restructuring of the self.

Tara's mission portrays identity as a continuous journey rather than a fixed construction. Mukherjee portrays Tara's transformation to a strong personality capable of taking decisions and exhibiting individuality. In Tara, there is not a much of a struggle between the emerging selves; but it caused Jasmine to remain always on the move and invent completely new identities. Instead Tara's multiplicity evolves in a continuous process that she welcomes. She recognizes that living in the past, whether temporally, spatially or both, is dangerous to the development of one's identity. She keeps on changing and evolving but at the same time does not lose the identities she had once possessed. Instead of transplanting Indian culture or disposing it off altogether she tries to assimilate her Indianness through reinventing her identity as experiences forever and keep on moulding it into something new. M.L Pandit in the book *New Commonwealth Writings: A Critical Response* writes that

The author's message is clear. The East or the West, whether she has had traditional Indian education or studied at a prestigious American institution like Vassar, the Indian woman, when facing an unfamiliar cultural environment, has problems that take unpredictable turns. No philosophy can help her under such circumstances. Having nothing and nobody to fall back upon, she has to tackle her problems by herself. . . an Indian woman, caught up in a cross-cultural dilemma, has to be, ultimately, her own saviour. (40)

Jasmine is a novel of emigration and assimilation, both on physical and psychological levels. Bharati Mukherjee fictionalizes the process of Americanisation by tracing a young Indian woman's experience of trauma and triumph in her attempt to forge a new identity for herself. The novel reveals the female experience of women who are self-actualizing. Jasmine moves from one family to another, builds relationships, acquires other names, finds a shared bond with a Vietnamese refugee and finally leaves the man whose child, she is carrying to go with the man she loves choosing between the 'Indian' duty and the 'western' pursuit of happiness.

Jasmine undergoes multiple identity transformation in her quest for self-empowerment and happiness. She is in search of a concrete identity. Her transformation from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jazzy, Jazzy to Jase and finally to Jane is marked by changes in behaviour and personality. She makes a life time for every name yet it is an embodiment of the old-world dutifulness, ever conscious of her sacred relationship with her husband, Prakash. When pushed from one disaster to another, she emerges not as a tragic character but as one who is determined to transform, change her destiny and explore her identity. Different locations assign her different roles – daughter, wife, caretaker, beloved, and a competent professional but at every stage she is conscious to achieve an identity of her own, along with her consciousness of her being an Indian woman. The various changes in life and identities shows that as an Indian immigrant she has no fixed identity in a foreign country and has to move on and on. She always passes through a period of transition.

Jasmine is neither a rebel nor an oppressed subject but a woman with her independent vision, sharing the best both of native tradition and Americanisation. Each

decision of Jasmine is her own by which she is struggling throughout her life to stand on her own which is far away from the Indian climate or culture. Brinda Bose in “A Question of Identity: Where Gender, Race, and America Meet in Bharati Mukherjee,” focuses on the main women characters claiming that “their process of finding their identity in the United States is a matter of intense struggle”(47).

Thus Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* reveals that the protagonist, Jasmine is a survivor, fighter and a trend setter. She overcomes the insurmountable obstacles that lie strewn in her path through sheer inner strength. She indeed is the symbol of a new woman who fights single-handedly for her survival and self-respect in a hostile world. She has learnt to live not for her husband or for her children, but for herself. In this process she emerges victoriously self-assertive. Thus Jasmine succeeds in her attempt to regenerate herself through various transformations with disintegration. Though shuttled between her identities of two worlds both in India and America, Jasmine is portrayed as a strong woman and also she revolts against fate and conventions at every juncture. She has the courage to transform her dreams into reality. She is a pathfinder, full of self-confidence and also an example, a leader for womankind desirous of liberation from the shackles of age-old dogmas.

For Tara and Jasmine who grew up in a traditionally repressed society, psychic violence is necessary for their transformation. In the case of Tara, the level of violence escalates from the moment she is seduced by the middle-aged politician to the moment she is stranded in the midst of a bloody political riot. In the case of Jasmine, the episode starts with the murder of Half-Face. Jasmine chooses to murder instead of suicide.

Jasmine embraces the possibility of self-empowerment and is able to distance herself from the fragile submissive young girl that she learned to be in Hasnapur.

The surrounding environments influence the formation of their identities and they navigate between temporal and spatial locations, perception of their ownself changes, thereby resulting in a multiplicity of consciousness. These create a tension within them and they feel the need to reconcile these conflicting perceptions so that they do not wage a psychological war inside them. Thereby they reinvent their identity completely.

Tara and Jasmine are convinced by these experiences, discard their past and embraces their home away from home. What drives them to react with violence is their frustration at other people's inability to understand their changing needs and desires, now that they are no longer confined to the social and cultural patterns of their past.

Tara and Jasmine in Mukherjee's novel perceive both their race and sexuality through new and different lenses throughout, they come to realize that the notion of a singular identity is a fallacy and the reality of the diasporic experience is the indeterminacy of multiplicity. This multiplicity at times becomes a significant plight for the characters, for as their different consciousnesses contradict each other, the characters are left uncertain as to the nature of their identities, not knowing where they fit in the American society. Finally they become capable of living in a world where individuals exist not as a unified one, but as many, bound by no borders and infinite in the possibility of inventing identities.

The expatriate writer Bharati Mukherjee combines the past with the present to recreate a future. Her novels express the impulse of Indians, who, in their search for a better life, face the problems of adaptation and survival. In the intricate battle to forge a

new self in a strange world, the trauma of lost identity is drowned with every surge of hope. She wants her women to fight against the belittling attitude of men for a better world, against the domestic tyranny and for their rights. The women should learn to realize their worth and recognize their potentials by doing away with their sense of futility, emptiness and crippling guilt. Their transformation is only to meet the need of being at home in the adopted homeland.

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