Chapter IV

A Comparative Perspective.
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The objective of taking up this comparative framework is to reveal the similarity and contrast in the approaches of V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee towards the concept of identity and home. The diasporic writings raise questions regarding the definition of home and nation and each writer has a different perspective towards it. Naipaul and Mukherjee occupy a significant place as the writers of diasporic literature. Although there is a marked difference in their attitude towards home and identity, there is also some similarity in their writings with regards to the central theme they handle in it. What emerges out of their writings is their stance on displaced individuals, once uprooted and then either permanently rootless or eager to adjust to the alien atmosphere in order to get rooted.

Naipaul is considered as the classic example of being a permanent nomad whose identity now appears to be vested in a condition of homelessness. Born in Trinidad in a Hindu family of Indian origin, and presently self-exiled to London, he has always considered himself a displaced and rootless wanderer. His condition of being in permanent exile is partly imposed and partly self chosen. This has altered his way of looking at culture, creativity, identity and home. Through his travel and travelogues, he is engaged in a perennial process of dislocation and rootlessness.

On the other hand Bharati Mukherjee’s residence on the North American continent is wholly an outcome of her own choice. Unlike Naipaul her migration was not thrust on her and this made her further assimilation in the U.S. easier. But her migration was not always
pleasurable i.e. in keeping with her expectations. Her stay on the American Continent is divided into two phases: first the phase of expatriation and second that of immigration. To pursue her interest in creative writing, Mukherjee left India for the U.S. at the age of twenty-one. In 1963 she married a Canadian writer, Clark Blaise and in 1966 the couple moved to Canada and lived there till 1980. The phase of expatriation of Mukherjee’s life covers her stay in Canada. Although as a result of her marriage she became a naturalized Canadian citizen, she always felt herself a resident-alien in that country. Prior to this move, she had looked forward to this migration to Canada. She had thought that Canada, being her husband’s native land, would support her in her development as a literary artist. In fact, as a woman she had the ability to relate and identify herself with the homeland of her husband. But contrary to her expectations, the period of her stay in Canada, as a Canadian citizen, was filled with pain and anger. The racial discrimination in that country proved to be shattering for her. As a woman of colour she was too visible but as a writer she was completely invisible. Even when she published two of her novels during her stay in Canada, her literary genius was not recognized; her potentialities were ignored and unresponded to. The life in Canada tested her spirit to the extreme point. In her writings and interviews she talked about her personal loss. She even articulated the hostility of Canadians towards her. Such discriminatory treatment compelled her to become a civil right activist. Moreover she had to suppress her literary genius and write about the devastating and crippling effects of racism on individuals. Regarding this suppression of her literary genius she said.
“To be a woman writer in North America, to be a third world woman writer in North America, is to confine oneself to a narrow, airless, tightly roofed arena” (1)

Mukherjee realized that expatriation meant the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly atmosphere. She refused to accept an identity of being an alien; an identity that was forced on her by the environment.

Similarly, on his arrival to London Naipaul also experienced the same kind of alienation. Before coming to London he had thought Trinidad to be a restrictive land, a land that would suck all of his potential as a writer. At the age of eighteen, he escaped from Trinidad in order to realize his dreams. This brought him to England, the city of his dreams. But the realization of being an exile there too, came very soon.

“London was not the centre of my world. I have been misled; but there was nowhere else to go” (2)

He further expressed the malady of an exile like him, who belonged to nowhere. For him London—

“------was a good place for getting lost in, a city no one ever knew, [--------]. Here I became no more than an inhabitant of a big city, robbed of loyalties, time passing, taking me away from what I was, thrown more and more into myself, fighting to keep my balance and to keep alive the thought of the clear world beyond the brick and asphalt and chaos of railway lines. All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name.” (3)
His condition was so pitiable that he did not understand which country he belonged to and which country he should call his home. In the case of Mukherjee, Canada was at least the country of her husband, but for Naipaul London has become merely a halting station in his perpetual journey. What caused the identity crisis in him was his obscure understanding of all the three countries related to him – India, Trinidad and England. The incomplete and heterogeneous surroundings in his childhood, made a lasting impression on his mind. On the land of Trinidad his grandparents had created a little India of their own. For the coming generations the atmosphere inside the family was completely Indian and the atmosphere at the school and in the surrounding was colonial. When he became a writer these areas around him as a child became the subject matter of his writing. He visited India and Trinidad with the intention to realize these countries. But his early visits to India left him more perplexed than before. Though he lives in London, still his affinities are somewhere else. This created in him a sense of displacement.

This man in perpetual exile became a model for Bharati Mukherjee during her phase of expatriation. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee said,

“In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of V.S. Naipaul; it is he who has written most movingly about the pain and absolutely of art and exile, of ‘third world art’ and exile among the former colonizers; the tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a *desh*.”

(4)
In *Darkness*, she reiterated the same. She explained in her lucid and frank introduction that until Atlanta, she had thought of herself, in spite of a white husband and two assimilated sons, as an expatriate. Her statement in her introduction to *Darkness* is an exploration of the condition of expatriates as well as a statement of her own identification with Naipaul.

"Expatriates, on the other hand, knew all too well who and what they were; and what foul fate had befallen them. Like V.S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state of the art expatriation. Like Naipaul I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my character’s pain. Irony promised both detachment from and superiority over, those well bred post-colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they could ever belong." (5)

In thus identifying herself with Naipaul at this stage, it is clear that Mukherjee too saw herself as an expatriate writer in the light of her first two novels.

One striking similarity in V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee, as perceived from their literary works is their acquisition of a purely westernized sensibility. Their stay on European and American continents, respectively, endowed them with a foreigner’s eyesight, a westernized sensibility. It made them perceive quickly the defects in the Indian surrounding. Naipaul expressed it directly in his *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Wounded Civilization*, while Mukherjee presented it in an inverted way, through Tara, the protagonist of *The Tiger’s Daughter*. 

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The colonial influences on Naipaul made him a non believer from his childhood. He rejected the traditional and out of place Indian rituals that his parents and grandparents observed on the West Indian island, located thousand of miles away from India. Although he comes from Indian background, the scenes of the East shocked him a lot. During his initial journey to India, he was shocked when he saw men who had been diminished and deformed, men begging and whining. Seeing this he began to realize himself as a whole human being and determined to remain what he was. In *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul recorded that as a part of East, India was, in spite of all her mimicry of the British people, a nation altogether blind to the obvious obscenities. The over-crowded Indian roads, pavements and bazaars made him awe-struck and what followed then is his condemnation of it. He condemned the people of India for their blindness towards decency. He did not hesitate to present a disturbing picture of India; its condition of squalor, its public lavatories, its pollution, poverty, filth and confusion. Seeing these drawbacks, Naipaul developed a repulsion of India. He also denied any connection to it and ended his journey in more confused condition than before. He admits that his views on India were coloured by the Western influence on him. But his remarks were candid when he pointed out that the Indians have imitated Europe in wrong places. According to him Indians imitated only the external, superficial unreality and not the mind of the Europeans. His earlier image of India as a mythical land was shattered. The country revealed to him only filth and poverty.
Similarly, Bharati Mukherjee also attempted to present through Tara, the equally disturbing picture of Indian surroundings. Tara’s seven years stay in the States had changed her attitude towards the Indian milieu. She looked at it from a foreigner’s view point. In fact, poverty, filth and commotion were part of Indian life for her. Indians have become habitual to it. They either ignore it or accept it as an integral part of life. Tara herself once ignored it but her stay in the U.S. had opened her eyes to the gulf between the lives of the poor and those of the rich in her own country. From the stand point of a westernized Indian, India seemed to her a land of poor people living in a hostile and unhygienic condition. She noticed people suffering from starvation, decay and degeneration.

Like Naipaul, Mukherjee also considered squalor and confusion as the part of Bombay life. In An Area of Darkness, Naipaul had given a detailed picture of Bombay life, its crowd, and its squalor. In the same way, through Tara, Mukherjee attempted to present the disgusting condition of Bombay. Tara quickly perceived the changes the city had undergone. She remembered that seven years ago she had admired the houses on Marine Drive, had thought them fashionable. But now their shabbiness aroused disgust in her. The whole of the Marine Drive seemed to her rundown and crowded.

In the same tone as Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee described the appalling condition of Bombay railway station.

"Tara, lagging behind with several nephews, thought the station was more like a hospital; there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks" (6)
Another similarity we come across in the works of Naipaul and Mukherjee was their attempt to present in their works an expatriate community; a community that shared common feelings towards their home country. Their being away from the motherland brought them together. It was their feeling of loneliness that kept them bound together. When they gathered their talk was centered on India.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee presented an Indo-American Community, which strived to keep evergreen the memories of their life in India. It was their ghetto in Queens that was considered as a kind of fortress of Indianness. The immigrants of this fortress never tried to come out of their four walls, their artificially maintained Indianness. Instead of getting assimilated in the land of America, they interacted only with the Indians and struggled to keep their Indianness intact. These people from ghetto indulged in nostalgia, one of their ways being the craze for Indian food, Indian movies and other Indian things.

“They had Indian food stores in the block, Punjabi news papers and Hindi film magazines at the corner news stand, and a movie every night----”

“There were thirty-two Indian families in our building of fifty apartments-----”(7)

“Every night, Nirmala brought home a new Hindi film for the VCR. Showing began promptly at nine o’clock, just after an enormous dinner, and lasted till midnight. They were Bombay’s “B” efforts at best, commercial failures and quite a few famous flops, burnished against by the dim light of nostalgia”(8)
A similar kind of community was presented in *Wife*. In this Indo-American Community's consideration, India was far better than America, and it was only the job necessity that had brought them there. According to them Americans were dirty fellows who bathe only once a week, take two-minute showers rest of the week and use a lot of perfume. These people also criticized the Americans for their washing the clothes in the same bowl in which they spit. They found fault in every other action of the Americans but for them India could be no wrong. They even regarded Indian milk and chicken tastier than the one they get in America. To revitalize their Indian spirit,

"Hindi films were some times shown in high-school auditoriums in Queens by the Indo-American Society, on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings."(9)

Naipaul had also drawn a similar picture in *An Area of Darkness*. He informed us that his grandfather strived a lot to maintain his Indianness uncontaminated of the colonial influences. For him his Indianness was a rigid concept, wherein there was little scope for any foreign invasion. The things brought from India and the Indian rituals were preserved irrespective of their unsuitability on a land situated thousand of miles away from India. Regarding his grandfather Naipaul said

"When he went back to India it was to return with more things of India. When he built his house he ignored every colonial style he might have found in Trinidad and put up a heavy, flat-footed oddity, whose image I was to see again and again in the small ramshackle towns of Uttar Pradesh. He had abandoned
India; and, like Gold Teeth, he denied Trinidad. ----- A few reassuring relationships, a strip of land, and he could satisfyingly re-create an eastern Uttar Pradesh village in central Trinidad as if in the vastness of India” (10).

Both Naipaul and Mukherjee depicted these immigrant communities waiting eagerly for the end of their period of exile. In *A House for Mr. Biswas* Naipaul presented them awaiting their exit from the Trinidadian scene.

“Despite the solidity of their establishment the Tulsis had never considered themselves settled in Arwacas or even Trinidad. It was no more than a stage in the journey that had begun when Pundit Tulsi left India. Only the death of Pundit Tulsi had prevented them from going back to India; and ever since they had talked, though less often than the old men who gathered in the arcade every evening, of moving on, to India----"(11)

In the same way the Indo-American Society from Mukherjee’s novel considered their stay in America as a kind of temporary phase in their life.

“Who wants to buy tons of furniture? You’ll only lose money on it when you go back home. I’m going to retire when I’m forty, go back and build a five-*lakh* house and become the maharaja of Lower Circular Road” (12)

Apart from the nostalgic brooding, the geographical displacement causes unredeemable effects on the personalities of the immigrants. Both the novelists depicted very real pictures of such post-displacement consequences. In case of Biswas, Tara and Dimple rootlessness, alienation and uncertainty were an integral part of their
lives. In all the three cases, their displacement compelled them to lead an unsimplified and unstable life.

The discriminatory treatment at the hands of the Canadians compelled Mukherjee to record the devastating effects of displacement on the mentality of a person. Tara and Dimple would have been quite different personalities had they never been to America. Tara’s displacement caused a permanent split in her personality. Due to her seven years stay in America she was almost regarded as a foreigner in India, an Americawali. She herself was unable to trace the beginning of this foreignness but still she was constantly made aware of her being a foreigner by her relatives and friends. The tragedy of her life was that she has begun to be regarded as an outsider in both the countries. Her marriage with David was her attempt to integrate with the country of adoption, but by doing so she had unknowingly closed for herself the doors of India. She expected from her friends and parents the recognition of her courage in marrying an American, but she didn’t get it. For them David was merely a mleccha; an outcaste.

As an effect of migration, Tara’s mind worked constantly on two levels. While getting adjusted to the American life she unknowingly measured it in terms of Indian standard.

“In New York she had often praised herself, especially when it was time to clean the toilet and bathtub. She had watched the bubbly blue action of the toilet cleanser, and had confided to David that at home there was a woman just to clean bathrooms. There was no heroism for her in New York”.

(13)
And when she visited India, it was her American background that didn’t allow her to lead a simplified life. The company of her friends disillusioned her. She was less comfortable with them. Their self-confidence and assertive nature made her conscious of the loss of these aspects of her nature. She realized that she was being pushed to the periphery of the Indian world and that she had also begun to lose that Americanness which she had gained during her seven years stay there. She felt that she belonged to nowhere.

The geographical displacement in case of Dimple also led to the same instability, uncertainty and alienation. Already a sensitive personality that she was, her migration to America intensified inwardness of her nature and she became more alienated. Eighteen to Nineteen hours of the day she remained in bed. Frightened of the external unknown world she didn’t allow herself the exposure to that world; the only touch of it was through TV and newspapers, which introduced her to its violent nature. She remained isolated in her apartment and suffered from insomnia and frightening nightmares. The consequence of all these was her thinking only of death, first for herself and then for Amit. To rescue herself from her loneliness she developed an extramarital relationship with an American, Milt Glasser, and tried to lead an adventurous life with him. Her attempts of Americanization led to her committing murder of her husband, Amit and thus throwing herself in a more black and uncertain future.

Similarly in Biswas, Naipaul portrayed a permanently displaced personality. He presented through Biswas the psychological condition of an individual who was dislocated in his childhood and remained unhoused till the end of his life. Once displaced from the house of his
parents, Biswas found himself shuffled between various houses. The circumstances were so powerful that he could not remain rooted in a particular house. This displacement caused in him a kind of querulousness which in turn led to his remaining alienated from everyone. It led him to think life as a void and trap. In fact through him Naipaul intended to present the critical condition of post-colonial everyman, who was leading an unstable life. Biswas moved from his parental house to the house of his tutor, to that of his aunt and then from one house of the Tulsis to another. Twice he attempted to build his own house, but both the attempts turned out to be failure. At last he bought a house of his own but the fact of its being mortgaged and full of defects questioned his ultimate success. This perpetual journey left him exhausted, leading to his untimely death.

All these characters shared only one ground from which they could be compared with each other; their displacement. The approaches of the novelists in each case were different but their primary aim was to portray the struggle of a displaced individual. Keeping in view Mr. Biswas’ lifelong struggle to strike the roots, one may call him, irrespective of his untimely death, a successful being. He could not reconcile himself as a marginal man, what fate had designed him to be and attempted to distinguish himself from the Tulsidom. His story had a similarity with that of Mukherjee. Like Biswas she seemed to have determined to emerge as a survivor and unlike her protagonist, Tara and Dimple, she did not allow herself to be a puppet in the hands of destiny. Her struggle in Canada exemplified such a spirit in her.
One more similarity can be traced in Mukherjee and Naipaul in regard with *An Area of Darkness* and *The Tiger's Daughter*. Although these works differed in genre, they had one factor in common. The Penguin edition of *An Area of Darkness*, categorized the book as an autobiography, while Mukherjee considered Tara to be an autobiographical presentation of herself. Moreover the thematic concerns of these books were nearly similar i.e., a homecoming of an exile. Both the works presented an individual in search of a lost world. They delineated the attempts of a person to identify oneself with the land of origin, and both the works presented such attempts as failure. In both the cases, what was considered to be a happy come back didn't turn out to be happy at all. Instead it took both the individuals far from that land.

Prior to his first visit Naipaul had thought that every problem regarding his identity would be solved once he visits India. But what turned out on his actual visit was the opposite of his expectations. His home-coming had been an assault on his European styled sensibility. He failed to find unluckily thousand of *gold teeths* and in spite of his one year stay in India, it remained an unreal country-out in the void. For him his being an exile was more real than the vast expanse of India – the featureless area of darkness. He had hoped India to be a resting place for his troubled realization that England after all was not the centre of his world. But within a week he found out that he was an alien in India as well. "I was faceless. I might sink without a trace into that Indian crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England recognition of difference was necessary to me". (14) When he visited the village of his ancestors, his disgust towards his ancestry deepened
and he determined to remain what he was, an exile. When India failed to his expectations he said that his journey broke his life in two.

In the same tone, Mukherjee spoke through Tara, what Naipaul expressed in *An Area of Darkness*.

“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.”(15)

But like Naipaul she also realized the futility of such an enterprise. When her intensely awaited sojourn took place, Tara begun to realize her mistake. Her visit to India left her in more suspended condition. Even David and his America seemed to her completely foreign and unknown. This journey literally broke her in two; she realized that she had lost the feeling of being an insider in India and had developed a feeling of being an outsider in America. She lost her self-confidence and was completely shattered when she was seduced by Mr. Tuntunwala. This incident taught her the bitter lesson that Calcutta was no more the city of her dreams and that Calcutta had deceived her. This journey to India disillusioned her in her attachment to it. “It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse this trip to India”(16)

Another related point of similarity between V.S. Naipaul and Bharati Mukherjee is that of the change that occurred in their writings at a specific stage in their life. While Naipaul’s stance as a writer of Indian diaspora had undergone a dramatic change during his 1990 visit to India, in the case of Bharati Mukherjee the seed of change from being an expatriate to becoming an immigrant were sown during
her stay in India in 1973-74. It may just be a matter of coincidence that this turn in their stance as diasporic writers was presented in their writings after their visit to India. While Naipaul's travelogue, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, a work with considerable positive change in his attitude towards India, appeared after two earlier travelogues on India wherein he had denounced the country, Mukherjee's *Jasmine* which depicted the writer's own journey of progression was written after the two novels that presented the disturbed mentality of the protagonists. In the case of both the writers it was the journey of progression, a positive journey towards the recognition of one's own self.

In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul had recorded that at the end of his 1962 visit to India, he had discarded any connection with the land of his forefathers. Everything he came across was disgusting to him. He had recorded the absence of any growth and development in this land. But in the long run he realized that to deny India meant to deny his roots, to deny something that was inevitable. The second journey at least made him look at the country in a more neutral way than rather a contemptuous way. But it was his 1990 visit to India that presented an evolved relation of him with this country.

"In 27 years I had succeeded in making a kind of return journey, shedding my Indian nerves, abolishing the darkness that separated me from my ancestral past." (17)

The book, *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, that records his 1990 visit, surprised us by its empathy and modulated attitude towards India. Naipaul's early attitude and later transformation became more
understandable when we examined the circumstances of his life, which made him an outsider wherever he went. His inability to fit made him see himself as a person utterly displaced, connected by birth and education with three different societies and yet unable to establish living contact with any of them. But his return to India again and again spoke of an obsession and commitment. As a result, his latest book on India became a positive assessment of the confusions and cultural variety represented by India. In the book *India: A Million Mutinies Now* Naipaul reflected on a total experience, recognizing that even when he was most appalled he was considering a situation in which he was involved and which reflected certain aspects of himself.

A similar kind of change was perceptible in Bharati Mukherjee's life as well as in her literary creations. Her 1973-74 visit to India made her perceive herself more as an immigrant than as an expatriate or exile.

"The year in India had forced me to view myself more as an immigrant than an exile."(18)

In the book, *Darkness* Mukherjee said that she saw her Indianness as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated. This realisation of fluid identities and alternate realities too could be traced to this sojourn in India.

"In India, different perceptions of reality converge without embarrassing anyone. My year in India had shown me that I did not need to discard my western education in order to retrieve the dim shape of my Indian one".(19)
Again it was in India that Mukherjee realised the limitations of
the stance of a third world expatriate writer. This led to her later
opting for the viewpoint of an immigrant. Realizing the futility of the
stance of an expatriate, Mukherjee distanced herself from such a
stance. She also realised that expatriation is a position that keeps one
bound to one's own past, without allowing one to belong anywhere in
the world.

And this realisation found a better expression in her third novel,
*Jasmine*. Naipaul's *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, appeared after
two utterly disappointing works on India, *i.e.* *An Area of Darkness*
and *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Similarly Mukherjee's *Jasmine*
which was both the presentation of a progressive journey and
exemplification of the generic transformation of her own, appeared
after the two tragic fictional works namely, *The Tiger's Daughter* and
*Wife*. Thus the journey of both these writers was from the chaotic
assumptions of one's own identity towards the realisation of existing
realities in relation with their position as the citizens of a new world.

While there are obvious points of similarity, there were also
significant differences in the approaches of these two writers. Like
Naipaul, Mukherjee was a writer from the third world, but there were
a lot of differences in them as the writers of Indian Diaspora. The
way the presented their identity crisis through their creations, the
positions they occupied as the diasporic writer as well as their outlook
towards the problems of immigrants differed to a great extent. In the
case of Naipaul, his grandparents' displacement caused in him the
sense of being rootless, while in the case of Mukherjee her willing
migration made her assimilation in the U.S. easier one. This
difference in these writers enabled us to see migratory experiences from the point of view of the first and the third generation immigrants. While the former delineated the experiences of a third generation immigrants, the later, herself being a first generation immigrant, depicted her experiences from that particular perspective. R. K. Dhawan elaborates this further.

"Mukherjee does not write from the vantage point of an Indian expatriates like V. S. Naipaul. Naipaul, who was born in Trinidad because his relative left involuntarily has different attitude about himself. He writes about living in perpetual exile and about the impossibility of ever having a home. Like Naipaul, Mukherjee is a writer from the Third world but unlike him she left India by choice to settle first in Canada and then in the United States. She has now adopted America as her home. Mukherjee has asserted that though originally an Indian she had lived in Canada and America for too long to be categorized as an Indian English writer, She, therefore, views herself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestor arrived at Ellis Island". (20)

Naipaul, in his novels and travelogues, delineated the dilemma of a third generation immigrant. He made us see how in case of a third generation immigrant the language and culture of the land of his / her ancestors, ultimately becomes a thing distantly located; an entity far away in space and time.

"No on taught us Hindi, sometimes someone wrote out the alphabet for us to learn, and that was that; we were expected to do the rest ourselves. So, as English penetrated, we began to lose our language. My grandmother’s house was full of religion; there were many ceremonies and readings, some of which went on for days. But no one explained or translated for
us who could no longer follow the language, so our ancestral faith receded, became mysterious, not pertinent to our day-to-day life.”(21)

Thus the involuntary displacement of his forefathers casued such a damage to Naipaul’s personality that he always felt himself detached from his ancestral roots, and without a centre. He appeared the example of that immigrant community which was never settled in any particular culture. Instead of being benifitted of that special position, they developed in themselves a complaining attitude. Naipaul exhibited such a community in his fictional and non-fictional works.

Naipaul’s detachment from his ancestral origin was an involuntary process wherein his personal interest mattered little. But this displacement left a great impact on his life leaving his identity a hyphenated one : Trinidad born – British writer of Indian origin. On the otherhand Mukherjee’s voluntarily undertaken migration enabled her to call herself a writer in American tradition. She did not wish to be called an ‘Indian expatriate’. Strongly enough she cited V. S. Naipaul as the typical Indian expatriate writer. According to her, he writes about living in perpetual exile and about the impossibility of ever having a home. More important than her comment on Naipaul is her admission of herself being a writer who writes about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the pattern of the dominant American culture.

Another notable difference between Naipaul and Mukherjee is that while the former came to India in order to consider the possibility of his being identified with his ancestral roots, the later left behind her
motherland and passed through hazardous life of expatriation to emerge as an immigrant. Writing to his mother from Oxford on May 3, 1954, Naipaul had said,

“I don’t see myself fitting into the Trinidad way of life. I think I shall die if I have to spend the rest of my life in Trinidad. The place is too small, the values are all wrong and the people are petty ........... Ideally I would like first of all to arrange for some job in India”

He hastened to add:

“Do not imagine that I am enjoying staying in this country (England). This country is hot with racial prejudices and I certainly don’t wish to stay here”.

So it appears that even as early as at the age of twenty-two, Naipaul would have liked to settle in India. Psychologically, India was an unseverable connection for him. Trinidad had produced several images of India, which Naipaul failed to come across during his visit to India. An Area of Darkness records his frustrations with India. When he reached his ancestral roots he found them degenerated. But in the long run he realized his deep-rooted bond with India.

“In India I know I am stranger but increasingly I understand that my Indian memories, the memories of that India which lived on into my childhood in Trinidad, are like trapdoors into a bottomless past”.
Although he called India a difficult country for himself, he at once realized its inevitability in his life.

“It isn’t my home and cannot be my home, and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it, I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far” (25)

This hints at an involuntary compromise of Naipaul in case of his identity. Though Naipaul accepted India as an inevitable factor in his life, he never settled in the country and opted to remain what England and Trinidad had jointly made him.

On the contrary, Mukherjee learnt a lot from her visits to India. Unlike Naipaul, for whom past was a torturous existence, she regarded her Indian past as a concrete thing. For her the acceptance of the past was as necessary as rejecting its rigid hold on her memory. She is a writer who instead of just clinging to the past and attempting to engage with the history of one’s own nation, had marched on from the phase of expatriation, of being an exile, to the phase of immigration.

Naipaul’s uncertain condition affected his sensibility and writing, which is almost always self-imitative and predictable. Ian Buruma’s comment exemplifies it.

“Naipaul is his own main character. His personal story, or parts of it that matter to his theme, is repeated over and over .......... Naipaul’s writing, his stories or perhaps one should say his story are his way of making sense of his life, of trying to find order in his world, of ‘looking for the centre’” (26)
Unlike Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee abandoned her ‘ex’ status calling it a restrictive and self-defeating attitude in a writer. Her dropping the veil of an expatriate and accepting the inevitable fate of an immigrant corresponded with her choice of the writers she acknowledged as her models. When she outgrew and discarded the posture of an expatriate, she rejected Naipaul as her model and chose Bernard Malamaud instead:

“I see a strong likeness between my writing and Bernard Malamaud’s inspite of the fact that he describes the lives of East European Jewish immigrants and I talk about newcomers from the Third world. Like Malamaud I write about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapt itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture.” (27)

Her writings after *Wife* exemplified her changing spirit as an immigrant. Her voluntarily undertaken migration enabled her to develop in herself a spirited fighter, a spirited survivor. Her novel *Jasmine* was a work that celebrated her assimilation into the world of America. Jasmine’s metamorphosis from Jyoti of Hasnapur to Jane of Baden, Iowa was Mukherjee’s depiction of her own acquisition of the American spirit. She regarded herself one with all the Americans whose ancestors had once upon a time migrated to that land. Her works written during the phase of transformation and immigration were not concerned with alienation, rootlessness and crisis of identity. Instead of writing of backwardness as an area of darkness, she focused attention on her characters’ growing awareness of the dark spots in their lives, and their courageous efforts to discover areas of light.
This search for light, for happiness and fulfillment was subtly linked in her fiction to her protagonists’ struggle for assimilation.

Mukherjee now calls herself a naturalized American. She claims that her writings describe the character who are naturalized Americans that fit into communities in Queens or Atlanta. While Naipaul hardly comes out of his expatriate status, Bharati Mukherjee successfully overcomes that ‘ex’ status and happily clings to the “immigrant” position.