

Chapter III

BHARATI MUKHERJEE



(July 27, 1940 – age 75)

I. Bharati Mukherjee: Life and Works

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most influential literary figures of Indian women writers in English who is honoured as the 'Grande dame' of diasporic Indian English literature. She has been termed as an Asian- American writer, Indo-American writer, Indian Diaspora writer, writer of immigrant fiction and non-fiction, and American writer of mainstream today. As Clark Blaise puts it - "Bharati has become one of America's best known novelists and short-story writers" (Blaise and Mukherjee, "Prologue" to *Days and Nights*, vi). Raj Chetty (2006) opines that American author Bharati Mukherjee could be easily seen as "Lahiri's foremother" (75). Her journey from India to England - India - USA - Canada - USA - made her an expatriate writer like V. S. Naipaul, immigrant writer and American mainstream writer like Bernard Malamud and Henry Roth. She has developed a reputation for exploring the meeting of the Third World and the First World from the perspective of an immigrant to the North America, Canada and USA.

She is an activist of civil rights, educator, an author of highly praised novels, two collections of short stories and non-fiction works. She utilizes her own personal experiences in crossing the cultural boundaries. She is a well-known writer of Indian diaspora in USA, though she expects to be seen as (North) American Writer and rejects her hyphenated identity as Asian-American or Indo-American (Mukherjee, "American Dreamer"). Her works can certainly be read in the national context of Indian writing in English and in the international context of the literature of the Indian diaspora. Also her work locates her in the American context. She is the strong voice of the immigrants from all over the world in USA, because of her determined rejection of the emotional paralysis of exile and her affirmation of the immigrant condition. Her multiple displacement and replacement or relocation creates a chaos but out of this chaos she has forged a cohesive vision and her articulation of that vision in her voice is subtle, provocative and graceful. She wants to transform herself as an artist from expatriate writer into a confident redefined artist in the immigrant tradition which sets her in the tradition of American main-stream writers. So she is among 15 writers recruited by the US government to write essays on 'certain American values - freedom, diversity, democracy, - that may not be well understood in all parts of the world.'

To posit Bharati Mukherjee within the larger Indian Diaspora, it is necessary to begin with her biography. The second of three daughters of Sudhir Lal and Bina Mukherjee, Bharati Mukherjee was born on 27th July of 1940 to a wealthy upper-middle class Bengali Hindu-Brahmin family in Kolkata, India. Her father was a pharmaceutical chemist who had studied and done advanced research in Germany and U. K. Though a housewife, her mother Bina Mukherjee made sure that her daughters would receive the best possible education. The parents had shaped Bharati to be a writer and greatly influenced her. Bharati and her sisters (Mira and Ranu) were given ample academic opportunities and thus they too pursued academic endeavours in their careers and have had the opportunity to receive excellent schooling. Bharati Mukherjee had the experience of living in a joint family until the age of eight. She says in an interview by Runar Vignisson,

“When I was growing up I lived in an extended family so that there were 40, 45 people living in the house at the same time.”

(Vignisson 1993)

Sudhir Lal Mukherjee, her father, hailed from the district of Faridpur (now in Bangladesh) from a family of Policemen, who alone received education and wanted to be a professional man. He received his Honours Degrees (B.S. & M.S.) in Chemistry during the year 1935 and married a 17 year old Dacca girl, named Bina Chatterjee. Thus, both the families of Sudhir Lal Mukherjee and Bina Chaterjee came from the present Bangladesh. But the Mukherjees and also the Chaterjees settled in Calcutta, on Rash Behari Avenue in the section of Ballygunge. In 1936 their first daughter Mira was born who later became a working wife in Detroit. She is a child psychologist and out of India, “has chosen to remain Indian citizen but a greencard holder” (Edwards 101). In the same year 1936, Sudhir Lal Mukherjee applied to the University of Heidelberg for additional research and he was given a German scholarship and was also granted the University of Calcutta’s travelling scholarship for doctoral work at the University of London. Geographically and psychologically it was very hard for him being an Indian Chemistry student in Heidelberg in 1936. But his wife and father-in-law urged him and counselled him to ‘be there’. He studied Chemistry and nationalism. After a year in Heidelberg he went to London to finish his doctorate and to work in a Pharmaceutical company. In 1939 he returned to Calcutta and the next

year Bharati was born (1940) and after three years (1943) their third and youngest daughter, Ranu, was born. He started a small Pharmaceutical factory with a Jewish immigrant business partner. He lived in a joint family and life went on absolutely as usual.

A problem in the partnership led him to London. In 1947 he left India along with family (wife and three daughters) for London, when Bharati Mukherjee was only eight years old. Here begins her series of displacement. Sudhir Lal Mukherjee was interested in the research. But his partner apologized and he returned to the company to head up its London office. They lived there for three years when the sisters were placed in a private school where they learned English.

“It was the time of forgetting Bengali and acquiring English until I reached an absolute equilibrium.”

(Blaise and Mukherjee, *Days and Nights*, 182)

It is the origin of Bharati's English language and its skills as she says “Language transforms our ways of apprehending the world” (170). There she passed her eleven plus exams. The offer for research in Basel to Sudhir Lal Mukherjee took the family there and the sisters were placed in German schools. But the partner wanted Sudhir Lal Mukherjee in Calcutta and they were back to India in 1951 and began to live in the compound of the Pharmaceutical factory in Cossipore, Calcutta, where the sisters were like Princesses and presided at factory functions such as sports events, religious celebrations and variety shows for workers. The factory compound contained mansions, lakes, swimming pools etc. From their return to Calcutta in 1951 until the middle of 1959, the good days of the family came to an end. The partnership of factory dissolved, when the father was in his 50s. But he was asked to manage the Pharmaceutical division of the Sarabhai Chemical Complex. So in 1959 they left Calcutta for Baroda, Gujarat, when Bharati completed her graduation. Mira was out of college, had applied for training in Detroit and Ranu (16 years old) was accepted to Vassar on scholarship. Bharati joined the University of Baroda where she obtained her M.A. degree in English topping the merit list with first class in 1961. Since childhood she wanted to be a writer and it was her good luck that she joined the Writer's Workshop at Iowa, USA, in the same year. Having been awarded the scholarship from University of Iowa, USA, she planned to study there for MFA,

which she obtained in 1963. In the fall of 1961 Bharati and Ranu, trying again at Vassar, left India for USA.

Bharati met Clark Blaise at the Writers Workshop, University of Iowa, only two weeks before they got married, during a lunch hour, in a law office, in 1963. Blaise asserts “All three daughters of S. L. Mukherjee have made headstrong love matches, all three are better educated than their husbands, and the two who live outside of India- cruel irony – earn more than their husbands” (Blaise and Mukherjee, *Days and Nights*, 29). Bharati’s marriage is really an exception and very much different from Bengali traditional marriages of Brahmins. She herself described it as “intensely literary marriage” (Edwards 30).

Like her father Bharati was also shifted from place to place. In 1966 after her marriage with Clark Blaise, she migrated to Canada and became a naturalized citizen in 1972. They lived there for 14 years (1966-1980) first in Toronto, then in Montreal. “The first ten years into marriage, years spent mostly in my husband’s native Canada. I thought of myself as an expatriate Bengali, permanently stranded in North America because of destiny or desire” (Mukherjee, ‘American Dreamer’). She found that life was really impossible and very hard in Canada being an expatriate, non-white and non-European, Canadian Citizen of Indian origin. She was ‘Visible Minority’ and an ‘Invisible Woman’ at the same time. Those 14 years of race-related harassment politicized her and deepened her love for the ideals embedded in the American Bill of Rights. She has talked in many of the interviews about her difficult life in Canada, hostile to its Asian immigrants, where there was lack of cultural assimilation. She remembers

“I had thought of myself... as an expatriate... in Canada, I was frequently taken for a prostitute or shoplifter... domestic... crippling assumptions about me.” (Mukherjee, ‘Introduction’ to *Darkness*, 1-2)

She was a brown in the white society in Canada, her Indianness was fragile. Her physical appearance is very much Indian. She strongly stated –

“Over the years I spent in Canada 1966 to 1980 – I experienced racial harassments in increasingly crude forms they included removal to

a seat in the back of an inter-city bus, not being served in stores, and racial slurs in Toronto's Rosedale Subway Station.”

(Blaise and Mukherjee, *Days and Nights*, 302)

Fed up with Canada, she took a bold decision to migrate to the USA in 1980, “After a 14 year stay in Canada I forced my husband and two sons (Bart and Bernie) to relocate to United States ... I am a naturalized U.S. citizen and I take my American Citizenship very seriously. ... I became a citizen by choice, not by simple accident of birth” (Mukherjee, ‘American Dreamer’).

Bharati Mukherjee calls this change, “a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation to the exuberance of immigration” (Mukherjee, ‘Introduction’ to *Darkness*, 3). So she began to consider her identity as a set of ‘fluid identities’. She has seen herself as “an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island” (3). In her later life, She describes herself as American and not the hyphenated Indian-American title:

“I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I'm ashamed of my past, not because I'm betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here... I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a U.S. citizen for me is that can define myself in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My affiliation with readers should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race.”

(Mukherjee qtd. in Basbanes)

From her childhood till her year-long visit to India in 1973-74, she herself has divided her life into three parts which are disproportionate – (1) First eight years when she lived in a typical joint family (2) from eight till twenty one when she lived in a single family (3) since twenty one when she began living in the West (*Days and Nights* 179).

In 1980 she crossed the borders because this time she wanted to cross it, to repossess a homeland, not of inheritance but her wish. For Clark it was a heavy cost to continue companionship with Bharati, his wife. But it was also happy one because they built their “home” out of expectation not of memory.

Bharati’s career as a teacher began with her joining the duty as an instructor in English at Marquette University, Milwaukee in 1964 and at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1965. In 1966 both Bharati and her husband joined McGill University as lecturers and she was promoted as a full Professor in 1978. She was there a director of graduate studies in English and chaired the writing program of the University, where she obtained the Canada Arts Council grant and Guggenheim Foundation’s grant for her work. Yet she had to leave her job and it made mandatory for her husband to resign the job. So in 1980 they joined / worked at different college and university jobs in America. She taught at Skidmore college; Saratoga; Springs, New York Mont Clair State College, New Jersey (1984-87), Queens College, University of New York, Flushing (1987-89), University of California, Berkeley (1990-95).

Over the years she has taught English and creative writing at the colleges, universities throughout USA and Canada. Bharati Mukherjee’s oeuvre includes now eight novels, two collections of short stories, two books of non-fiction and some powerful essays. It seems that she is a born writer. In an interview with Runar Vignisson Bharati confessed – “I knew from when I was very young, long before I was ten, that I was going to be a writer” (SPAN). Her parents supported her to have the career chosen by her, to be a writer.

She was not forced to choose any other career. Being a woman it was proper to be a writer, as her parents thought and allowed her this career instead of being a scientist / chemist, a doctor or engineer. In her school days some of her stories were published in school magazines of Loreto Convent School, where everything was European, and English. Though initially she attended a Bengali medium school, there was an English class. There she was introduced to English when she was only a three year old girl. Since early childhood she learnt to think in English because of her first migration with her parents to England where she went to school. Since her childhood days she was a bi-cultural and bilingual.

She returned to India and joined the convent school in Calcutta. It gave her grounding in English language and literature. All these things, she says in an interview by Vignisson - "helped me as a scholar when I came to Iowa to get my Ph.D. and it also formed me in some ways as a writer". She considered it as the damage of colonialism; she had been robbed of Indian epics, surrealism, elastic time, magic realism, and Hindu literary tradition. She was influenced by British English language and literature since her childhood days.

Her marriage and migration to Canada in 1966 with her husband are responsible for her career as an expatriate writer like V. S. Naipaul. She found that as a dark-skinned Canadian and non-European / Asian immigrant to Canada, life was really impossible and hard. She asserted "I had thought of myself ... as an expatriate Expatriates – knew what foul fate had fallen them ... Like Naipaul ..." (Mukherjee, 'Introduction' to *Darkness*, 1-2). Her fundamental situation in Canada was that of non-acceptance in the society. She was uncomfortable in Canada. The outsider's experience leads to 'lostness' where the bits of sanity get scattered. Her displacements / dislocations (due to migration from one country to another) created outsidership, from which she suffered.

Mukherjee's works focus on the "phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates" as well as on Indian women and their struggle. Her own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States has led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants (Alam 10). She wrote her first two novels when she was in Canada – *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) and *Wife* (1975). *The Tiger's Daughter* tells a tale of a young Bengali girl named Tara, elite, born in Calcutta, studied and married in USA. She returns to India after seven years of her migration and finds the city in political turmoil. She is caught between the two worlds and feels equally an expatriate in both of them. Bharati's second novel *Wife* again narrates the story of a Bengali Brahmin girl, Dimple Dasgupta-Basu, who migrates to America with her husband. She is also caught between the two worlds and its culture. She is unable to break away from the original culture and feels trapped in it. She turns neurotic and kills her own husband.

But it is "... her misguided act of self-assertion" asserts Bharati Mukherjee (Edwards 24).

Her collaborative work with her husband – *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) came out when she was at McGill, though it was the result of their sabbatical tour to India in 1973-74.

Mukherjee's *Darkness* (1985) is the first collection of twelve short stories about the degrees of acculturation of South-Asian immigrants in (North) America. The stories were written in Montreal and Toronto, Canada and in the USA. It is a portrait gallery of Asian-(North) Americans, mostly of Indian origin, like Ratna, Leela, Nafeesa, Mr. Bhowmick, Dr. Patel, Sikh grand-child and grand-father, Mr. Gupta, the legal and illegal migrants and the Canadians like Ann Vane. It unfolds the migrants' encounter with the Canadians and Americans which clears the difference of the host countries in dealing with migrants. Mukherjee's *Darkness* reminds us of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and V. S. Naipaul's *Area of Darkness* (1964). India, the country of his origin, is the area of darkness for Naipaul. But for Mukherjee husband's country, Canada, with its racial discrimination evokes darkness.

Mukherjee collaborated with her husband for *The Sorrow and the Terror: the Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* which came out in 1987. She had taken the road not taken to investigate the plane crash (Kanishka) in 1985. 329 passengers, most of them Canadians of Indian origin, were killed. It was a very personal kind of grief for Bharati Mukherjee. The Prime Minister of Canada offered condolences for India's loss. Wasn't it the loss of Canada? This book was and is a wakeup call for all of us who face terrorism.

The Middleman and Other Stories (1988), her second collection of eleven short stories, was greatly welcomed and applauded by the readers and American critics. She won the National Book Critics Circle Award for it. "The new, changing America is the theme of the stories..." says Bharati in an interview by Alison (Edwards 26). Mukherjee highlights the reciprocal effects of the migrants, and the American life on each other. The migrants are the middlemen in those stories. These stories explore the meeting of East and West through immigrant experiences in the U.S. and Canada along with further describing the idea of the great melting pot of

culture in the United States. The eleven word portraits of Alfie Judah, a Baghdadi Jew, the middleman of the titular story, Indian Shaila Bhave in Canada, Vietnam vet Jeb Marshall, Trinidadian Jasmine of Indian origin, Danny, Maya, Panna, Roshan and others, the legal, illegal migrants from the different countries, are painted with glittering colours of America. They adopt the American culture for survival.

Jasmine, published in 1989, is the climax of “exuberance of immigration” of the novelist herself and the eponymous title-character Jasmine. An Indian widow, Jasmine migrates to USA and lives the life as Jase and Jane with Taylor and Bud as their live-in partner. She turns ‘Widowhood and exile’ – her prophesy, into all time spouse of somebody in the country of countries and immigrants-America. Bharati asserts in an interview that “we each take from each others’ heritage what we need and sew it together into our own heritage” (Schoch). This is the globalization of culture.

Mukherjee’s young American asset hunter Beigh Masters narrates in *The Holder of the World* (1993) the tale of Hannah Easton who was born in the American colonies in 1670. Hannah travels to Mughal India with her husband, an English trader. She becomes Salem Bibi of Raja Jadav Singh. Hannah says “I was once a respectable married lady and look at me now – a bibi in a sari. We can all change.” (*Holder of the World* 256) Eventually she returns to homeland. In search of a legendary diamond Beigh Masters finds that Hannah is her distant relative.

Leave it to Me (1997) is the fifth novel and deals with the theme of a search for roots, biological and national. The protagonist- Debby / Devi is in search of her biological parents. She is successful in finding out her parents but the truth is painful and disgusting. Abandoned on the Asia hippie trail by her Indian father and American mother Debby is adopted by Italian Americans – DiMartinis. She abandons them to find out real parents and renames herself Devi. Debby / Devi seeks revenge on her biological parents who had abandoned her.

Bharati Mukherjee’s trilogy consists of *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004) and *Miss New India* (2011). *Desirable Daughters* is a tale of three beautiful sisters – Padma, Parvati and Tara, who reside presently in USA except Parvati. She lives in Bombay, India. Tara, the protagonist-narrator-writer and her

sisters “have proved that a daughter is as good as a son” (Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters*, 292). Tara, a Hindu wife, divorces her Indian husband for freedom and loves Andy, a Hungarian. She lives with her live-in partner and her gay son, Rabi. She faces the violence of a terrorist. Finally she joins her crippled husband and serves him. She becomes a mother of his daughter. Indian Tara returns to India to visit the land of her origin.

In *The Tree Bride* (2004) Tara delivers a daughter and lives with Bish, her husband in America. She discovers her namesake her great great aunt Tara Lata, a tree bride, who turns into a freedom fighter and a martyr, whose soul must rest in peace. Tara returns to India for her cremation. Like her, Tara remakes herself as a new American, the blending of the Indianness and Americanness.

Mukherjee’s *Miss New India* (2011), the third novel in trilogy, was entitled initially “*Bangalore by the Bay*” (Edwards 176). It is a tale of Anjali Bose, who set off to Bangalore from a backwater town, Gauripur, to complete her dream. It is like a move to new country. She reinvents herself as an American Angie by imitating American sound. Mukherjee is intrigued by the phenomenal changes in India.

Apart from works of fiction and non-fiction the other writings (miscellaneous) of Bharati Mukherjee are : ‘Kautilya’s Concept of Diplomacy : A New Interpretation’ (1976), ‘Response to American Fiction’ (1980), ‘An Invisible Woman’ (1981), ‘Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists’(1988), ‘Prophet and Loss: Salman Rushdie’s Migration of Souls’ (1989), ‘After the Fatwa’(1990), ‘Political Culture and Leadership in India’ (1991), ‘Four Hundred Year Old Woman’ (1991), ‘Regionalism in Indian Perspective’ (1992), ‘On Being an American Writer’, ‘Two Ways to Belong in America’(1995), ‘American Dreamer’(1997), ‘Destiny’s Child’, ‘Imagining Homelands’ (1999), and *Writers of the Commonwealth*.

It is interesting to note that many critics have focused on some single dimension of Mukherjee’s works such as feminist discourse, cultural construct or immigrant sensibility. Nobody has tried to explore the changing identities of characters through different phases of the existential challenges faced by them while adjusting with the unknown and less known cultures abroad. The researcher feels that there is a need for a detailed study wherein her fictional characters pass from an

expatriate, nostalgic longing to an effort for acculturation in and assimilation with the culture of America. This kind of holistic study, it is believed, would throw fresh light on her achievement.

As a diasporic writer she has focused on the several identities of her immigrant characters. The hypothesis for the present chapter would be: Mukherjee's heroines pass through the phases of expatriate uncertainty, immigrant confidence and finally acquire the transnational hybrid identity of the world citizen. This process of shifting identities poses dilemma of identity on different levels. In the wake of Globalization people have been moving around across borders as a matter of fact. The cultural collisions and encounters are now a day-to-day reality. It is here that this kind of study and its conclusions would add to the knowledge and perception of people giving them insights into the phenomenon of immigration.

The next part of this chapter throws light on her novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* which narrates the return of an immigrant, Tara Banerjee, to India in the hope of recovering her roots and the sensibility of her cultural identity as an Indian. But the wistful, passionate sensitivity of an immigrant for her mother country is dashed to pieces when it comes into direct blows with reality.

The third part of the chapter deals with the psychological isolation and suppression of identity of Dimple in the novel, *Wife*. It depicts the plight of a middleclass girl who marries Amit and migrates to America. Unable to adjust in a new host country, she becomes the victim of confusion, insomnia, tribulations, disillusionment etc. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated and marginalized. Finally, in a fit of frenzy, out of depression and disgust, she kills her own husband.

The last part of the present chapter deals with the protagonist's number of endeavours to re-invent her identities in the novel, *Jasmine*. Through Jasmine, Bharati Mukherjee encapsulates many aspects of the immigrant's experiences in America. The process of transformations as Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane is figuratively centred in the death of one's own self and the birth of new identity. Jasmine constantly reinvents herself in order to suit her surroundings. Every time she changes her name, the change in name indicates the change in her own identity.

II. *The Tiger's Daughter*: An Endeavour to Regain the Lost Identity

When a person visits the alien land, he is an outsider in no man's land and he has to struggle a lot for his survival conquering these new feelings of nostalgia. As man is a social animal, he needs home, love of family members and the acceptance of the society. But when he comes to an unknown land, he passes through altogether an extreme transformation. He loses the complete sense of belongingness and suffers from insecurity and identity crisis. Gradually, he adopts the new ways of life and forms a kind of affinity with the milieu of that adopted land. This makes him forget his own native culture for a time being. But when he returns to his native land he finds that his native land is altogether changed and once again he finds himself an alien in his own culture. This results, once again, into the identity crisis at home. Bharati Mukherjee's novel *The Tiger's Daughter* depicts this rising problem of the immigrants due to multi-culturalism and intercultural interactions. About her aim of writing, in an interview, Mukherjee says:

“...when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society... I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country.” (Sunday Review page 1)

Bharati Mukherjee's works mainly focus on the issues of Indian women and their struggle in migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feelings of expatriates. She herself was in exile from India, expatriate in Canada and an immigrant in the United States. Mukherjee's own struggle with identity works as motivating force behind her attempts to find identity for her protagonists. Her works are her attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage. She is at her best to draw on her experiences of the India and Canada while writing with insight about the New World in America to which she now belongs. She describes her American experience as one of 'fusion' and immigration as 'two-way process' in which Americans and

immigrants are growing by the interchange and experience. Her recent books prove that she is an original writer in American immigrant/multicultural literature.

The Tiger's Daughter, Bharati Mukherjee's first novel published in 1971, is a manifestation of the diasporic community. Tara Banerjee, the protagonist, is the 'other', disjointed community who struggles to hook-on to the nationalized community by entering into the wedlock with an American, David Cartwright. He is wholly Western, the more Tara becomes cognizant of this point of divergence between- the Indian wife and the American husband, the more she is apprehensive of the reality that she is a detachable entity from the nationalized community.

In *The Tiger's Daughter* Bharati Mukherjee narrates return of immigrant to India in the hope of recovering her roots and the sensibility of her cultural identity as an Indian. The tremendous difference between two types of life, leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. When a person leaves his own culture and enters another, his old values come into conflict with the new one he finds. Tara Banerjee, the key protagonist, is a Brahmin girl who travels to America for advance studies. In order to assimilate herself to her new surroundings she marries an American. Tara Banerjee Cartwright is an autobiographical presentation of the author herself who is also married to an American. On this matter she herself explains:

When I wrote, I certainly didn't think of it as autobiographical. But my father felt he recognized himself in the portrait and there were other people just as well. In *The Tiger's Daughter* I was writing about my class, a certain period in Calcutta's history about a class and a way of life that's become extinct. Calcutta soon after changed; the government became communist government. I felt my world was that kind of nineteenth century world that became outmoded in the twentieth century; a class aware of the enormous changes about to come and hoping those changes would not come. (MOSAIC, 2011)

Certain critics might argue that migrants like Tara Banerjee are more prone to assimilate to a common (American) model but at the same time they increasingly retain their ethnicity more than ever. When Tara makes a trip to home in India after being away for seven years, the alien western culture which has almost become a

second self to her is constantly in clash with the Indian culture. After seven years she looks towards India and Indian culture through the eyes of a foreigner. It is the influence of the Americanness that she felt the houses at Marine Drive shabby and filthy now. The Bombay station is felt like a hospital and the passengers in her compartment like circus animals. She evaluates her life and ethics with that of her husband's. Contrary to the cultural belief, her ethnicity comes to direct blows when her conjugal life which was supposed to be based on the standard code of 'union' identified by her right from her childhood, was actually based on the principle of 'contract' as identified by her husband. The wistful, passionate sensitivity of an immigrant for her mother country is dashed to pieces when it comes into direct blows with reality.

Earlier in the novel she expected that her return to India would remove her solitude and discomfort of life 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 quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. (TD 25)

The "Americanization" of her finer sensibilities; her unruffled and frosty response to her nickname 'Tultul'; her response to her relatives' house which seemed elegant and chic to her previously looked shabbier afterwards, startle her. The character of Tara is aghast and horror-struck at this swing in response. She is sandwiched between two personalities and suffers the duality and conflict very divergent to her American life. The moral fiber of Tara's character, like the novelist, suffers from the cultural dichotomy surrendering those thousands of years of pure culture. The 'epidemics, collision, fatal accidents, and starvation' of Calcutta, the omnipresence of her husband David in the midst of rioting rabble and her own westernization over the period of seven years add to her anguish and misery. The husband and wife have different estimations and assessments of Indian encounter, her distress and his apprehension, are seen in one of their joint publications, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Mukherjee, like Tara, felt self-estrangement at a 'loss of identity'.

Interestingly, this novel is also about the isolation of Indian emigrant. A reading of *Days and Nights in Calcutta* reveals that there is a strong autobiographical element in *The Tiger's Daughter*. On another level, *The Tiger's Daughter* is an interesting response to E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. Tara Banerjee, an autobiographical representation of authoress herself, like the Bharati Mukherjee of *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 husband. 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. With reference to this novel, in an interview, Mukherjee says:

“...rootlessness and nostalgia as an outsider in a no-man's land where she (Tara) is struggling for survival. There she 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 feeling 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 pleasure, but along with it the deteriorating social change and her new perspective towards Indian poverty and dirtiness culminate in her discomfort, frustration and disgust.” (Clark Marilyn, 2011)

The novel is a fictionalized story drawing from Mukherjee's own first years of marriage and her return home for a visit to a world unlike the one that lives in her memory. It addresses her personal difficulties of being caught between two worlds, homes and cultures and is an examination of who she is and where she belongs.

The novel is divided into four parts to present the dangling identity 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. The second part deals with Tara's visit to India, 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.

Twenty-two-year-old Tara Banerjee is a daughter of an industrialist known as Bengal Tiger who sends her to America at early age of fifteen because he was afraid of situations at his mother land. Tara felt alienated on the foreign shores. Even in discussions she defended her family and country very strongly. She always prayed Goddesses for power that she should not break down in front of the Americans. Whenever she felt despair and nostalgic, she used to create an India around herself. Once she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more Indian. It was only fate that she fell in love with David, an American, painfully Western man. Like true Indian wife she was very dutiful, but devious in her marriage, she always failed to communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta at her husband's naïve questions about Indian customs and traditions. Due to her split personality she doubts understanding of her country through her by her husband. Her Indianness is found in her use of typical Bengali terms and her habit of retaining her maiden surname after marriage. Her husband was after all a foreigner and she was feeling completely insecure in an alien country. Her doubts and conflicts are resolved by the strength, determination and quiet dignity of her parents. Tara's perspectives about India were refreshed and cleared by Antonia Whitehead's decision to make India a home as she believed that India needs help. She thought that all her hesitations, fears at abroad will be magically erased if she visits her home at Calcutta and comes to India.

In India, through a series of adventures and misadventures she reaches to a final self-realization and reconciliation. Depressed and disgusted with deteriorating situation of India finally she determines to leave for USA to her husband. Actually, the fusion of Americanness and Indianness in Tara's personality results in inability to take refuge either in her old Indian self or in newly discovered American self. She comes with changed outlook to India and her very first landing at Bombay fills her with disappointment. Once admirer of Marine Drive, Tara now feels it as shabby:

“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.” (TD 19)

She finds the Calcutta of which she was homesick has gone through many changes. She was expecting happy Bengal of her childhood where children are running through cool green spaces and aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces; but she was confronted to Calcutta forcing weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty.

“But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggar in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty-two and quick to take offence.”

(TD 25)

The news papers at Calcutta were full of epidemics, collusions, fatal quarrels and starvation- the vision of modern India. A funeral pyre at the river bank, a small beggar girl afflicted with leprosy, beggar children eating off the street, superficiality in the life of her friends, the riots and her claustrophobic rape by the politician, her Darjeeling visit marred by ugly and violent events; all bring out the trauma of her visit to India. She comes across a kind of bewilderment on her visit to India.

Sense of nostalgia is a common phenomenon in the expatriates. Bharati Mukherjee wanted to test Tara, whether she could find her position after staying seven years abroad in the alien culture from her native culture. Expatriates face the strange paradox of being foreigners in their adopted land and strangers in their home land. Assimilation is difficult for the first generation of expatriates in the alien land. Tara has changed apparently but she cannot change internally. Though she had married an American and lived with him, she is not assimilated in the new culture. She becomes homesick and returns to Calcutta. In New York she finds Calcutta very attractive because of her experiences as well as her attitude towards an alien country. When she reached Calcutta, she thought New York was horrible and exotic because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Moreover, the girls like her were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings.

But now, on her return, Tara sees India through the eyes of a Western imagination rather than through her own childhood eyes. Tara's efforts to adapt to

American society are measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life. Her sense of alienation in Calcutta is symbolized by her regular visits to the Catelli-Continental Hotel, from where she views the turmoil of Calcutta, from the safe heights of a tourist, cut off from the real India which seethes below her. The Calcutta she finds now is totally changed under the grip of violence between different classes of society. Such picture of Calcutta shatters her dreams and turns her negative. Unlike Maya of Anita Desai and Kim of Rudyard Kipling; Tara finds nothing of her liking in India, instead she finds emotion of escape in Catelli-Continental Hotel. Tara's improprieties are related by the relatives to her American attitude to life because of her seven years stay in America and she is found as 'stubborn'.

Tara encounters cultural conflicts and begins to wonder as to who is she? Where is her past lost? Where did all her childhood dreams go? The atmosphere, she finds back home is far from pleasant, rather hostile. The Indian ways and the Indianness fail to seek a response from her Americanized self. She begins to disgust everything that she encounters. Here she faces a crisis, a conflicting situation, where there is a struggle between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. Tara's consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India through a new insight, 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. Torn between two contrary emotions, even though Tara declares her love for, she cannot sympathize with her Aunt Jharna's religious attempts to heal her child. Tara is no longer able to feel a part of her family, who belong to an old Bengal which is now lost to her, nor is she able to feel at ease with her old friends who, like her family, belong to a Calcutta which is rapidly fading, and who, in their different ways are as isolated as Tara from the beast beneath them. She is caught in an antithetical tension because at one hand her family and friends consider her marriage as an emancipated gesture and on the other her husband gives her no credits for cleaning bathrooms. After returning from America the antithetical feelings beset her among friends; she feels afraid of their tone, their omissions and their superior oneness, the same friends with whom seven years ago she had played, done homework, loved and dated. Today her friend Reena comments:

“How is it you have changed too much, Tara? I mean this is no moral judgment or anything, but you have become too self-centred and European.” (TD105)

Her friends expect her to tell about their fantasies of American life, but Tara knows the facts of violence and ghettos in the American life and could not escape from them. Actually, she felt that she was a woman only to clean bathrooms at home in America. Among her friends she was a foreign-return; a woman enriched with many romantic experiences at America. But 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.” (TD 62)

Her friends approved her foreign manners, foreign etiquette and foreign fashion; but as conservative racial purists they are, they would never approve her foreign marriage.

“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.” (TD 86)

Tara narrates about her strange experience in America to Sanjay:

“New York, she confided was a gruesome nightmare. It wasn't mugging she feared so much as rude little invasions. The thought of stranger....looking into her pocket book, laughing at the notes she had made to herself transforming shoddy innocuous side into giant fangs crouching.” (TD 69)

Thus, her communication becomes devoid of significance. Tara's every attempt to adjust with her friends fails and she strongly feels the breakdown and invisible gap between them. 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 in the adopted as well as at the native country. 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.” (TD 50)

Caught between two contrasting worlds, Tara has forgotten many of the Hindu rituals at worships. In fact she was always standing beside her mother at performing Pujas since her childhood, but today she has forgotten the steps of the rituals during the prayers. The incident at Shivpuja 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.” (TD 51)

Today she is unable to recite the *bhajan* which she used to sing in her childhood very fluently. The American culture works as an 'invisible spirit or darkness' which kills her simple desire to behave like an ordinary Indian. *The Tiger's Daughter* represents the confrontation between the illusion and reality. Tara had left India in search of her dreams and again nostalgically comes to India in search of her Indian dreams. But for times she is confused with purpose of her trip to India. She is unable to express her state of mind and feelings.

“It was not a topping or sliding of identities that Tara wanted to suggest to David, but an alarming new feeling that she was an apprentice to some great thing or power. If she was pressed to tell more precisely the nature of that power, she would have to remain silent. It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India”.

(TD 130)

In the train she happens to share her compartment with a Marwari and a Nepali. She thinks both of them will ruin her journey to Calcutta. Because of her arrogant attitude in air-conditioned compartments in America she ironically observes the Marwari as a circus animal and the Nepali as a fidgety older man with hair, both ruining her journey. At this situation she missed her husband David. This missing is symbolizing the demand of her American self, which leads her to repentance on her tour to India. After losing the roots in India, Tara finds India merely alien and hostile. She frets about David and thinks:

“Perhaps I was stupid to come without him... Perhaps I was impulsive, confusing my fear of New York with homesickness. Or perhaps I was going mad.” (TD 128)

When she reaches home she records her impressions of New York. She finds New York certainly more exotic and extraordinary in comparison with grubby Calcutta. After reading the letters from her husband David at late night, she feels the real consolation that Calcutta has provided her, which cannot be understood by her husband.

“She thought about Calcutta. Not of the poor sleeping on main streets, dying on obscure thoroughfares. But of the consolation Calcutta offers. Life can be very pleasant here, Tara thought.” (TD 132)

Her inner self consisting two different cultures; two different ideologies makes any reconciliation impossible. She is like a bridge poised between these two cultures. In an attempt to westernize herself she loses all touch with her homeland. Duality and conflict are the two aspects of her personality. The confusion that she faces could also be a result of her unstable self.

Even her father's attempt to entertain her by a picnic to Darjeeling fails to provide her peace. When she realizes that India no longer yields her recognition, she decides to return to New York and books Air India flight ticket for herself. This was the escape she had planned, but destiny could not allow her to escape. Before she takes off for America, she becomes a victim of violence. The violence started as the marchers proceed towards the Catelli-Continental hotel. At the end of the novel Joyob Roy Chowdhury, 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 also gets injured while trying to save Tara. Tara's end is mysterious, but it is suggested that she does not survive in the violence. This is suggesting that a person can escape from the roots either through death or by keeping on hanging forever. This is how Tara's end suggests:

“And Tara, still locked in a car across the street from Catelli-Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she doesn't, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely.” (TD 210)

In this way, Tara's endeavor to relive her past turns out ironically frustrating and results in her disillusionment, alienation, depression, and her tragic end. 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. Homesick at New York she comes to India seeking peace and finds her final peace in death. When death is approaching she is thinking 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 parents in her own motherland.

III. The Exposé of Psychological Isolation and Suppression of Identity in *Wife*

Bharati Mukherjee's most popular as well as controversial novel *Wife* (1975) had attracted number of critical comments. It was written while she was going through her intimidating phase in Canada. One can notice a definite alienation leading to a feeling of dispossession from her depiction of Dimple, the protagonist of the novel. *Wife*, a finalist for the Governor General's Award, deals with the theme of immigration and psychological trauma in the form of loss of identity of Dimple. Mukherjee visited India ten years after her migration to the West. It was by accident that she heard a question. What do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one? (*Days and Nights in Calcutta*) This shaped her creative sensibility and the outcome of it was her novel *Wife*. The Bengali heroine of *Wife* has been named Dimple which literally means "any slight surface depression". But as the novel progresses, one would surely understand that she leaves not just slight depression but a deep wound on the surface of her own fate.

The protagonist, Dimple is a twenty years old, middle-class Bengali girl who is eagerly waiting to be married. She has a romantic disposition towards life, a result of reading novels and film magazines which make her negate the harsh and gruesome realities of life. From the very beginning she is different from other normal girls. She has set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father is looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads. The author has pin-pointed here the dilemma of the Indian woman whose social role, by tradition, is defined by a patriarchal culture. It is the feminine duty of a woman in a male dominated society to subjugate her feelings and desires to the will of her father. Thus she believes that marriage is a blessing in disguise which will bring her freedom, fortune and perfect happiness, things she is too subservient to ask for in her own family: "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love". (WF 3)

Dimple always wishes to live a different kind of life- "an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris" (WF 3). But at the same time, owing to her traditional upbringing, she imagines

herself as “Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends” (WF 6). She thinks that premarital life is some sort of a dress rehearsal for actual life. What pleases her most is imagining about marrying a man who would give her all materialistic comforts. Meanwhile her father finds a suitable boy for her. He is Amit Kumar Basu, a Consultant engineer. He has applied for immigration in Canada and his job application is pending in Kenya. Dimple is excited about her marriage but after marriage her desires remain unfulfilled. Amit's mother is not quite happy with the name 'Dimple' and instead wants to call her 'Nandini'. This aspect of re-christening, although, common in the Hindu tradition, is something which infuriates Dimple. This is the first blow she has to suffer on her real identity. She wonders whether the new name would cease her being the person she is. Can a new name change her identity or make her a new person? She does not like the new name given to her by her mother-in-law. She finds the apartment very small, unattractive; the sight of the wounded crow is exceedingly loathsome to her, but at this stage it is a passive resistance only: "it was this passive resistance, this withholding of niggardly affection from Amit, this burying of one's head among dusty, lace doilies that she found so degrading". (WF 30). At this stage, when she begins to reconstruct her 'ideal' man, on the basis of the faces from magazines, and is unable to identify herself with anyone in the family. Slowly she begins to realize that marriage is something not made for her. The imaginary world that she had so carefully and lovingly created begins to shatter into little fragments. At her in-laws she dislikes everything and her sense of dissatisfaction irritates her. Thus comes a shift in her psychology. She dislikes the new name given to her by her mother-in-law. The apartment is horrid and so is the interior decoration of the apartment. All of a sudden she finds her expectations and dreams shattered. The thought of happiness eludes her mind and she abhors the very idea of being a wife.

To make things even worse, she conceives a child but she regrets her pregnancy. The prospect of becoming a mother infuriates her. She treats it as an outrage on her body and induces an abortion, disposing of that "tyrannical and vile" thing deposited in her body. While she is excited about going abroad, she does not want to “carry any relics from her old life” and wants everything to be nice and new (WF 42). In order to get rid of the vile foetus she begins “eating hot green chillies in the hope that her body would return to its normal cycle” (WF 30). Her fanatically killing of the mice suggests her uneasiness with her own pregnancy. At last she skips

her way to abortion. She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed. (WF 42) This being her first act of assertion marks the commencement of her evolution. She regenerates herself as she has never done before. In view of some critics Dimple's act of abortion is a sacrament of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood. She frees herself from the traditional role of a wife by revoking her motherhood.

When she is admitted in the hospital she receives the news of their migration to the America. She accepts the migration to the US as an omen of change and considers this as an outlet from her painful past. Shortly after her migration to the West she is disillusioned. She presumes that her migration to New York with her husband after marriage would gratify, enchant and liberate her from the expected unhappiness and afflictions. After yearning for a chance to leave behind what she sees as a dull, suffocating middle-class life in Calcutta, Dimple, in the end, experiences migration only as a series of paralyzing social and psychological displacements, a deepening loss of control over her identity that finally leads to mental instability and her killing of her husband.

Dimple was always confused in life and tried to run away from reality. However her confusion is intensified by the West and its cultural conflicts that it turns her into a mental wreck. She goes through psychological isolation and hence lot of mental stress. She is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions, between the American culture on one hand and the Indian tradition on the other. The life of New York seems destructive to her and provides little freedom to Indian house wives. She feels isolated from her new surrounding and finds that there is great disparity between her fantasy world and the real world. Instead of showing signs of improvement, she goes worse. She is frustrated with Amit who fails to provide her not only physical comfort but also emotional comfort. Her frustration increases and she begins having repulsion for Amit. In this novel, Bharati Mukherjee deals with the subject of rootless identity. In fact, her women characters fighting against the retention of identity no longer wish to conform to traditional Indian pattern. They counter cultural alienation but the desire to eradicate the past and adapt to the present weighs heavily upon them. They are in a

hurry to become Americanized, although the weight of their past, their homeland, its histories etc remains somewhere deep within themselves. Dimple now unable to adjust to the new host country begins to suffer from an inferiority complex. To add to this comes about confusion, insomnia, tribulations, disillusionment etc. Her existence becomes something of a torture for her. Very often to escape from this torturing present, she retreats into a nostalgic phase; but again this is a momentary consolation. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated and marginalized. Finally in a fit of frenzy, out of depression and disgust, she takes out the knife from the kitchen drawer, chooses a spot near her husband's hairline and stabs him repeatedly at the same place seven times. Seven stabs are symbolic of liberation from the bondages imposed by matrimony.

Perhaps the killing of her husband can be viewed as being Western, as Mukherjee has declared in an interview:

“Dimple Das Gupta of *Wife* rises to murder her domineering husband, something she never would have done in India. Here she would have killed herself. But in America transformation allows her to kill him. She is my dark-faced female Clint Eastwood”.

(Express Magazine, March 11, 1990)

Superficially, this novel can be read as the story of predicament of an Indian wife, finding herself out of depths, in a foreign country with alien milieu. But I would focus on the issue of the psychological isolation and suppression of identity of the woman in an alien land. The conflict between the protagonist's drive towards a recreation of self and her position as a wife and a member of the small Indian immigrant community is illustrated in the sudden physical isolation that marks the beginning of Dimple's life in New York. Instead of the freedom she has associated with marriage and America, her life is limited to the private space of the home much more than in Calcutta. Mukherjee invests her immigrant characters with a kind of self-excluding attitude, a desire to remain culturally and socially isolated from American society even when extracting a financially better future from it. For instance, in an almost stereotypical scene of 'immigrant experience', the combination of gender and ethnicity is presented as universally known among the immigrant group to signify a definite and particularly vulnerable cultural otherness in an Indian woman:

Meena put her feet upon the coffee table and gave Dimple household hints: wash saris in the bathtub, throw them in the dryer, fold them in half and use spray starch. “But if the washing machine is in the basement of the building, let Amit do the laundry.”

Dimple laughed at the suggestion. “I’m sure he wouldn’t do the laundry! He hasn’t washed a hanky in his life. I wouldn’t let him.” “You want to get mugged? Women in *this* building – not me, touch wood – have been mugged in the basement. If you want to get killed and worse things, then go do the laundry yourself. Don’t listen to me. I tell you these people are *goondas* [thugs].”

“But why would anyone want to mug *me*?”

“It’s all the rare beef they eat. It makes them crazy.” (WF 70-71)

Meena’s mundane anecdote, an archetypal caveat of the literal dangers of assimilation, presents physical isolation not only as a way of maintaining individual physical safety, but also as a collective norm to ensure cultural and religious purity.

Thus, Dimple is identified, first and foremost by her own peer group, as a woman of brown colour whose speech marks her as a cultural foreigner among the intimidating, always potentially violent Americans. In other words, Mukherjee suggests that the experience of constant physical vulnerability is a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, an automatic realization of the Indians’ collective prejudices even before any actual experiences of racially motivated aggression. This is illustrated, to tragic-comical effect, in the scene at a Jewish shop where Dimple, in her effort to be “American”, innocently tries to buy cheesecake and is terrified by the owner’s crabby response, certain that she will pay for her imperfect English and cultural ignorance by being shot on the spot. She perceives her venturing into America proper as being met with the penalty of death, as warned by Meena. Therefore, her attempts to complete her arrival into the host society through two basic ways of cultural interaction, bartering and the consumption of food typical for the foreign culture, only corroborate her socially sanctioned confinement to her home, to a kind of geographic and cultural limbo between India and America. Although some of this image of America as

impenetrable and hostile can be read as Mukherjee's ironisation of the 20-year-old protagonist's naivety on arrival in a new culture, it also constitutes a strong criticism of the middle-class gender-bias within the Indian community as well as the everyday racial discrimination in American society. Both are based on the desire to protect the perceived cultural unity of one's group; the effects of both are most detrimental on immigrant women.

Whereas in Calcutta marriage amplified Dimple's class and familial status and afforded her at least a degree of freedom from her parents, in New York her actions as a wife reflect too much greater extent on Amit's cultural, class and gender identity. Her expectations of a life where everything would be "brand-new" are overshadowed by the socially sanctioned demands to uphold Indian customs within and outside the home; to show cautiousness towards other men, alcohol, and Americans; and to comply with the domestic power hierarchy that maintains her husband's accustomed male identity. She has expected to become a subject instead of an object of the familial system by transforming from a daughter, controlled and defined by her parents and by her eligibility for marriage, into a wife shaping her future together with her husband, Amit. But the same familial structure forms the basis of Amit's negotiation with his new surroundings in the USA, and therefore his view of his wife.

"How about it, Dimple? A weak gin?" She felt that Amit was waiting for just the right answer, that it was up to her to uphold Bengali womanhood, marriage and male pride. [. . .] If she took a drink she knew Amit would write it to his mother and his mother would call the Dasguptas and accuse them of raising an immoral, drunken daughter.

(WF 78)

Amit expects Dimple to be a good Bengali wife, taking care of her home and husband and adapting to life in American society without becoming too influenced, too Americanized. He tells her:

"You're becoming American, but not too American, I hope. I don't want you to be like Mrs. Mullick and wear pants in the house!"

(WF 112)

Mukherjee's satirical portrayal of the husband's preciseness and perception of his wife as an extension of his self-image is arguably simplified, bordering on stereotypical. Nevertheless, the description of the growing physical and psychological distance between the spouses also implies a painful temporal and cultural distance from India that is not gender-specific. Although the focalization in the narrative never allows for the husband's perception to emerge, it is implied through the husband's reported reactions to other Indian women, food, and Dimple's clothes that Dimple as a wife, a personification of the familiar class and cultural circumstances, represents "home" to the husband, who is struggling to re-establish himself as "a man", that is, to regain his economic and social significance in a new society. Therefore, Mukherjee's criticism would seem to be directed, not only towards the expectations or limitations which men place on Indian immigrant women, but also towards the discrepancy between the conventional norm of a husband's authority and the reality of the vast economic, social and psychological changes affecting immigrants' lives on the margins of American society. Brinda Bose claims the following in her essay on the identities of Mukherjee's female protagonists:

"Ultimately, it is not the traditional role models that [Mukherjee's women] reject, but the fact that they can no longer reconcile the models to their circumstances. What drives them to react with violence, then, 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."

(Brinda Bose 28)

A study of *Wife* from psychological point of view shows Dimple in an entirely new light. The already existing neurotic picture in her is precipitated and aggravated by her American life. Her husband does not suffer from any of those conflicts because his psyche is structured entirely differently. What then ultimately interest us is not so much the cultural conflicts but the psychological suffering of the individual to which the cultural conflicts often contribute. *Wife* stands out as a unique fictional work by virtue of its insightful probing into its heroine's psyche. The psychic development in Dimple has been variously but uncritically viewed as her desperate effort to "forget" her Indian roots are necessitated by the demands of American life and her assertion of

independence from her overbearing husband. In this light it can be argued that Dimple suffers from the neurotic compulsion of indulging in abnormal acts in order to conceal her own sense of intrinsic weakness and failure. The novel falls into the category of the modern novel as it presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic individual. Instead of trying to combine the freedom of the individual with tolerance for fellow beings, Bharati Mukherjee chooses to glorify the alienated individual. Rootlessness and unreal existence are the main concerns of this expatriate novelist who has set out to make a deliberate distortion of Indian womanhood. Her women characters are tormented by the possibility of passion, which they mistake for love and self-expression.

As the title of the novel suggests, Dimple tries hard to adjust to Amit's wishes and be a dutiful wife. At the dining table, she picked out the best part of the chicken for him. She is never quite unaware of the fact that he is not the man of her dreams. Life with him, both in India and America, is naturally a big disappointment for her. Marriage has not "provided all the glittery things she had imagined had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies (WF 101). Like any traditionally brought up Indian husband, Amit does not know how to pay a compliment to his wife. He would like her to stay at home and attend to the household chores rather than go out, work and earn. In a word, he appears to be almost a personification of *Ego* in the Freudian sense.

Amit fails Dimple on all planes – physical, mental and emotional. She tries to convey her fears and forebodings to Amit but neither does he try to understand her nor is he capable of rising above a mundane understanding. Dimple's psychological imbalances, her immoderate daytime sleeping, her nightmares, her indecisiveness – everything remains unknown to him up to his dying day. The contrast between Amit's freedom to explore American society and Dimple's isolation from the outside world is emphasized in the description of Dimple's latent aggression and growing mental imbalance. Without any social contacts outside the Indian immigrant community, Mukherjee seems to suggest, it is almost impossible for an Indian immigrant woman to forge an identity based on her actions as an individual; she remains always defined by her status as someone's wife, a part of her husband's identity. Because of the lack of emotional communication between the couple, the rift between them widens day by day. In the mode of utter disappointment with Amit, she tells him:

“I feel sort of dead inside and all you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never listen; you have never listened to me. You hate me. Don’t deny it; I know you do. You hate me because I am not fat and fair.” (WF 110)

Dimple has to cope with her traumatic mental condition all alone. She is shaken by the knowledge that America with all its outward glitter allows Indian wives only to create "little Indians" around them but does not allow them either freedom or fulfilment as evident in the case of Ina Mullick who, despite her attempts at becoming 'a total American', remains a frustrated individual. After this disturbing realization, Dimple sinks into a world of isolation, unable to welcome the bright prospect of setting up a new home even after Amit gets a job. She is completely alienated and has nothing to look forward to. In this new world too, Dimple is hardly permitted to talk of liberation and cannot assert her will. She tries to adopt the modernity and openness of the new land but cannot afford to do so either on account of money or due to her inhibitive and shy nature. She turns towards Ina, Leni and ultimately Milt Glasser in her moments of crises. Ina and Leni fail her as friends. After a few pathetic attempts to merge herself into the new culture by wearing the borrowed outfit of Marsha and by flirting with Milt Glasser, Dimple experiences total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. Torn by the conflict between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation, she allows her mind to be totally conditioned by the commercials on T.V. and magazines so much so she loses the ability to distinguish them from the world of reality. She is caught in a whirlwind of traumatic emotions - her tradition questioning her outrageous adultery and her present confused self-wishing to become American by any means. "I am terrible in crises" (WF 204) she had told Meena and she is true to her words in the moments of her crisis. She had even thought of seven ways to commit suicide in Queens. Her extra-marital affair gives rise to a growing feeling of guilt. Given the right opportunity, she might have confided in Amit but Amit's inactiveness blocks the outlay. Torn by her psychic and emotional tensions, she takes the drastic step of murdering her husband thinking that she cannot bear this sort of life forever. In a stunningly calm and cool manner she takes out the knife from the kitchen drawer and drives it down on a spot near his hairline repeatedly hitting at the same place seven times. Thus she punishes her inattentive husband for his lapses and unceremoniously ends up her disharmonious

marital life. Finally she kills Amit to suppress her guilty conscience and also to feel very American, almost like a character in a T.V. serial.

In *Wife*, Bharati Mukherjee had portrayed the enigma of existence, the hollowness of the Indian institutionalized marriage. Bharati Mukherjee had seen the stereotypical pattern of conventional Indian marriage. Being the writer of modern time, she has depicted in her fiction the problems faced by Indian and other third-world immigrants who attempt to assimilate into North American life styles. Mukherjee focuses upon sensitive protagonists who lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity and are victimized by racism, chauvinism and other forms of social oppression.

American Culture (in the form of violence, soap operas and commercials) also plays a significant role in Dimple's psychological collapsing. She is trapped between two cultures, and aspires to a third, imagined world. Living in her mental isolation, Dimple is not unlike hundreds of American men and women who believe and are betrayed by the promise of fulfillment offered by the media, and who choose the solution suggested by a violent environment. Violence is her fundamental experience of New York and thus despair sets in her life. She thinks "her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an intense desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne". (WF 117) Television introduces her to love, middle-American style. Her T.V. watching stuns her by the incredible violence. It becomes a diabolical trap, a torment without hope of either release or relief. Dimple has been portrayed free and rebelling throughout the novel. She has no inhibition in expressing whatever she feels. The murder of Amit is an assertion of her American identity. The novel traces the enigma of existence, the psychic breakdown of an Indian wife in America. She is neither of India nor of America but a stunned wanderer between these two worlds, yet is trying to attain a distinct identity. Neither does she belong to the T.V. world nor to the world of reality but keeps on shuttling between the two.

Dimple's identity, in the course of the novel, is always suppressed by different commanding authorities. Like so many Bengali girls she has been brought up to believe that her romantic illusions will somehow be made a reality through marital bliss. Even in imagining her husband, she pictures a man from different advertisement, joining the best parts from each. She also expects marriage to lead her

to a new dimension of self-expression. But ultimately her marriage leads her to more complex bondage. Even the discussion regarding her physical features are very agonizing. When Amit's family comes to inspect her, they do not accept the real identity of this girl. They superimpose their own notions on her. They do not accept her as she is. The most important trait of any individual's identity, the name, itself is rejected by them. They do not like the name Dimple, hence change her name as Nandini. This is the first attack on her identity which consequently grows more deeper as the novel progresses:

There were two early hitches. Mrs. Basu objected to the name Dimple which she considered too frivolous and unbengali, and the candidate's sister, Mrs. Ghoshe, felt that Dimple was a little darker than the photograph. With the Basus Mr. Dasgupta flattered and pleaded, smiling at Dimple and saying she is so sweet and docile, I tell you. She will never give a moment's headache. At home, she advised his wife to try more whitening creams and homemade bleaching pastes. After two weeks Mrs. Basu and Mrs. Ghoshe conceded it was a satisfactory match. But they had made their point; Dimple Dasgupta was not their first choice. (WF 15)

All the premarital dreams of Dimple get shattered one after another soon after her marriage. She realizes the discrepancy between the premarital dreams and the marital realities. She tries hard to cope up with all the demands expected towards a traditional wife in the house. Once again she suppresses her own real identity and tries to fit in the borrowed robes of the others. For instance:

To please her husband, Dimple took to wearing bright color: reds, oranges, purples. She wore her hair up in a huge bun and let a long wispy curl dangle behind each ear, like Mrs. Ghose. She even tried to imitate the way Mrs. Ghose laughed and left sentences half finished. She gave up eating her favourite hot green chillies. (WF 42)

Even after her immigration to America, her position remains unchanged and her dreams still unfinished. This new chapter of her life only brings her isolation and loneliness. The gap between the couple is widened in America. With the passage of

time, she starts feeling that she is deceived in marriage and highly insensitive husband like Amit will never cater her dream world.

But Amit would always be there besides her in his shiny, illfitting suits, acting as her conscience and common sense. It was sad, she thought, how marriage cut off glittering alternatives. If fate had assigned her not Amit but some other engineer, she might have been a very different kind of person. (WF 126)

As the time passes in America, Dimple responds to the loss of self-confidence in her threateningly multi-faceted surroundings first by asserting the superiority of her own background. Recovering from the frightening encounter with the Jewish shopkeeper, she remembers her shopping at Lake Market in Calcutta, where twenty hawkers would be grabbing at her for any small change she had.

They would do anything to please her... in Calcutta she'd buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races; she'd never been a communalist. And so long as she had money to spend no one would ask her what community she belonged to. She was caught in the crossfire of an American communalism she couldn't understand. (WF 60)

It is also worth noticing that Mukherjee's interpretation of relationships between women is the fact that Dimple's experiences with Indian women have a similarly alienating effect on her. The specific intersection of class and gender structures which also produce Dimple's identity is revealed in Dimple's contacts with other Indian immigrants, especially the other wives. The majority of them continue to base their identities on their relatively privileged, class-conscious attitudes towards social propriety, loyalty to one's roots and adherence to Hindu tradition. To Dimple, their views on gender roles, woman's place in the immigrant community and in the surrounding yet unknown American society at first seem reassuringly familiar, but soon become inadequate and ill-suited to her struggle between her old self-image and an immigrant location where the middle-class social codes and gendered division of the private and the public are at the same time ardently defended and repeatedly contested. Mukherjee describes Dimple's growing sense of alienation and fear when

faced with the other women who embrace motherhood, maintain a loyal and idealized view of India, and dismiss those among them deviating from the established social codes by their appearance, their independence or their Americanized views on femininity. Dimple is equally incapable of identifying with the few radical women in her social circles who break these unspoken norms.

Earlier in the novel, the killing of the rat by Dimple symbolizes her anger, frustration and depression embodying life of a pest. It gives rise to her intention of committing suicide. Symbolically it suggests her secret self and her conception of herself. Gradually, she gives up her submissiveness and docility and bursts out into violent outbursts. Her destructive tendency is displayed in her killing a goldfish in a glass bowl. Her neurotic behaviour is seen through her actions like destroying the rat, her own foetus and the plastic flowers of Meena Sen and Marsha's cactus and roaches. Mukherjee suggests that Dimple's loss of sanity may be attributed to her sense of alienation from her own self identity and American culture; she doesn't understand the later, and neither seems to accommodate her. Dimple's sense of loss is heightened by her seduction by Milt, a moral lapse that is as inimical to her status and self-identity as it is insidious to her role as a wife. Her sense of her own subservience reiterates her marginality, which is further compounded by her continuing frustration in adjusting to her new environment and new experiences. Her descent into madness, in the final analysis, is to be seen as both an affirmation and a denial of her identity as a victim of cultural displacement and patriarchal discourse.

The final act of killing her husband is an outburst of her prolonged suppressed self identity. It is an outward manifestation of her powerlessness and her inability to out of the rut that she finds herself in. The murder has liberated her from becoming a prisoner of ghetto unbearable to her free thinking mind as she descends into depression, madness and murder. She does however not fail, completely because she acts and asserts her individuality apart from the role governed by a cultural history: "Individual initiative, that's what it came down to," she finally realizes, "and her life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself" (WF 212). Dimple's act of violence can also be understood as an act of rejection and resistance. Though murder is a misdirected act of self assertion of her identity, it is the result of her long standing suppression, subjugation, depression, negligence and rootlessness.

IV. *Jasmine*: The Chronicle of Re-inventing New Identities

“There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake one-self. We murder who we were, so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams.”

(Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 178)

After the gap of fourteen years, Bharati Mukherjee made a welcome return to the novel form with the publication of *Jasmine* in 1989. The novel explores female identity through the story of an Indian peasant woman whose path takes her from Punjab, to Florida, to New York, to Iowa, and as the novel draws to a close she is about to set off for California. With each new move the protagonist reinvents herself with a new name – Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane – and with each new name she moves closer to her dream of being an American, of belonging to the New World. Jasmine’s ongoing journey is an effective device which highlights her rootless position and her search for identity. The move to California, which resonates with hope and invests her with the aspirations of America’s early pioneers, suggest that Jasmine has finally found her identity in America, which, perhaps more than any other country, can contain her many identities without contradiction. The researcher tries to analyse each dimension of her identity crisis that she personified during her diverse transformations.

Among all her fiction works, perhaps *Jasmine* has much similarity with the life of its creator, Bharati Mukherjee. An immigrant lives through several lives in a single life-time. Bharati Mukherjee herself admits in her interview that an immigrant’s life is in fact a series of reincarnations. As she mentions:

“I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States.” (Interview, Iowa Review, P.18)

The protagonist, Jasmine, is very much like Bharati Mukherjee herself, as she says:

“I think of Jasmine and many of my characters, as being people who are pulling themselves out of the very traditional world in which their

fate is predetermined, their destiny resigned to the stars. But Jasmine says: I'm going to reposition the stars." (Schoch, 2008)

Jyoti was born into a traditional family eighteen years after the partition riots. Although she is undesirable female child, she is bold and intelligent, the first ever likely student of Masterji fit for English education. In the very beginning of the novel, the astrologer forecasts her widowhood and exile in the future but Jyoti refuses to accept the fate. Right from her childhood, she longs for a 'special' existence and had the conviction that she is special, beautiful and intelligent. She does not believe in the traditional ideology. Hence she longs to flee from the dirty, mean chores that women are expected to perform as a part of their duty:

On the far side of the country and by the buffalo enclosures, the maid servant's pretty little girl was scooping up fresh dung, kneading it thick with straw chips, and patting them into the cake size of her palms. She would slag the cakes down on the adobe walls of our kitchen enclosures and leave them to dry into fuel. (JS 16)

From the very beginning she was very conscious of her identity. Her psyche was born out of two complexes – her existence as a woman and her so-called derogatory status for being a 'village girl'. She asserts very frankly:

"...that big-city men prefer us village girls because we are brought up to be caring and have no minds of our own. Village girls are like cattle, whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go." (JS 39)

She comes in contact with Prakash who is a modern city man who believes in trashing traditions. After marriage she becomes a true wife in the Indian sense of the term identifying her husband's wishes with those of hers. At that time Prakash was trying to get admission in some American Institute of Technology. He was very broad minded and insisted her to call him by his first name. He proves to be an ideal husband any girl would yearn for. He, with his generous efforts, transformed Jyoti into Jasmine – the sweet smelling flower, thus pulling her out from the rotten Hasnapur stench. Her new name is a mechanism of the transformation of her new identity. Jasmine experienced eternal bliss with Prakash. He altogether transforms Jyoti:

He wanted to break down the Jyoti I'd been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine. He said, "You are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You will quicken the whole world with your perfume."

(JS 45)

Prakash is a forward-thinking modern man. He believes in the concept of man-woman equality. The harmony in the marital relationship of Prakash and Jyoti is expressed through the nomenclature too. Both their names signify 'light'. He always advocates a whole new concept of freedom and individual identity. But the cultural constraints that constitute Jyoti's psyche let her not to dissolve her identity in the unconventional progressive ways of Prakash:

"He wanted me to call him by his first name." Only in feudal societies is the woman still a vassal; he explained. "Hasnapur is feudal". In Hasnapur, wives used only pronouns to address their husbands. The first months, eager and obedient as I still had a hard time calling him Prakash, I'd cough to get his attention or start with. "Are you listening?" Every time I coughed he'd say "Do I hear a crow trying human speech?" (JS 51)

Though Prakash is quite broadminded, it is revealed that he superimposed his own ideas and way of thinking on Jasmine. It is very evident that he holds her in his fist and tries to remould her identity as per his own wishes just like Lady Caroline's act towards Valmiki in Kamala Markandaya's *Possession*. In Jasmine's case the truth is to be admitted that even before entering the trans-cultural spaces and encountering the trauma of alienation on the alien land, her integrated psyche was shattered as she says:

"Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities." (JS 70)

Jasmine was indulged in the day-dreaming about her future life in America with Prakash. Unfortunately for Jasmine this dream, full of happiness, does not last long. The astrologer's prophecy comes true and terrorists kill Prakash on the eve of the young couple's scheduled departure for the west. At once all the dreams of Jasmine shattered in a moment. Her life was totally changed through this blow of the

destiny. But she was a born fighter hence she didn't lose hope and decided to set out to fulfil the mission of her husband. Ultimately, she plans to visit the supposed institute where Prakash had to get admitted and to burn herself a 'Sati' at the campus of that engineering institute in Florida. She flaunts all conventional taboos of widowhood and starts on the path of achieving the mission, to America. She leaves for America on forged papers knowing not what future holds in store for her. For her, immigration comes as a serious challenge in her life because she is to migrate as "a village girl going alone to America without job, husband or papers" (JS 97). On her journey to America she faces some of the harsh realities of life.

The second phase of Jasmine's life begins after her migration to America. For her the shelter in America was a device to escape the shadows of the past, the process to ensure a renewed identity, to fulfil the dream of her late husband. In America, after her landing, she was received by the captain of the ship known as Half Face. He tried to seduce her for being an ignorant woman. She pathetically begs to him, "my husband was killed, please don't do anything to me" (JS 102). The horror of rape infuriates her, and out of rage she sliced her tongue and with blood dripping tongue, she stabbed Half Face. The murder of Half Face is a mode of revenge no doubt, but it is also a method of justice. In fact, it is the first endeavour of Jasmine to maintain her feminine identity as an Indian widow. In this rape encounter she experiences in herself the strength and fury of Goddess Kali – the sucker of evil men's blood.

After the horrible memories of rape and murder, Jasmine's second encounter with Lillian Gordon in California adds new dimensions to her identity. The maternal care of Lillian gives a new strength and purpose in the life of Jasmine. She calls her 'Jazzy' and such a loving and informal address encourages her to resume a new spring in her life.

In her odyssey, the next stage is her encounter with Prakash's professor – Mr. Vadhera. She becomes his servant and caretaker of his elderly parents. Though she is young enough to be a high school student, she is forced to wear saris with patterns that reveal her widowhood. Thus, she feels uncomfortable in that house because she wants to get away from the claustrophobic traditional 'Indianness'.

“I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian everything Jyoti like...to them, I was a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude.” (JS 128)

There is a contrast between tradition and modernity through the contrast between Mr. Vadhera’s wife Nirmala and the protagonist, Jasmine. She comes to know that Devinder Vadhera far from being a real professor is a sorter of human hair. The reality of immigrant life is unfolded to her and she rationalizes Vadhera’s act. Finally, unable to sustain the conservative India represented by the Vadheras, she abandons the Vadheras and sets forth for the new life.

In the new ambience with Taylor and Wylie Hayes, at Claremont, she works as a nanny to their adopted daughter, Duff. Jasmine becomes more Americanized, more confident of her proficiency in English but her instinctive Indian values do surface now and then. However, she appreciates the Americans for their democracy of thought and their sense of respect even for those doing menial works. She was impressed by the American civilization where everybody is performing his duty without any hesitation. She is treated as a family member. When Wylie addresses her as a ‘caregiver’, she gets the first realization of her own self identity, an identity different from being Prakash’s wife or Vadhera’s dependent:

“I was a professional, like a school teacher or a nurse. I wasn’t a maid-servant”. (JS 155)

There is a gradual transformation in Jasmine but sometimes there is conflict between Jasmine’s two selves. One part of herself still holding fast to traditional Indian values of life and the other an adventurer in a capitalistic culture. Jasmine is still united to Indian ethos much more than the New World. The stories she tells Duff were about gods and demons.

Although she got an established home, she does not consider it as her destination and she is forced to run from New York. Her stay at Taylor’s was the most fruitful period. She becomes conscious of her own identity as Jase. As Pushpa N. Parekh states:

“This period in Jasmine’s life is the most restful and comforting, emotionally and psychologically, intellectually however, it is a phase of minute observations of complex inner deliberations on, and keen involvement in her new environment.” (Parekh, 113)

Unfortunately, Jasmine becomes instrumental in bringing about Taylor and Wylie’s separation. Taylor is not as possessive as generally typical Indian men are. When Wylie leaves, Taylor accepts her more quite normally. Jasmine falls hopelessly in love with Taylor but the past intervenes her present when she sees Sukhvinder, the murderer of Prakash, and she decides to leave Claremont for Iowa.

As usual Jasmine sets out for one more unknown experience of life without knowing what would happen in the future. In Iowa she meets Mother Ripplemeyer, the Iowan counterpart of Lillian Gordon. As the time and circumstances changed, she changed her name also from Jasmine to Jane. She likes Iowa because it is very much like Hasnapur. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but steady transformation of her identity. Here she is changed – one who had murdered Half face for violating her chastity, now not only willingly embraces the company of an American without marriage. Bud is attracted towards her because she is exotic, mysterious, intensely sexual, representing a form of the orient. She changed Bud’s life completely. He is now a divorced man totally enchanted by her and courts her because for him she is the very embodiment of Eastern mystery.

In *Jasmine*, the transformation in identity of the protagonist begins with her decision to travel America and continues through the numerous encounters in the new place. Beginning from Half face, through Lillian Goron, Mr. Vadhera, Taylor and Wylie Hayes to Mother Ripplemeyer and Bud she always re-invents a new identity of herself. Like a modern, liberal minded woman she does not feel guilty leaving Bud, but is looking forward to a new horizon of rebuilding herself:

“It isn’t guilt that I feel, its relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked window. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove.” (JS 240)

In the end, Jane is expected to become Bud Ripplemeyer's wife and the mother of their expected child. But her increasing sense of isolation and loss of self in this suffocating world is heightened by her inability to share with him her memories of reflections of the past. In evaluating her past and present, and envisaging her future, she confronts the complexity and multiplicity of her identity as an immigrant woman. She herself is very perplexed about her own identity:

“I still think of myself as caregiver, recipe giver, and preserver. 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, weakest links. How many more shapes are in me, how many more selves, how many more husbands?” (JS 215)

In her restless vagrancy from one place to another, Jasmine betrays her gripping alienation and disharmony with the American society. Her Indianness seems to emerge to the surface as Indira Bhatt comments:

Even Jyoti to Jasmine, to Jase and Jane may appear to be real transformations of the personality of the protagonist; From Hasnapur to Jullundhar to Florida, Manhattan, Iowa may appear to be moving from old world values to the brave new world. But the person we see at the end of the novel moving away with Taylor, is very much the same person we encounter at the earlier stages in the novel. (Indira Bhatt, *American Literature Today*)

Travelling in the America, Jasmine develops familial relations at different stages with Professorji, Lilian Gordon, Wylie and Taylor and then Bud and Du. She personifies different woman at different stages, and for each stage she encounters a man. As she says:

“I have had a husband for each of the woman I have been, Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane, Half face for Kali.” (JS 216)

The novel ends with Jasmine's decision to leave Iowa for California. She runs to Taylor's car to begin her journey to California without calling Bud to say good bye

or even writing him a note. Through Jasmine Bharati Mukherjee encapsulates many aspects of the immigrants experiences in America. The process of transformation as Jyoti, Jasmine and Jane is figuratively centered in the death of one's own self and the birth of new self.

Jasmine constantly reinvents herself in order to suit her surroundings. Every time she changes her name, the change in name indicates the change in her identity. In the course of the novel, she is called by eight different names – Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Nirmala's cousin sister, Day-mummy, Jase, Ma and Jane. Faced with a loss of identity at each stage, Jasmine manages to evolve a new identity at the end. She is in the struggle to preserve her identity as a woman and as a sensitive individual. Her voyage in the different cultural spaces with her shifting identities, connecting within it the quest to realize her perfect individuality irrespective of geographical locations in order of patriarchy, is the central motif in the life of Jasmine. She nowhere makes a compromise with her own self as a woman and as an Indian. In her interview with Bill Moyer, Bharati Mukherjee expresses her faith in this metaphorical theme of Indianness :

“If Conrad had the ‘Heart of Darkness’, I’m exploring the heart of light through Jasmine”. (Anindu Roy, 136)

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