Chapter V

CONCLUSION
Today Indian Diaspora has emerged to be distinctive transnational communities, bridging the ‘local’ and ‘global’ together. It is made of experts in different fields like IT, Medicine, Space Technology, Engineering, Management and so on. The improvements in communication and transportation technology have facilitated further advancement in these networks among the Indian diaspora in general and regional/linguistic/ caste diasporas in particular. This is manifested in the socioeconomic, cultural and political networks through transnational and global organizations among the overseas Indian communities, involving their homeland, and their kith and kin around the world. During the past decade, these contacts are further facilitated through the encouragement and intervention of the government of India and several state governments in various political as well as economic matters. It is obvious that, though the Indians are separated by distance, they remain linked to one another through ties of real or imaginary kinship, shared resources, and cultural exchanges. They preserve and recreate their identity in new homes across the globe.

The Indian diaspora literature is certainly a useful resource for studying the psychology of the migrants. It speaks of diasporic experiences that the diaspora undergoes resulting from geographical displacement, alien customs, problems of adjustment, longing for the homeland and the burden of beliefs, myths and heritage. These writers have double obligations. They write about their homeland for the natives of the country they have adopted and also speak of their diasporic experiences to the readers of their homeland. Diasporic literature can well be studied from Socio-Cultural point of view.

The issues pertaining to identity, nostalgia, longing and desire for home have become the central preoccupation of the diasporic writers. Language, culture and history are the three major constituents of diasporic identity. They form an emotional link with the homeland. The identity of a person is not some sort of a fixed rigidity but rather a continuing process, evolving from one stage to another: the moment it is threatened, damaged or lost, it creates an identity crisis. The threat to identity comes when the loyalty of person is divided. His duties are conflicting and his roles incompatible. The public disapproval follows which makes him marginalized, lonely, alienated. He then is driven to be neurotic or schizophrenic with a split-personality and his identity is threatened more. However, it is of utmost importance to keep in
mind that it’s always not necessary to be a migrant or to settle down in an alien land to encounter the identity crisis. One can also encounter the issues pertaining to identity in his own homeland, in his own culture too. For example, as in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, the peasants who have become landless due to industrialism and migrate to various cities of India, suffer the same identity issues as the immigrants.

A large bulk of Indian diaspora literature focuses on the issues of identity. There is the emergence of a new type of identity which is based on humanism, tolerance and secular outlook. The notion of identity is an important focus particularly in the works of women writers who give highly volatile expression to women’s issues in sociopolitical construction of the nation. Many writers who have left their homelands describe their immigrant experiences, predicament of displacement, questioning or celebrating their encounter with the new alien countries. The settings of these narratives are quite varied. V. S. Naipaul takes readers to slums in Mumbai, Trinidad, England and African countries. Salman Rushdie’s settings are often Pakistan and India, and England. In Kamala Markandaya’s novels the landscape stretches from rural India to America, London etc. Similarly, the characters of Bharati Mukherjee belong to different countries ranging from South Asia, Europe and American continents. Jhumpa Lahiri’s short stories are set in Urban American as well as in Indian settings.

A common strand that runs through the lives of all the authors undertaken in this study is the multicultural experience, though it shows considerable variations in each case due to temporal and spatial changes. Though, all the three authors write from outside India, yet their immigrant experiences are quite different and so are their creations. They touch upon various strands of diaspora in their fictions which are influenced by their imaginations as well as experiences. The dual marginalization is visible in the works as well as the lives of these three female authors. However, it is also important to note that the theme of identity crisis is the major preoccupation in their works. Kamala Markandaya portrays identity issues faced by poor peasants due to industrialization, suppression of identity of a poor shepherd boy by a western woman and identity crisis of an old man in the alien country whom he considers his own homeland now. Bharati Mukherjee is mainly preoccupied with the identity of women in the changing times in her works. Jhumpa Lahiri focuses identity issues
faced by the second generation diasporas in her short stories and novel. Moreover, she portrays these issues in the backdrop of inter-generational conflicts.

In Kamala Markandaya’s fiction, the emphasis is as much on the portrayal of principal characters as on the background – economic, political, cultural and social. She is able to create living characters in meaningful dilemmas. The novels of Kamala Markandaya fully explore and delineate in terms of situations and character the ‘vital, formative areas of individual consciousness that project the images of cultural change’. Inter-cultural conflicts break through the facts on intra-cultural tensions, ultimately lead towards the identity-crisis of the particular character in her novels. The shades of cultural interaction, however, become the essential mode of perception in her novels. All the three significant novels undertaken in this study render dramatically the tension of identity ensuing from biculturalism.

All the three selected writers have expressed their great and serious concern for the loss of traditional and human values in the wake of the sweeping western influences and the expanding urban outrages. They have shown in their works how a spiritual vacuum has formed during the transitional phase and how the old traditional values were disappearing without proper replacement by new ones. However, they expose this predicament in different ways. The conflict between tradition and modernity undoubtedly forms a major thematic concern in the novels of Kamala Markandaya too. She had studied this confrontation deeply with a historical perspective and also traced its origin to the very beginning of the process of modernization. The exceptional nature and genius that distinguishes her from other writers is her keen understanding of the shift in values that has been taking place in post-independence India. Her genuine and unbiased depiction of the uprootedness of agrarian communities on account of the rapid growth of Westernization stems from her keen and clear-sighted awareness of the social and historical changes that have been taking place in modern Indian society. This uprootedness is depicted as the identity crisis of various characters in her novels.

The characters in the novels of Kamala Markandaya are extracted from different strata of society viz., peasants, and middle class educated women as well as from the royal families. Nevertheless the common thread in all her characters is that the quest for autonomy for the self, coupled with nurturance for the family and fellow
feeling for the larger community of men and women, a venture in which the women are confronted with several obstacles emerging mainly from the irregularities in the social system along with economic difficulties. As the women battle with these forces they develop mature vision of life. While the desire of autonomy and nurturance co-exist simultaneously leading to disillusionment at every stage, yet her characters firmly refuse to lose either hope or courage.

On making a deep perusal of Kamala Markandaya’s novels, one sees her intense awareness of her identity as a woman and her attention to feminine problems. Markandaya’s objective is to help women in general to attain identity, dignity and recognition for their contribution to society. She portrays dignified women who are self sacrificing and suffer a lot for the sake of her family. However, that’s not a case with the women of Bharati Mukherjee who are self assertive to their own demands. Her woman like Dimple even aborts the child in the womb by skipping rope. She even does not hesitate, in the state of frenzy, to kill her husband. Likewise, the second generation women depicted by Jhumpa Lahiri are also very modern and self demanding. They have many love affairs and extra marital relationships too. Markandaya is not a radical feminist and her novels are not an outright condemnation of a repressive male dominated society calling for radical reconstructing of male-female roles. Nor are these naturalistic accounts about the victimization of women. Her novels are not a propaganda for reforms but they reflect the ambivalence of change in female characters as well as male characters too. In this regard one can keep in mind her portrayal of identity-crisis of the male characters like Valmiki in Possession and Srinivas in The Nowhere Man.

Kamala Markandaya’s protagonists are in search of something positive. She has portrayed a gloomy scenario of Indian life due to changes in social, economic and political spheres yet she believes that togetherness and mutual understanding can create a meaningful existence for mankind. In each of her novels she has portrayed strong characters who are prepared to meet the challenges of life come what may. The novels of Kamala Markandaya reflect the awakened feminine sensibility in contemporary India. In her novels, she traces her protagonist’s journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, from self denial to self-assertion and from self-negation to self-affirmation.
The significant thing about Kamala Markandaya’s novels is that in all of her novels the characters of women are glorified. The key protagonists in most of her novels are the characters who are in constant search of their identity for meaning and value of life. In some of her novels she presents an existential struggle of a person who denies to flow along the current and refuses to submit her individual self. Markandaya's strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective; her prose style is mellifluous and controlled.

The most apparent and strong conclusion, that can be drawn after a detailed and analytical reading of Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction is, that her fiction has become chronologically more American, in an almost parallel graph to her own increasing identification with her new homeland. This change in Mukherjee’s identity which is subsequently reflected in her fiction can be more clearly deciphered if we were to divide her creative writing into three stages. These three stages serve as a tool to delineate the evolution in her work as well as her own persona. Mukherjee distinguishes between the ‘aloofness and expatriation’ and ‘the exuberance of immigration’. By making this distinct differentiation, she is implying that the former maintain their own ethnicity, whereas the immigrant prefers to be influenced and adopted by his host country.

Mukherjee’s writings of the first stage can be classified as being the writings of her ‘Expatriation or Alienated’ stage and these have mainly been written during her early ‘dark’ days in Canada, when she felt most alienated from her surroundings. Despite a white husband of French Canadian descent, Mukherjee suffered racial discrimination in Canada, and hence her works written during this period foreground emotions of alienation and angst through their protagonists. These writings include *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975) and the Canadian stories of the *Darkness* (1985) collection. The second stage marks her ‘Turning Point or Ambivalent’ stage, and here her writings display a definite ambivalence towards both her home country, as well as her adopted country. The works of this stage are *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977), *The Sorrow and the Terror* (1987) and the American stories of *Darkness*. It was after her return to America from her trip to Calcutta, that she seemed to have discovered that ‘home’ for her meant North America. The third and final stage
of her fictional evolution can be termed her ‘Immigrant or Identification’ stage, and
the works of this stage show an increased desire on the author’s part to ground herself
firmly in the American tradition of immigrant writing. These works also shows an
enhanced familiarity and satisfaction on the writer’s part, with her adopted homeland.
The fictional works that this stage comprises are The Middleman and Other Stories
these works many of her protagonists identify more with their adopted homeland than
they do with the country of their origin. This change has certainly come about because
of author’s own gradual assimilation into the new country.

The writing style of her earlier novels like The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife was
influenced by the British writers she had been exposed to as a student at Loreto
College, Calcutta. An expatriate writer like V.S. Naipole was the model that she chose
for her initial fiction, but later, as she grew to identify more and more with America,
her writing style also became more Americanized. Her recent works display a dark
sense of humor through the use of short energetic sentences which are often laden
with manifold meanings that need to be decoded. The protagonists of these later
works reflect the changes in her personality. Her later heroines like Jasmine get
‘transformed’ with the act of migrating to the New World, unlike the expatriate-
protagonists of the earlier two novels who succumbed to feeling of alienation in their
new homelands. Like Jasmine who ‘rebirths’ herself with each new identity, and goes
from being Jyoti to Jasmine to Jase to Jane, Mukherjee too evolves through her
fictional protagonists from being like Tara in The Tiger’s Daughter to Panna in
Darkness to Jasmine in Jasmine. Each of these are different steps in Mukherjee’s
identity building process, and are consequently reflected in her fiction. Her fiction has
moved from the alienation that Dimple felt in America, to the need to discover and
succeed at all costs, which is the hallmark of Jasmine. Mukherjee too seems to have
moved in the same direction, as she is an ‘American writer’ with a hint of her Bengali,
Indian past.

Today Mukherjee is considered a spokesperson of immigrants to America
from varied immigrant communities and through her works she wants the reader to
know that, these immigrants are changing America as much as they are being changed
by their host country. “It’s always a two-way transformation”, she says (Jouvert
interview, Sept 1996). What she as an immigrant writer is striving for she says in the same interview, is “transform as well as be transformed by the world I’m re-imagining and re-creating through words”. She first began by writing about India as someone who had exiled herself from it, moved on to depict the Indian expatriate vulnerability to racism and sense of alienation in North America, and finally made herself the spokesperson of all immigrants in America regardless of their nationality.

In the earlier expatriate fiction of Kamala Markandaya the main protagonists always return to India, to discover their identities. However, in Mukherjee's fiction, her protagonists invariably choose to return to America, even Tara, the heroine of her first novel aspires to return to her husband David and her life in America. This change in the mindset of diaspora writer is the remarkable shift if we look at the Indian Diaspora literature chronologically. The protagonists in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya always consider their adopted land as an alien country where they do not belong at all. They constantly feel a sense of nostalgia and yearn for their homeland back in India. They try very hard to befit their feet in someone other’s shoes. For example, Valmiki in the novel Possession tries earnestly to cope up the commands of his mentor, Lady Caroline Bell. He learns the western ways of etiquettes and tries to be like her. But, ultimately, he returns to India leaving behind all the materialistic pleasures offered to him by the western culture. In the same way, Srinivas, in The Nowhere Man is an alien, rootless and outsider whose alienation results from the estrangement from his native culture and his failure to adopt the westernized manner and mode of living. Throughout the novel he is probing for his root and identity.

In comparison with the characters of Markandaya, the characters in Mukherjee’s fiction are more practical in that sense. They, gradually, assimilate into the culture of the host country. It should be mentioned that in Mukherjee's fiction, collision between cultures often ends in violence, but through violence comes a transformation and re-birthing of a new identity, like in the case of Jasmine, for example. In multicultural discourse, notions of ethnicity frequently operate simultaneously as markers of identity and as barriers to cultural integration. However, Mukherjee's fiction overcomes some of these barriers, as her protagonists rush to be part of the ethos of the melting pot. Mukherjee herself is committed to her American citizenship, and as a result most of her protagonists after she got her citizenship in
1988, also celebrate their ties with the new world. By making a ‘new identity’ for themselves, Mukherjee’s Indian characters do not remain passive; instead they take control of their lives: Tara leaves home, so does Jasmine, and Dimple becomes more assertive. All these characters want to seize control of their lives and move from alienation to identification synonymously with their creator.

Women are the worst victims of cultural collisions, as they fall prey not only to cultural marginalization but also to multiple patriarchies. Mukherjee has tried to explore the complex nature of feminine psyche in the order of patriarchy where woman seems to make her futile efforts to carve her own spaces, may it be within her native cultural milieu or in the form of escape in an alien culture. The place and the cultural scenario may change but the horror of patriarchy remains rooted in the female mind. In the postmodern context, the ideas of nationalism and patriotism have altered significantly and in place of the ‘homing desire’, a possibility of ‘fluid identities’ is created. As a result, women break out of the patriarchal limits, and reject any ‘hyphenation’ of identity to celebrate a liberated identity. For them, crossing the border is a mark of liberation from all oppressions. Having lived in various cultural milieu, Mukherjee’s creative sensibility has undergone a number of changes. Various themes such as east-west confrontation, tradition versus modernity, find their way in her writings. However, she concentrates and emphasizes on subjects such as quest for self and survival of self. Each novel of hers can be considered to be a voyage of discovery, wherein identity crisis and survival stand at the core of it. She is concerned about the physical and psychological survival of her characters, especially the women. The women's world is beautifully portrayed by her and the crisis faced by women is not only regional but universal. Mukherjee's diasporic characters are caught up in the conflict between two countries and its codes. This living between two cultures creates a need and desire to fashion new identities.

Most of the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee are constantly faced with the spectacles of ceaseless frustration in the unending series of hope and disappointment. It is impossible for them to live in such an anguished state. Because of the psychic needs and the demands of the outer world, each one of them evolves a strategy to get rid of this anguish and despair. Their understanding of the present situation is disturbed and distorted by memories of the past and expectations of the future. Instead
of trying to live in the present, they move backward into the past and search for happiness in the memories of the bygone days. They scuttle between the past and the present as they withdraw from the demands of reality and seek easy mode of escape from these pressures. They eternally refuse to live fully present and their inner psychological urges prompt them to search for a new imaginary world that gives them consolation, escape and some kind of an alternative reality. Most of the characters of Bharati Mukherjee are highly sensitive and has a subjective nature. Embittered by the present and with no hopes of a satisfactory future, most of them show a market preference for escape into time and space.

Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation immigrants unlike Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee. Hence her characters are not subjects of Biblical forecast like the Jews, or forced participants of the carnival named colonization where economic, political, cultural and religious hurly burly affected people as whole communities or races. Lahiri’s characters are individuals who managed to pursue their self-centered dreams, the pioneer participants of globalization. All the members of her nation of imagination are exiles in some way or the other; they have chosen or been forced to make a new beginning, to discover a ‘New Foundland’ and hence pass through the dilemma of identity. Situated in the cusp of two temporal punctuations, their only means of survival is by oscillating between fact and fantasy, tradition and modernity, Past and Present.

In Lahiri’s Unaccustomed Earth or even in her earlier works the two generations of diaspora are virtual strangers. The first generation migrants remain clustered together, sharing their collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland. Though they left it for the possibility of distinctive life in a tolerant country, yet they know that they are not accepted by their host society and therefore feel insulated from it. In order to avoid undesirable conflict with the norms of the host country, the diasporas specially the men who are compelled to enter the mainstream through their jobs try to camouflage. In ‘Unaccustomed Earth’ Ruma’s father manages to look like an American. But for the next generation the adaptation was easier, for being born in their parents’ hostland they were far removed from any sentimental attachment to their supposed homeland India. The first generation in their dual loyalty live with utopia in contrast to dystopia in which actual life is lived. For
the next generation the alienation is stark and strange. Unlike their parents who share through community activities, they are introverts, having no common grounds they cannot open up to their parents. For example in *The Namesake*, though Ashima and Ashoke attempt to uphold their cultural identity, Gogol is preoccupied most of the time with how to break with his cultural past to identify himself with the American culture.

Lahiri’s very careful use of names, places, attires, food makes the job easier than any definition and that ambivalence is achieved which is the hallmark of diasporic experiences. In Lahiri’s works we have families whose birthplace is their motherland while their children, born in their parents’ hostland would call that homeland which is not their place of birth. The idea of nationalism has different resonances for the two generations of the same family. For the first generation who tries to adapt to the conditions of their hostland while living with a different memory, the sense of alienation is natural. But the next generation, the hostland being their birthplace, adopt naturally but still they are doubly alien – they are alien at their birthplace, but they never wish to return to their parents’ birth place because they are so far removed culturally that they appear like aliens from a different planet. Diasporic experience seems like a complicated puzzle in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri.

In comparison with other two writers, Jhumpa Lahiri is an objective story teller. She presents predicaments of diasporic way of life, but does not like to comment on them. She presents basically the destinies of second generation diaspora as she herself belongs to them. She presents nostalgia in various ways, but due to the precise objective narration, the readers may not feel its presence. The expression in Jhumpa Lahiri’s works is replete with the images of loss and longing. The narratives are necessarily the narrative of pain. She alludes to her constant listening to the tales of struggles her parents or the friends of her parents encountered in their lives. She feels her sense of pain, alienation, and marginalization, to be a kind of inheritance from her parents. Home, homeland and food are the most significant elements of nostalgia. As such the metaphor of food and home make their presence strongly felt in Lahiri’s works.

Her characters waver between the crowded, dusty Bengal lanes and sophisticated yet masked American identity. Hers is a very objective and content
world full of a painter’s diversity, faithfully played with reserve and absolute impersonality. It seems her characters put on a plastered face; a kind of arrangement and design to make up in life without revolt. Both *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies* share her objective and detached craftsmanship. She understands the state of the displaced protagonists to be puzzling yet never portrays them in extreme passion or melodramatic tone. As a writer, belonging to the ‘neo-class of immigrants’, Lahiri has reached a new paradigm of bicultural experiences. Hence, her perception of cross-cultural experiences shows drastic shifts in her focus and concern regarding transnational identities and their cultural acclimatization.

Two of the diasporic women authors analyzed in this thesis, Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, belong to Bengali background and one, Kamala Markandaya, belongs to South India. But, all of them have experienced a cultural drift more than one nation – Kamala Markandaya over India, England; Bharati Mukherjee over India, Canada and America and Jhumpa Lahiri over India, England and America. The study of the selected works of them reveals remarkable similarities and differences in their attitudes and vision. They derive their material primarily from their inward and outward (subjective and objective) experiences of life. Their themes have a profound socio-cultural and psychological significance. Moreover, they have succeeded in capturing the transitional phases of the rapidly changing identity of contemporary women in India. The divergences between these writers emerge only when the individual works are set against the specific psychological and socio-cultural milieu. A survey is made of the identity issues of these three cross-cultural authors and the displaced characters in their works. It reveals the different aspects of diasporic experiences and how these experiences further diverge into preservation and appropriation under the sway of globalization which is a challenge to cultures, to marginalized characters and their identities.