Bharati Mukherjee uses caustic wit, racy style, genial comedy and shrewd observations of human behaviour to fix all the follies and foibles of the society with humour, wit and satire. Her novels represent the expatriate sensibility. The world of her novels alone offers an understanding of the ambivalent present not only in the psychology of the protagonists but also that of the author; this helps us understand the satiric interludes, the ironic juxtapositions, the shifting point of view and also the final disintegration. There are a number of satiric interludes in The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife. In Daughter it is the marriage arrangement, the bargaining over dowry and the sacrificial marriage ceremony. In Wife it is marriage, man-woman relationships, the little India in America, the Pseudo - westernization of the Indians, the immigrant life style and so on.

Mukherjee constructs her characters’ expatriate and immigrant consciousness which is ever shifting and fluid. In inscribing the female subject, she foregrounds an identity – in – process, aspiring towards a matured artistic vision. In their developmental process her protagonists dismember the past, the self, sexual identity, male-female relationship and most importantly sexual violence and the conflicting self of an individual. Sometimes, as is the case with
Tara and Jasmine, the dismembering is followed by re-construction and re-membering, involving change in spatial and temporal perspectives of the subject – the evolution of the female subject from a self-divided, conflictual identity to a mature woman – Tara, Jasmine, Hannah and so on.

The retrospective autobiographical consciousness of the first person narrator is a split consciousness as evident in *Wife*. In it, the subject is shown to be divided by time, by voice, by language and by male ‘gaze’ (Jasmine) in a way that constantly questions subjectivity or identity. This dismembering and re-membering in her works can be seen to be working on two levels: structured by the quest motif and by the narrating I’s quest for a form to tell of that chaos. Her concern is to be the one leaving, going away, not the one left, rejected.

Mukherjee’s women characters are mainly expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. They share the expatriate characteristics of being ill at ease both in the native culture and in the alien one. They represent the dilemma faced by expatriates. Her novels are representative of the expatriate sensibility. She presents some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions. A close examination of her fiction reveals that the Western and Indian worlds give them an authentic and objective perspective with a combination of malice, charm, irony, and sympathy. They push both their
protagonists to the edges of their worlds and liberate them for a new world order.

Focusing on the lives of characters migrating to North America, Mukherjee produced meditations on cultural displacement, on the pleasures and regrets of exile and on, what Elleke Boehmer terms, “the exuberant clash of immigrant cultures” (240). Her novels trace the location and exploration of the contingent, fluid forms of identity that are of displacement. She probes the processes of transculturation, the tragedies, misunderstandings and comedies that define the contact zone and the disruptive effect that migrancy can have on the individual.

The female subject of her novels is pre-occupied at the roots of women’s psyche with the banalities of either cultures or a desperate attempt to deny and subvert either cultural codes and is caught in the nauseating dilemma of their essential rootlessness. Thus where home becomes a matter of perspective, of displacement, adaptation and identification, they become essentially homeless. Disjunction and dislocation become both a psychic pathology and an objective reality.

Mukherjee looks at India from the perspective of third world writers, expatriates and immigrants. Her India figures in her narratives as a part of
memory, as a Third World place, as a fragment of nostalgia. In her works they depict a liquid society, a society in-flux. Her protagonists cross geographical and psychological boundaries in an essay to search their roots remembering/re-remembering/dismembering their ancestral ties with their homelands. She shows the awakening of the heroine into political awareness and consciousness of their bodies and how they relate to the culture.

Mukherjee laid importance on the condition of the Indian woman immigrants in America. In an Interview she admitted that her stories are about psychological transformation, especially among women immigrants from Asia. Her attitude to expatriation, immigration and exile has changed over years. She had first felt herself an exile or an expatriate and then she felt that America’s melting pot approach to imagination was better than Canada’s stance on multiculturalism. She is obsessed by the experience of expatriation and also by immigration. Her *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a story of an expatriate returning to her home country, *Wife* is a novel about immigration and psychological crises, *Days and Nights* poses the questions of identity, *Darkness* is about South Asian immigrants, *Middleman* has a tone of affirmation of belonging, *Jasmine* is about an immigrant girl, *The Holder of the World* is about an immigrant from the Puritan World, *The Tree Bride* is about Tara, an immigrant in both India and America and *Desirable Daughters* is about an immigrant called Tara. Dimple in
Wife, jasmine in Jasmine, Hannah and Bhagmati in The Holder of the World recurrently defy estrangement in the society they live in and get the answer in rejecting cultural stereotypes. They develop a life of their own outside the home. The more they learn about themselves, the more individualistic they become. Like Easton Hannah all are self-possessed, intelligent and desirable as far as their sense of assimilation is concerned. Hannah is dissimilar to all the rest. She remains inadaptable to the new environment. Jasmine is initially unable to adopt the American culture but soon adjusts herself to the new way of life. Dimple is perturbed and her migration to USA proves disastrous to her hyper-sensitive nature. Hannah proves to be a pure product of time and place.

Mukherjee’s novels show the change in her work from a primary concern with the Indian expatriates’ experience in the new society to a situation where the expatriate becomes an immigrant. The expatriate is slowly assimilated into the host society – at all levels, psychological, sociological and linguistic. Her protagonists break the umbilical cord with the homeland. In Wife Mukherjee dramatizes the opposition between two cultures, the despair of prejudice and the pre-consciousness of immigrant status; but the psychological fragmentation, alienation, and insanity that her protagonists experience are viewed not only in terms of culture shock but also as an “intense experience of female biological, sexual and cultural castration, and a doomed search for
Mukherjee’s novels deal with nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of ‘expatriation’, fragmentation of the self, exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation and negotiation. Her *Desirable Daughters* marks a new trend in her writings. In her earlier novels, leaving one’s native country for an alien land meant liberating oneself from the clutches of a convention-bound society. In *Desirable Daughters* the novelist acknowledges the alternate ways to belong. In addition to that, she focuses on cultural hybridity, simultaneity and the third space of enunciation which are markers of the post-colonial condition of existence.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee interrogates cultural essentialism and celebrates cultural hybridity. She also challenges the stereotypical notions of national identity. Tara is a cultural hybrid, who is at home in both the cultures. She has ‘affiliation’ with the host culture but that does not in any way hinder her ‘filiation’ with her homeland and native culture. Padma is an Indo-American who believes in hyphenation. She is an Indian cultural ambassador in the United States. Parvati is a western educated Indian woman of the conventional
mould. She is contended with her role as the woman of the household. These are the three distinct and different ways to belong in the new world.

_The Holder of the World_ has the theme of sexual awakening through another lover. This theme can be seen in _Wife, “The Lady from Lucknow”_ and in “A wife’s story”. It is conveyed through Hannah Easton’s relationship with the Raja of Devghat in _The Holder of the World_. This novel criticizes canonical American literature’s white centredness, by forcing the recognition of the immigrant experience and the multi-cultural aspects to American history. Hannah, who returns to America as Hester, brings with her Black Pearl, the daughter of Hannah and Jadav Singh. Black Pearl is Indo-American; her very existence signifies the merging of cultures. The novel inserts immigrant culture and history into the American canon. In it, Mukherjee is claiming a place within the canon of American literature for immigrant writers like herself. It is in this sense that she sees herself as an American writer; by calling herself American. She is not naively adopting an alien identity but is refusing a hyphenated existence as an Indo-American writer. On the road to becoming immigrants’, the novelist feels her protagonists have to try out new identities and this often necessitates the death of their former selves. This is her artistic way of showing the psychic damage that often takes place as immigrants change and adapt.
In the earlier novels, especially in *Jasmine* this change was brought about through violence since her immigrant characters often suffer dislocation as they grab at the change to reinvent themselves in the new world. This phenomenon is connected to the diaspora, and the transplanting of people from one nation to another. However, in *Desirable Daughters*, this diasporic violence is absent as by now the concept of the immigrant protagonist has already matured, and Mukherjee no longer finds it necessary to portray the angst of the transplanted individual. There is more restraint, and the style too is more leisurely and controlled.

Some ethnic and gender stereotyping remain in Mukherjee’s characterization. Mukherjee’s sympathetic Indians are largely female. Her Indian men are unromantic, overwhelmingly acquisitive, and slightly ridiculous. Their rejection by their romantic, sensual, and sensitive women in her short fiction emphasizes the crumbling masculine power structure in the South Asian immigrant community in the United States. However, Mukherjee’s social critique remains politically oblique in that her satire by passes the feminist emphasis on women’s anger.

Mukherjee’s presentations of her situations and people are characteristically American. She places her immigrant characters in real American settings. Her characters are real, modern, and life-like. They are
typical representatives of men and women, particularly of the Third World countries, who cherish the dream of emigrating to America. Their situations and the difficulties they face are realistically portrayed.

Mukherjee’s protagonists have to go through deep suffering in order to realize their ambitions and to experience a sense of liberation. They have to shed all their inherited racial, religious and cultural heritages. Consequently, new relationships between characters of the opposite sex from different countries are forged.

Mukherjee seeks to contribute through her novels to the process of change that has started all over the world. She radically reconstructs the social thought. She depicts the determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate. Her women wish to affirm their independence and autonomy. They are perfectly capable of assuming new roles and responsibilities. They wish to build a world which is free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that rests on the principles of justice and equality and is truly human. She attempts to trace the development of the protagonists trying to find a place of their own in the world at large either through rebellion or acceptance of realities. She suggests that if one has to assimilate oneself to the mainstream culture of the adopted land, one should forget one’s past.
Mukherjee humorously delineates her characters adapting to an alien culture and the stress that accrues when colliding cultures clash. As Adrienne Rich says, “to assimilate means to give up, not only your history but your body.”\(^3\)

Mukherjee’s protagonists like Jasmine, Tara and Hannah are ready to give up both. They make much of the fact that Third World immigrants are able to love and compress in one lifetime, the development of centuries. Hurtling through time, they move from a feudal village to the global metropolis. Her women make progress in their path to attain self-realization. For instance, Tara of *The Tiger’s Daughter* marries an American but on returning to India she feels alienated among the filth of Calcutta; Dimple in *Wife* blunders her way toward liberations by having an affair with a white American man but ends up in madness and stabbing her husband to death; in *Jasmine*, Jasmine deserts her common law husband and opts for freedom and an open relationship with another white American man, in *The Holder of the World* Beigh Master and Hannah seek superficial relationships to a meaningful encounter with Indian men that allow them to be fully themselves and in *Tree Bride* and *Daughters* Tara seeks a new life by having an affair with Andy. Such themes operate in Mukherjee’s novels with an intention to portray changes that take place among south Asian women in the new world.
Thus Mukherjee portrays the changing generations in her society. Jasmine, Dimple, and Tara assert the autonomy of their self through violence. They find vision in their life by voicing the voiceless. In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee does not probe into the inner consciousness of Jasmine but makes the novel examine the American life from immigrant’s point of view leaving aside the American experience of the immigrants. Asian males in Mukherjee’s view tend to be too preoccupied with economic transformation. Thus, they are less interesting as fictional subjects. Her women run the whole gamut of emotions in their bid to adjust and immerse themselves into a new world. Hence her major contribution lies in raising questions related to women and their position in and outside their societies with the changing cultural, societal, religious, and economic perspectives.
REFERENCES

