CHAPTER III

MAPPING IDENTITIES

Expatriation is a complex phenomenon that involves not only a geographical journey, but also an emotional severing of bonds with the homeland, followed by transplantation in a new, alien country and social environment. Immigrant writers and their narratives are interesting studies in re/construction of identities in the migration paradigm. The search for an ethnic identity is grounded in a connection to the past. In the process of the ethnic's transformation and translation within an alien culture he or she negotiates ways of reinventing ethnic identity using memories from his or her ethnic heritage. The changes, which the ethnics undergo in a diverse social milieu get manifested in the creative writings of immigrant writers, especially in the genre of fiction. Such novels evidently portray hyphenate characters often with dual affiliations and hybrid cultural identity. Using theories in social psychology, which attribute behavioural changes resulting from social interaction as a key factor in the psychological make-up of an
individual, we are able to discern the changes in the psychological make up of an individual in the process of immigration to an alien land. Most of the characters created by Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee in their fictional narratives are prototypes of their own selves: hyphenated and double visioned.

Walter Ong in his Introduction to *Three American Literatures* remarks: “Literature offers representations of experience. The literary traditions of numerically and ethnically defined minority groups in the United States, offer representation of the *sui generis* cultural and historical experiences of the groups from which they derive” (1). In his pioneering study about the immigrants in U.S, titled *Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin describes the emotional and psychological conditions which the uprooted individuals are subjected to, in an alien cultural milieu. According to Handlin the pressures of realising their identity, in such a diverse cultural environment, together with the financial problems besetting the newcomer, can lead to mental sickness ranging from mild depression, hallucination, fantasizing, to severe insanity, schizophrenia, or other maladaptative behaviour. The fiction of Amy Tan and Bharati Mukherjee reveal interesting insights into the ways in which the ethnicity and culture of an individual determine his/her identity. The analysis also reveals the manner in which cross-cultural encounters impact upon the immigrant psyche.
The first generation Chinese immigrants portrayed by Tan, in her first two novels, *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, are typical Chinese mothers, like her own mother, Daisy Tan. These elderly immigrants Suyuan Woo, An-Mei, Ying-Ying, Weili, Helen, only effect structural assimilation, that is they make changes in their lifestyles or in the matter of language and dress. They do not suffer an identity problem which becomes the malaise of the children of these immigrants who have had an American education. The second-generation American born daughters, June, Waverly, Rose, Lena, Pearl, are fictional representations of the Chinese American who are caught between Old world ethnic values and New world cultural norms. It is these immigrants who suffer the problem of dual identities and affiliations. The problems of the new immigrants of the post-sixties differ from their ancestors in their attitude and self concept. These new immigrants are educated, and hence, do not lack the self- esteem which characterise the early immigrants. As a result, the new immigrants from Asia are willing to conform to American standards yet retain their ethnicity. This is also the case with second generation immigrants who are educated in America. The rich cultural heritage of India\China prevents these races from total assimilation in to an Anglo- American culture. Mukherjee’s characters belong to that category of immigrants who have darker skins than the white ethnics, and hence it becomes
difficult for them to slip unnoticed into mainstream American life. But since they are better educated, and more sophisticated than the average American, they resist the Anglo-American conformity beyond a certain degree. We see this best illustrated in the act of violence committed by Mr. Bhowick in the short story "A Father" (Darkness) Thomas J. Carabas remarks upon this in his essay "Tristes Tropisms":

Unlike earlier immigrants who quietly acquiesced to their Americanisation, they insist in entering the new world on their own terms. They want the best their adopted land has to offer (53).

This is also the case with the new immigrants from China. Being inheritors of an ancient culture, they are unwilling to effect a total assimilation. Their physical characteristics segregate them from mainstream American society. But they wish to claim the American citizenship and so they become Chinese Americans. It is interesting to see how they translate and transform themselves in order to accommodate themselves to the culturally diverse environment.

Mukherjee's women characters Tara, Dimple, Jasmine, Hannah, Debby manifest different degrees of changes and adaptive patterns in their personality in the cultural interface. This chapter aims to analyse the impact of migration, especially a cross-cultural
one upon the immigrant psyche. The analysis will, in the process reveal the psychological maladies afflicting the Asian in America. Tan's novels focus on the tension or intergenerational conflict between the two generations as a result of differences in culture and social environment. While the daughters find themselves confused and disturbed by the generational conflict, the mothers feel alienated from their own daughters, and this causes mental distress, because the matrilineal tradition of the Chinese establish strong bonds between mothers and daughters. Tan has effectively captured the two categories of Chinese American women separated by culture and generation, in her novels *The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

Mukherjee's characters, like herself, have grown from expatriation to immigration. Her earlier protagonists, Tara and Dimple, show the typical expatriate syndrome, of nostalgia for the homeland, and alienation in the new sociocultural environment. Dimple is a case study of the peculiar stress induced by a cross-cultural social environment. Her later characters, Jasmine, and the Asian immigrants in her short stories are those who have learnt to accommodate themselves within the multicultural, multiethnic American society. Jasmine is a semi-autobiographical character whose trajectory from Indian widowhood to American citizenship is the typical story of the frontier saga.
The longing of the expatriate for the homeland is a recurring motif in most emigre fiction by writers dispossessed, and displaced from their home land. Raja Rao's, *The Serpent and The Rope*, Anita Desai's, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, or the novels of V.S. Naipaul are examples of this sensibility. Mr. Bhowick in Mukherjee's short story 'A Father' exhibits similar nostalgia for India and Indian life. *In Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee has stated this as: "the pain and absurdity of the exile who experiences the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a Desh" (287). In the case of Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter*, her homesickness in the initial days at Vassar is so severe that she suffers depressions and hallucinations. It is aggravated by the subtle and covert racism she experiences in the college and hostel. For instance "if her roommate did not share her little bottle of mango chutney she sensed discrimination" (11). A number of theories in social psychology have stated the influence of social environment upon the individual psyche. Alfred Adler has stated that human beings are inherently social being motivated primarily by the desire to belong to, and participate in a group (*Abnormal Psychology* 82). Recently a psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan evolved a theory, that personality developed as a result of interpersonal interactions of the individual at various stages of his/her life. This, as well as, other theories in social psychology, point towards the possibility of the Asian immigrant in America
being subjected to psychological and emotional stress which can become detrimental to his/her mental health.

Mukherjee illustrates this in the life of Tara in The Tiger's Daughter. After Tara's hostel mates have vacated for the summer, she feels extremely lonely and homesick. She begins to suffer fainting spells, depression and occasional bouts of hallucinations. She imagines herself "sleeping in a large carton on a sidewalk while hated men made impious remarks at her. Headless monsters winked at her from eyes embedded in pudgy shoulders" (The Tiger's Daughter 13). Eventually, her mental health causes concern to her academic advisor who recommends a summer school at Madison. Here Tara meets David Cartwright, and marries him. Though Tara's seven years of married life with a Caucasian has effected a degree of assimilation, the nostalgia for the homeland persists, and finally her husband agrees to allow her to visit India, because she had "to work this out" and get it over with quickly (62). However, the return of the ethnic to the native land can prove more distressing than pleasant, as anticipated, because the native often finds himself or herself a foreigner in the native country. Tara perceives the "foreignness of spirit" on her visit to her native city. It is reaffirmed during her visit to see a destitute relative Aunt Jharna. The vituperative words of the elderly aunt to a humanitarian concern of Tara, is a typical reaction which the "foreignreturned"
invokes in his/her country. "You have come back to make fun of me.... What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mlechha husband?" (36). Mlechha is a Bengali word connoting 'dirty'. It is used to refer to non-Brahmins and has an underlying subtextual reference to casteism prevalent in Indian Society. Tara Banerjee belonged to the Bhadralok community which was the aristocratic caste in Bengal. Therefore her husband the American was considered "dirty" by the Brahmin community. These words add to the hurt and disillusionment which Tara had felt from the moment her feet touched the Santa Cruz airport at Bombay.

The schism in Tara's personality, caught as it were, between her American self and her Indian self, confronts her, in the prayer room of her parental home in Calcutta. After agreeing reluctantly to join her mother in the morning prayer ritual, Tara discovers that she has forgotten the ritualistic prayer and ceremonies. This was not a "simple loss". Tara "feared this forgetting of prescribed lines." It was a "little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center" (51). This is symbolic of Tara's identity crisis; it had been her problem right from the beginning of her stay in America. Even her semi-assimilation through marriage to an American had not made her feel any less divided or confused.

Tara's visit to India, becomes increasingly painful and distressful to her expatriate psyche. Her interactions with her long
time friends and companions fail to bridge the gulf she perceives between herself and them. Her friends let slip their disapproval of her. They suggest her marriage to have been “imprudent,” “that the seven years abroad had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (55). The inherent loneliness of a misfit had been felt by her, even in America, while living with her husband David Cartwright; for the Indian Tara, had felt distanced from her Caucasian husband. Once when she had tried to explain and share her background with David he had expressed “those things” embarrassing (48). Added to this, the dilemma of dual affiliations experienced by the ethnic on the return visit to the native land, and the changes there, bring confusion and distress to the expatriate psyche because they always carry a romantic picture of the native country / village / city in their mind. In addition, the time of Tara’s visit to Calcutta was a most inopportune period in the history of the city because Calcutta was at that time going through the throes of a socio-political upheaval: aristocratic land owners were being killed by slogan-shouting workers. Eventually Tara too, falls victim to the violence which had become a regular feature of the city. At the end of the novel we see Tara locked inside a car outside Hotel Catelli Continental while all round her marchers indulge in arson and killings.
Thus Mukherjee’s protagonist in *The Tiger’s Daughter* remains an expatriate, with dual affiliations and conflicting cultural affinities. Her much anticipated return to the native land proves distressful and tragic. From her first revulsion, upon seeing the beggar in the Bombay Railway Station, right through her unhappiness with friends and relatives; together with her sexual abuse in the hands of a stranger; culminating in her imprisonment inside a car, amidst a rioting mob on Camac street, Mukherjee succeeds in portraying the psyche of a typical expatriate.

The return visit of the ethnic to the native land, is a typical phenomenon in ethnic narratives. Tan also, has employed it in her novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Hundred Secret Senses* but with a different outcome. In the former, the return visit paid by June Mei Woo with her father, proves extremely pleasant and happy. June is persuaded to undertake this trip to see her half-sisters whom she has never met before by the Joy Luck Club aunties. Although they meet beneath the cloud of the recent tragic death of their mother, yet the three siblings delight in the family union, as they are eager to hear about their deceased mother whom they do not remember. They are thrilled with the facial resemblance they discover between themselves. They feel instant bonding.
A similar visit, undertaken by Kwan in *The Hundred Secret Senses* to Changmian, is a much anticipated event in her life. She had left the mountain village at the age of eighteen, and was returning to it at the age of fifty. It had been her desire to bring along her half sister, Olivia. The visit proves extremely eventful, as it ends in the mysterious disappearance of Kwan, at the same time that it helps to bring about a realisation in Olivia, about her ethnic ancestry. Kwan like Tara is lost in the native city/village. She is never found, despite intense search operations carried out by investigating officials sent by the American embassy, at the request of her half-sister Olivia. These incidents reveal, that the return visit of the native to the ethnic country is most often fraught with sadness, disillusionment, loss and irrevocable tragedy.

If *The Tiger's Daughter* ends with the protagonist caught in the vortex of a political riot, symbolizing metaphorically the irreconcilable conflict within the expatriate, the novel *Wife* depicts the Asian immigrant, Dimple, caught in the same dilemma, although at a more extreme level. In the case of Dimple, a sheltered girl from Ballygunj, Calcutta, who is already prone to neurotic behavioural patterns, the cross-cultural collision destroys her frail psyche.

Dimple's psyche is prone to depressions, hallucinations and fantasizing, even before her marriage and consequent emigration to
America. In her house at Ballygunj she suffered bouts of hallucinations. "Sometimes when she entered the bathroom in the dark, the toilet seat twitched like a coiled snake. Tight, twisted shapes lingered at her from behind cupboards or tried to wrestle her into bed" (Wife 12). Her reaction towards her pregnancy, also appear abnormal from the cultural point of view; for an Indian woman is usually delighted at motherhood and looks forward to the first born, hoping it to be a son. Dimple's wilful rejection of the growing "thing" within her womb, is an indication of the self within her which yearns to be liberated from the binds of a stereotype image of Indian wife\mother. Thus in Dimple, the conflict between ethnic traditional beliefs and American individualism gets played out in her self, and ends in the disintegration of her psyche into schizophrenia. Cultural collision, undoubtedly aggravates the mental illness of this newly married Bengali woman. The internalisation of Indian cultural values instils in her the desire to be a Sita-like wife to Amit. At the same time her inner self revolts against the demands of maternity. Therefore, she kills the baby growing inside her womb because she desires to go to America without carrying any "relics" from the past (42). This wilful rejection of the past can also prove damaging to the immigrant's psyche as is seen in the case of Dimple. The severing of all ties with her family and friends in Calcutta, after her stay in America, plays a
significant role in her psychological breakdown. For the ethnic, the past is important for the formation of self-concept and consequent identity formation in an alien country. Dimple tells Amit that she never thought about her parents or friends in Calcutta, and that she was disturbed by this. She repeatedly tells Amit: "If I could brood about Calcutta I'd be okay.... The trouble is I am not even dreaming any more" (112).

Once settled in America, surrounded by the Indian community, Dimple endeavours to live the role of a conventional Bengali wife. She is always dressed in Indian costumes, preferably sari. Any attempt to become western like the Indian, Ina Mullick, draws the warning from Amit: "I don't want you to be like Mrs. Mullick and wear pants in the house" (112). But unknown to Amit or their Indian friends Meena and Jyoti Sen, Dimple sampled a bit of American liberations by going out with Milt Glassner, wearing jeans and sweater. She had found the courage to wear those dresses with the encouragement from Milt. The outing in borrowed clothes gave her all the thrill of "an enemy agent in disguise... in [her] borrowed get up" (174).

Dimple's brief foray into a western life in the company of Ina and Milt only increases the conflict within her. Her inner self gets caught in conflicting cultural-ethical values. Her social orientations had conditioned her to remain Indian, but her exposure to
American society makes her long to break the bonds of orthodoxy and become another Ina Mullick. But this would incur displeasure from her husband, as well as disapproval from the Indian community and Dimple wished to emulate the model of a Hindu wife which was Sita. The disparity between reality and idealism proves damaging to this immigrant. Assimilation and accommodation are important factors for the mental health of ethnics in an alien country. Both these processes need to be properly balanced by the individual. Often in the case of Indian women the idealised image conflicts with the socially different external world they are confronted with, in America. Karen Horney, observes: “The idealized image is a decided hindrance to growth, because it either denies shortcomings or merely condemns them” (Our Inner Conflict 98). Finally this cultural conflict gets played out in the protagonist’s withdrawal from the real world, into a make believe world fed by T.V. serials and advertisements. During her lonely hours at the apartment in Manhattan after Amit left for work she ruminates: “How hard it was for her to keep quiet and smile though she was falling apart like a very old toy that had been played with ...” (212).

That Dimple suffers from cultural disorientation, is evident in her fear of making friends with the neighbours in Manhattan, her inability to shop for essentials in the market, and her fear in using
a self service elevator without a “lift man on a stool to press the button for her.” “She could not live with people who didn’t understand about Durga Puja” (114).

Psychologist Adler (1870-1937) believes that, humans being basically social, are motivated primarily, by a desire to belong to, and participate in a group. Immigrants like Dimple, who are not sufficiently educated to pursue a career in the alien country, or who are too diffident to attempt a social interaction with the dominant majority, feel alienated and lonely in the host country. A good family support system often helps to curb this alienated feeling. This is how the Chinese mothers in Tan’s novel who formed The Joy Luck Club survive in America. In the case of Dimple, conflicting cultural role expectations, her own individuality divided between cultures, all have a cumulative impact upon her frail mental health. She slips into schizophrenia and Amit becomes her first victim. The existential estrangement she had been feeling, since quite sometime leads to angst and she makes Amit the target of her frustrations. Cultural conflict, also termed cultural collision by psychologists, has been discovered to be a causal factor in mental illness among migrant populations of the world. The severity is dependent upon the diversity of the culture of nativism and host country. Carson and Butcher state that a person’s maladaptive behaviour might be
caused, not only by biological factors but also by abnormal conditions in the Social environment (*Abnormal Psychology* 82).

Thus Dimple's attempts to create a new identity - untraditional, liberated and American, meet with failure, and therein lies the tragedy of this Asian immigrant. Though "cultural roots retain their hold in insidious ways" (*Critical Perspectives* 39), Mukherjee's protagonists - Tara, Dimple and Jasmine attempt in different periods of time to acquire an Americanness that will liberate them from the need to conform to traditional norms and patterns. If in Tara, this acquisition of Americanness is manifested with her choice of an American husband, in Dimple it is exhibited in her brief sexual affair with Milt Glassner.

The expatriate dilemma portrayed in the character of Tara and Dimple is resolved in the exuberance of immigration, which Mukherjee celebrates through her later protagonist Jasmine, and more recently with Debby Di Martino in *Leave It to Me*. More than Tara or Dimple, Jasmine is the best example of the hyphenated immigrant who has learnt to create an alternate reality which is neither purely ethnic, nor totally American.

Violence is ubiquitous in the novels of Mukherjee; perhaps because her protagonists are inhabitants of a society (U.S.) which is known for its culture of violence. As Emmanuel Nelson remarks, "Mukherjee's immigrants, unwary or unable to adapt, are victims or
contributors to America’s mindless violence" (56). Tara is a victim of violence in her own country, while Dimple unleashes violence in a fit of insanity, upon her own husband. Depicting psychic violence in the lives of transplanted women is a speciality of Mukherjee. This is seen in most of her creative writings through characters such as Dimple, Jasmine, Debby.

More than Tara, Jasmine is pushed from one violent incident to another: beginning from her fateful fall that produced a star scar on her forehead after the astrologer predicted her imminent widowhood, to her rape in the hands of an American whom she called Half-face. Jasmine survives the disasters that befall her, and lands in America with the desire to commit Sati with her husband’s clothes and books. Being a Hindu, the sacrificial death of the devout Hindu wife, undertaken on the funeral pyre of her husband is the dream with which Jasmine enters America. But the country exerts its influence upon this immigrant from the beginning. Despite all the hardships she experiences on the steamer boat, travelling as an illegal immigrant, and her rape by Half-face, she severs the unhappy past lives and Kali-like rebirths into a new life. Kali is the birth/death Goddess who pre-dates the ancient religious culture of Hinduism in India. To realise Kali is to realise life as death and death as life. When Jasmine kills Half-face, she becomes the avenging Goddess kali. She acquires a ‘Kali-like’ appearance:
mutilated blood-dripping tongue, sudden rage. She is suddenly filled with archetypal power. In such a condition she transcends personal reactions and becomes a vehicle for mythic justice. Thus archetypal imitation increases her resilience for the nomad life that she follows afterwards in America.

It is the philosophy of rebirth, which becomes the dominant motif in this novel. It is reiterated in the image of the broken pitcher on the jacket cover of the novel *Jasmine*. According to Indira Bhatt “It symbolises the rebirth of Jyothi time and again. In this life she is born and dies many deaths, but is reborn many times acquiring a new though fluid identity” (*The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee* 176).

In Jasmine’s story of adaptation and survival, Mukherjee seems to emulate Bernard Malamud her role model. Like Malamud, Mukherjee demonstrates how one can escape guilt and adapt the patterns of dominant American culture. The moral center and focus is there, despite the physical disasters and psychological injuries. Jasmine achieves this adaptation and assimilation by discarding the past and moving on into the present and future. In doing so, she challenges the astrologer in Hasnapur, who had predicted her widowhood and exile. Jasmine learns to slip in and out of identities—from Jyoti, the village girl of Hasnapur, to Jasmine, wife of Prakash Vijn, Jase, companion and care-giver of Taylor and as Jane to Iowa farmer banker, Bud Ripplemeyer. The Hinduism she has
imbibed as a religion and a philosophy explains her different identities as “shells of the same Absolute”. After the sexual assault committed on her, the narrator says; “My body was merely the shell soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn debts and sins all paid for” (Jasmine 121).

Jasmine’s life is lived by the dictum of discarding the past and moving on. She represents the new immigrant patterned along the frontier myth of the American Dream. Mukherjee’s Jasmine employs this Western myth of the pioneers of American colonialism, motivated by the search for prosperity to tell the tale of an Indian woman in America. Jasmine is constantly moving westward in search of happiness, love and prosperity.

She has learnt this on witnessing the wasted years her father lived after the partition had deprived him of his wealth and kith and kin. Jyoti one of the nine children had always seen her father nostalgically reminiscing on the Lahore days. Jyoti had resolved to study and make her life. Her meeting and eventual marriage to Prakash had filled her with brighter prospects.

With the survivor’s determination which characterises Jasmine’s personality, it is destined that she outlive her widowhood, as well as the abuse of her body and become a semi-assimilated immigrant ever ready to “re-position the stars” (Jasmine 240). Her teacher in the village school in Hasnapur had called her a
“lotus blooming in cow dung” (46) This metaphor has the connotation of the wasted talents of an intelligent girl imprisoned in the mundane chores of married life and refers to the intellectual stagnation. “The flower” is Jasmine, who according to her schoolteacher, has to be saved from burning in the “cowdung” which symbolises monotony of the married woman in the villages of India. Finally Jasmine blooms as Jase and Jane in America.

The making of this ‘American’ has been a combination of adverse circumstances, traumatic incidents, as well as valuable lessons picked up from those with whom she lived at various stages of her life. For instance, from Prakash she learnt that “love” means “letting go” (76) and she put it to use by letting go of all that suppressed and stunted the growth of her inner self. Assimilation in America could be effected easily if one could just let go; “like not wearing ... a turban, or not wearing the tikka on the forehead...” (29). She had learnt that death was a myth, no one died, it was only “an ascending or a descending, a moving on to other planes” (96). After death claims Prakash and puts a violent end to her eighteen month marriage, Jasmine turns her back on the “houseful of widows”¹ and persuades her brothers to process illegal papers to enable her to come to America. Jasmine expresses Mukherjee’s position on the immigrant condition: “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so
we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams” (29). This novel best reveals the pressures felt by Asian immigrants in American society: the pressure to assimilate, and the novel bears out the novelists own belief in the necessity of doing so. “To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheath the heart in a bullet-proof vest, was to be a coward” (165).

After killing Half-Face Jasmine is picked up by a benevolent American woman named Lilian Gordon. She has nothing of the past to cling to: her clothes, as well as her dead husband’s clothes which she carried like a relic from Punjab has been destroyed in the trash can funeral. She has been reborn into a new identity and she is determined to survive. Lilian Gordon, the Quaker woman also echoes Jasmine’s philosophy when she warns her: “Let the past make you wary... but do not let it deform you” (131).

Jasmine, moves from Professor Vadhera’s house as maid, to a family at Manhattan. She becomes care-giver to Taylor, Wylie and Kate. From there too, she is forced to flee, when she accidentally sees the Sikh terrorist killer of her husband. She flees to Iowa and meets Bud Ripplemeyer. In her role as Jane Ripplemeyer, live-in-companion and soon to be-mother, Jasmine is happy and contented. A fatal accident to Bud, which reduces him to a cripple on a wheel chair, does not deter Jasmine from remaining faithful and true, because she still carried within her Old world loyalties
which she confesses, is the feeling she has for Bud Ripplemeyer (Jasmine 7). But a visit from her lover Taylor makes her take the decision, to once again move on, to a more fulfilling and exciting life.

Passing through the difficult phases of life – being raped by Half-face, living on charity in the shelter home of Lillian Gordon, and as an unpaid servant in Professor’s house, Jasmine discovers new modes of expression through her newly unfolding self and with others like Duff, Taylor and Bud. Jasmine’s ambitions is to “belong to that tribe” which contains Mother Ripplemeyer, and Lilian Gordon who “represented... the best in the American experience and the ...character.” (Jasmine 197). Her social quest is epitomized in the recognitions she earns as “caregiver, recipe giver, preserver” (125). The suicide of Darrel, a Vietnamese-American, distresses and destabilises her temporarily. But again the appearance of Taylor, and her consent to go with him as Jase, marks her transition from one existence to another. It is evident that Jyoti-Jasmine-Jase-Jane are the different names of the same individual at different stages of her life, with different men. The novel ends, with Jase heading westward once again potent enough to reposition her stars. “greedy with wants, and reckless with hope” (241).

If Jasmine is a survivor in America, Mukherjee’s next protagonist Hannah is depicted as a survivor in a cross cultural
milieu, but in the reverse pattern. Jasmine travels westward, while
Hannah in *The Holder of the World* comes to India all the way from
Salem, Massachusetts Bay Colony. The theme of migration and
consequent transformation of the immigrant is explored in a more
challenging manner because the story is set in the late seventeenth
century and spans three countries and cultures—America puritan-
Christian culture; Coromandal coast: Mughal culture; Devgad;
Hindu culture. Like Jasmine, Hannah's identity changes, from that
of belonging to an elite class such as the settler community,
inhabiting Massachusetts Bay Colony, to becoming a foster child in
the Fitch household in Salem, further as Mrs. Gabriel Legge, who
travels with her husband to India, and to become the Salem Bibi,
to finally end as another addition to Aurangzeb's harem. At the end
of the novel Hannah returns to Salem, with her daughter and lives
as White Pearl while her daughter is called Black Pearl.

Sybil Steinberg in his article on Bharati Mukherjee makes the
revealing statement: that, "Mukherjee's characters have always
reflected her own circumstances and personal concerns, and one is
able to trace her growth in self confidence and her slowly developing
identity as an American through her fiction" (PW Interviews 46).
When she wrote *The Tiger's Daughter* she was living in Canada,
conscious of being "a brown woman in a white society" (*Days and
Nights* 169). Just like Tara, Mukherjee admits to have been
"between two worlds" (223). *Wife* published three years later, was an immigrant book where the wife was seen to be suffering from feminine and immigrant crises. Mukherjee confesses to have been closer to this protagonist. The characters in her short story collection are South Asian immigrants who are "trying out new lives". About *Jasmine*, Mukherjee opines that it "contains the shape of my life and desires..." (47). She admits that like this heroine, she too coexists between two opposed philosophies and wishes to reposition the stars. In an interview with Alison B. Carb, Mukherjee says: "I believe in alternate realities, and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction" (*Span* 35).

The protagonist Hannah of *The Holder of the World* is also a survivor who lives a life of surviving the difficult situations and circumstances of life. In this she is similar to Jasmine and the novelist herself who has stated that she believed in "personal striving" (47). Hannah's childhood in Brookfields, deep in Nipmuc country, surrounded by Native Indians who have initiated her to violence, uncertainties and sudden deaths. Perhaps her mother's wildness in eloping with an Indian lover, has been passed on to this puritan girl, and influenced her into accepting Gabriel Legge's marriage proposal after the death of his girlfriend Hester. As Mrs. Gabriel Leggee, she played her role with sincerity and honesty. Even when Gabriel left her alone in London and later in India, to
travel far into the sea, Hannah kept herself busy with housekeeping, gardening and her embroidery.

Hannah's visit to India, to the Coromandal Coast, which was the vortex of social, political, economic changes in the late seventeenth century, proved to be the 'translation' for Hannah. Hannah changed herself suitably to live in the changed cultural milieu. Her ability to transcend in mood and sensibility is indeed commendable. The invention of individual identities by contemporary immigrant and ethnic American women writers reveals the intricate complexities and possible patterns of self invention through the metaphor of translation. These women characters must translate themselves into their new settings—"a reconstruction of identity involves post-modern ethnographic oscillation off-centeredness, ethnocritical review of otherness as well as 'thinking through cultures and beyond cultures' (DAI 3844). Like one's concept of reality, individual identity is not a fixed permanent entity, It is subject to change; constantly reinvented; its new meaning conceptualised in new metaphors of self. Manju Kak in the essay 'Travelling in Time' writes that, "Salem Bibi is a metaphor of man's spirit that must roam. Mukherjee tries to unravel this quest; why one world is not enough to contain the spirit of some; they must always search for new boundaries, travel to the utmost shores" (Indian Review of Books 25). Salem Bibi, Gabriel Legge, Venn
Iyer, like Jasmine, are all the same: travellers, constantly seeking frontiers. It is this spirit which founded America.

This translation is effectively achieved, by Jasmine in America and Hannah in India. In the case of the Chinese American women of Tan's novels, the translation and consequent emergence of selfhood differs between generation and cultures. For the older Chinese women Suyuan Woo, Lindo Jong, Weili the transformation is peripheral. But to others like Ying-Ying, and the American born immigrant daughters the translation is problematic and incomplete. The transcultural dilemma is exemplified by the conflict of two cultures and the ensuing often painful search for cultural identity: the struggle to accommodate two selves and two cultural spaces into one integral identity.

One of the Joy Luck Aunties, Lindo Jong, calls this "double vision." Diana Chang in her essay "Writer in the Hyphenated condition" terms it a "bifocalness" of her identity (MELUS 69). For her, there is no other choice but the complex hyphenated condition. For Lindo in The Joy Luck Club admits to possess a double face "one American, the other Chinese." She also adds that her "Chinese face" is mysterious to the Americans, it is "the one they cannot understand" (255).

The cross culture encounter between east and west is played out in the intergenerational conflict between Chinese mothers and
their American educated daughters. The Chinese culture is known for its matrilineal bonds. But in the American social environment the family ties between mothers and daughters are no longer what it was in Chinese culture. While An-Mei, Weili, Lindo, recollect with fondness the strong ties which they shared with their mothers in China; in America they are alienated from their daughters-Rose, Pearl, Waverly. The reason for this is the cultural impact upon traditional roles. The traditional role of a Chinese mother has been greatly curtailed in America. If formerly she represented an automatic authority, now she is unsure of herself; defensive, hesitant to impose her own standards on the young. With the mother's role changed, the daughter no longer identifies with her mother, or internalises her authority in the way as it was in the lives of these Chinese mothers. The consequent conflict between mother and daughter is portrayed by Tan in her novels *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kitchen God's Wife*. It causes great distress to the mothers-Lindo, Suyuan Woo, An-Mei, and Winnie.

June-Mei is scolded by her mother, for not making an effort to achieve success in America. The high expectation of Suyuan Woo, and the low academic as well as extracurricular achievements of her daughter fill Suyuan with anger. She believed in making a prodigy out of her daughter just like Waverly was at the age of six. But June could not excel because she was "not trying" (136).
Suyuan Woo herself had come to America in 1949, having lost her family and wealth in the war. But she had remade her life. Now she wanted June to achieve success in the New world which offered infinite possibilities of becoming rich.

Pearl in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, describes her relationship with her mother using the metaphor of land mines: “...Whenever I am with my mother, I feel as though I have to spend the whole time avoiding land mines” (9). Many times both mother and daughter have felt the estrangement. They have been “polite” like strangers, “careful not to bump into each other” (95). Winnie is sad with this relationship she has with her daughter. She recollects her own love for her mother; even though she never saw her after the age of six. For many years afterwards, she kept her mother’s long cut hair, hoping to gift it to her on her return. But it never happened. 

After all the years that have gone by, Weili confesses to feeling the same aching longing for her lost mother. She shares this with her American daughter Pearl at a time when both of them sit down to have a heart-to-heart talk. They have never done it before because of the “enormous distance” which separated them and which made them keep secrets from one another. Winnie has kept secret the truth regarding Pearl’s paternity, while Pearl has not told her mother about the serious ailment which she is suffering from. Even their moment of self-revelation has been brought on by Aunt Helen
who threatened Winnie of divulging the secret herself if she did not do so herself. But, the experience becomes curative. After the long talk spanning a major part of the novel, the mother and daughter feel a closer bond. Winnie plans to visit China to get herbs for her daughter's ailment and Pearl does not feel rankled as she used to formerly at her mother's attitude of being a "Chinese version of Freud" (27).

The Chinese women are caught in a cultural transition, which impacts upon their identities in various ways. As time erases the memories of the past, these Chinese American mothers regale their daughters with oral histories, and stories and by doing so endeavour to perpetuate their ethnic culture transmitted through a matrilineal tradition. The Chinese mothers see their daughters impatient about their mother's Chinese culture and ethos. This reminds them of their past in China, when they enjoyed deep bonding with their own Chinese mothers. The matrilineal tradition was stronger then. It is in danger of being erased now by the American social milieu in which their daughters have gained a foothold, although a low one, by virtue of their education. So the elderly Chinese women tell their daughters stories about their matrilineal tradition in the past in China.

Generation differences exist in other Chinese American novels such as *Fifth Chinese Daughter* of Jade Snow Wong, *The Woman*
Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston. It is also the subject of African American writer, Alice Walker’s Meridian.

Despite the generational conflicts the ethnic mothers are unwilling to abandon their daughters to the values and beliefs of the dominant culture. Tan portrays this paradoxical dilemma in the great influence exerted by Chinese mothers in the identity formation and psychological, emotional maturity of their daughters.

In the absence of mothers other elderly women such as aunt, grandmother or mother-in-law take up this responsibility of educating the young Chinese girls about their cultural role expectations. In the case of Lindo, separated from her natal family at the young age of twelve, she is brought up under the strict orientation of her mother-in-law Huang Taitai. On her wedding day, at the age of sixteen, Lindo discovered her “inner strength;” she was “strong,” she was “pure” (Joy Luck Club 58). It is this inner strength which gave her courage to escape her unconsummated marriage to a sexually impotent man. She has taught her daughter Waverly this “invisible strength” (89), when the child was six years old in America. This helped Waverly to become a chess champion but again intergenerational conflicts put up insurmountable walls between them and Waverly loses her invisible strength at the moment she quarrels and hurts her mother. Bereft of this she soon gets defeated in the game. All her life Waverly felt the loss but could
not regain it. She lost interest for the game. As an adult, career and married woman, Waverly is emotionally dependent upon her mother. She feels apprehensive about anything if it is disapproved by her mother for she knows that her mother is always right. This is the reason she keeps her engagement to Rice Shields a secret long after the event.

Since the 1970's there has been a proliferation of autobiographical works by daughters and granddaughters that communicate forcefully the sense that “ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity” (Multiculturalism and the Canon 148). The Chinese mothers are anxious that their ethnicity is not erased in successive generations. They fear that their daughters will become failures in the new world because they have been brought up on a different shore. An-Mei voices her fears about Rose's failing marriage in this way: “if she doesn't speak, she is making a choice. If she doesn't try, she can lose her chance forever” (Joy Luck Club 215). An-Mei wants her daughter to listen to the Chinese self within her. It will never lead her into trouble. She diagnoses Rose’s problem as being “without wood,” always “bending to listen,” too often ignoring the advices of her Chinese mother (191).

When Rose's marriage with Ted Jordan ends in a divorce, she becomes depressed. In a fit of introspection she acknowledges her mistake. She had often let her mother’s words “blow through” her.
She had often filled her mind with “other peoples thoughts all - in English,” so that when her mother “looked at her inside out,” she would be confused by what she saw. Over the years she had learnt to choose American opinion. In almost every case, she had felt that “the American version was better” (191). But now, she was confused and unhappy. Her mother’s words were proving right. She had to return to her Chinese mother in order to survive. There are many similar incidents where one sees the immigrant suffering from his\her contact with American men\women. The lives of the Asian immigrants are greatly influenced by their middle-class American acquaintances. For instance, Dimple in Wife is overwhelmed by the attention shown to her by Milt Glassner. She is lured into a sexual experience, which only throws her psyche into greater confusion and consequent depression. Jasmine, on the other hand is positively influenced by her American male friends, Taylor and Bud.

According to Thomas J. Carabas, in comparison to the Asian characters, Mukherjee’s American characters, Mary Webb, Lilian Gordon, Mrs. Ripplemeyer, prove themselves “insipid, self-limiting, and self-defeating” (Literary Half-Yearly 58). The Asian women portrayed by this writer, as for example Jasmine, Maya Sayal (“The Tenant”), or Bhagmati, are women who are willing to survive against all odds.
Amy Tan's Chinese American mothers are similarly strong characters, who educate their daughters about their ethnicity, through narrations of Chinese myths, legends and stories from the past life and country. For the daughters who have never seen their homeland, their mothers' stories are a way to construct this past, because they explain to them who their forebears were and what their heritage consists of. The daughters begin to understand the "unspeakable tragedies" their mother and aunts have left behind in China and the anxieties and concerns they have about the cultural continuity between their pasts and their children's future. It is due to these fears that the mothers do not only use stories to help reconstruct a past but also to create and control their present and future. In an interview, with Susan Kepner, Amy Tan explains that the Chinese mother in her book map out personally their daughter's lives.

The mother, Ying-Ying tells her daughter not to go too far from home— to stay within her sphere of influence. Lena St. Clair remembers how she was forbidden as a child to go to the basement of their old house in Oakland. To frighten her and prevent her from disobedience her mother told her a tale about a "bad man who lived in the basement; so evil and hungry" that, had not her mother rescued her, he would have planted five babies "inside her and then eaten [them] all in a six-course meal, tossing [their] bones on the
dirty floor.” After hearing this tale at the age of five, Lena began seeing “terrible things” with her “Chinese eyes,” “the part” she had inherited from her mother (Joy Luck Club 103).

The character of Waverly and June are portraits of multicultural identities. They have achieved the dual identity of being both Chinese and American. For June this realisation has dawned on her only after her mother’s death. She, who considered herself more American than Chinese, is invited by the Joy Luck Aunties to sit in her mother’s place for the game of mahjongg. They tell her about her twin sisters living in China. Their words convince her to undertake the trip. In China, she feels instant bonding with the older half-sisters. At the airport June looks at the twin girls and realises they look like her mother, the same short hair, small body; “‘Mamma, Mamma’...we all murmur, as if she is among us” (286). It is then that June sees what part of her is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is her family. It is in her blood. As they look at one another June realises: “together we look like our mother” (287). Pearl in Kitchen God’s Wife has married an American like Rose Hsu Jordan in Joy Luck Club. But she has, with great difficulty resolved the identity crisis within her. Her illness no doubt has helped her to see beyond racial-cultural differences. But her interactions with her mother, usually fraught with emotional stress, bring home the dual identity within her. Her daughters’ American tastes, attitudes, way of life,
cause further concern to Grandmother Winnie. But she is
determined to be the cultural preserver and transmitter like other
Chinese American mothers. It is this, which makes her gift Pearl the
altar of The Kitchen God, familiarise her with the myth and its
interpretation. By sharing with her daughter the great secret of
Pearl’s real father being Wen Fu, Winnie finally earns the love and
intimacy she had hitherto never shared with her daughter. The
exchange of confidences between mother and daughter bridge the
gap between them as never before.

Exposure to a diverse cultural milieu causes identity crises in
the second generation immigrants and is implicitly manifest in the
low self-esteem and near self-contempt harboured by Rose, Lena,
and June Woo. In her book From Necessity to Extravagance, Wong
explains this in terms of the value system of the dominant culture
upon the ethnic’s psyche. The ethnics adopting the white
supremacy in standards of duty, behaviour and achievement as
morally absolute, begin to have doubts about their own
attractiveness. “In the event a self contempt is bred within the
immigrant physic with the acknowledgment that he is not white
and can never fully measure up to white standards” (77). In Joy
Luck Club Lena often suffers self doubts regarding her beauty.
Despite her friends affirming her “exotic” looks she fears she will be
considered “sham” and dirty by her husband (156).
The construction of identity becomes greatly problematic in the case of Eurasian characters. This we see in Mukherjee's character Debby Di Martino and Tan's character Oliva Bishop. For these characters their unethnic appearance, hiding an ethnic identity gives cause for greater pain and misunderstandings from their American friends. In the case of Debby, her lean, American look gives her an attractive appearance. However, sometimes she is mistaken to be a Burmese, a Bangladeshi, or a Pakistani. This identity mix-up hurts and piques her so that one day she resolves to unearth the truth about her roots. Her efforts reveal that she was the child of a Russian American woman and an Asian Indian father. This explained her hybrid appearance. But the knowledge does not bring her any happiness. Lena St. Clair in Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club* is likewise a victim of wrong pedigree. Her mother being Chinese and her father being Irish American, Lena possesses half-Chinese and half-American looks. She was "big-boned and delicate," at the same time a closer scrutiny revealed "cheeks . . as smooth as beach pebbles," her colouring too pale, eyes without eyelids like "two swift cuts of a short knife" (104).

Olivia Simon has a Chinese father. But she takes after her Russian American mother in her physical appearance. As a child she has been ashamed of her Chinese ancestry. When Kwan comes into the family, Olivia is embarrassed by the ridicule of her
friends: "Is that dumb Chink your sister? Hey. Olivia does that mean you’re a dumb Chink too?" (The Hundred Secret Senses 10). Olivia hated Kwan for her Chinese appearance and her Chinese quality of faithfulness and loyalty towards the younger half-sister. For Kwan believed, that Olivia and Kwan were connected by a "cosmic Chinese umbilical cord that’s given them the same unborn traits..." Olivia knew that Kwan would do anything for her. "She’d tear off the ear of anyone who said a unkind word" about Olivia (19). But it takes a visit to China with Kwan, to make Olivia grasp fully the meaning of ethnic ancestry and her bond with Kwan. After the trip she too believes in ‘yin’ people. Olivia's identity crisis is resolved; she celebrates her ethnicity by adopting her father's surname. She becomes Olivia Li.

Change of identities initiated by change of names is a common feature of both the writers. In The Joy Luck Club Clifford renamed his Chinese wife Betty St. Clair after bringing her to America. As Lena says "with a sweep of a pen, my mother lost her name"(104). In Kitchen God's Wife, Jiang-mei Weili, in Chinese, is given the name Winnie by Jimmy Louie, the Chinese American who, eventually marries her and takes her to America. Her friend Hulan in China is given the name Helen, by the same person. She adopts this name in America. In The Hundred Secret Senses, Olivia is called “Libby-ah” by her Chinese half sister Kwan and it becomes
the Chinese version of the Americanised name Olivia. In the case of Mukherjee’s protagonist Dimple, the change in her name to Nandini initiated by her mother-in-law, never actually materializes as Dimple refuses to accept the new name. This is indicative of Dimple’s resistance to domination upon her individuality. On the other hand the heroine of *Jasmine*. Jyothi, willingly accepts the name ‘Jasmine’ given to her by Prakash because she is enchanted by his reference to her as a “fragrant smelling flower.” The narrator (Jasmine) nostalgically recalls: “He wanted to break down the Jyothi 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’ ” (77). Jyothi, Jasmine shuttled between identities. This strategy of changing names to indicate a change in identity is again adopted by Mukherjee in her most recent novel *Leave It To Me* (1998). Debby Di Martino, the Eurasian child, adopted by Italian American, chooses the name Devi Dee after coming to know about her Indian father. She effects this change when she moves from New York to San Francisco after burning down the mansion of her boyfriend Fong following his betrayal. In the case of Jasmine and Hannah, the change is occasioned by violence: death of Prakash by terrorists, death of Gabriel Legge by attacks on the sea. If the change of name from the past is an
indication of the affirmation of the ethnic identity of the Eurasians, Debby Di Marhino's change of name to Devi Dee is a statement of the writer's intentions, of giving Debby an Indian identity. Similarly Jasmine's change of name to Jase and Jane, is symptomatic of translation / transformation of an ethnic's identity.

In Joy Luck Club, An-mei despairs over her daughter's weak character as a result of her Americanisation. An-Mei sees her daughter Rose drifting away from her, listening to the American advice which the mother knows, will only get her daughter into deeper trouble. This is emphatically stated by An-Mei when Rose suffers from depression after her divorce from Ted Jordon:

'A girl is like a young tree,' she said. 'you must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the strong wind And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along the ground until someone pulls you out and throws you away' (191)

Ying-Ying St. Clair claims, "I have always known a thing before it happens" (243). Her daughter Lena too, confirms at least an ironic version of her mother's acquired powers by adding, "she sees only bad things that affect our family" (149).
The ethnicity of Tan as well as Mukherjee is manifested in the depiction of Asian characters in their fiction. Both have portrayed strong women characters who survive hardships and lead successful lives in America. This kind of character delineation can be read as an attempt of resistance to racist stereotyping undertaken by the ethnic writers. The Chinese women of Tan's novels — Suyuan Woo, Weili, Lindo Jong, and Kwan are portrayed as survivors with great inner strength of character and fortitude. Some, like Kwan and Jasmine, also possess esoteric knowledge and prophetic vision. If Kwan can communicate with the spirit of people dead and alive, Jasmine and Debby are in possession of an inner vision, which Jasmine calls the "third eye of Shiva" (Jasmine 5). In comparison the American characters are made to appear innocent as well as ignorant. This is specially brought in the short story "Orbiting" in Mukherjee's collection Middleman. In this story, the Italian American woman brings her Afghan boyfriend Ro home, for the thanksgiving dinner. She prefers Ro to her former boyfriend Vic, because she considers Ro's torture-scarred body as "character manifest". She thinks to herself: "Our scars are so innocent :they are invisible and come to us from rough-housing gone too far" (76). According to Thomas J. Carabas, her decision to accept Ro is based on "her sense of his need, as well as recognition that he represented a superior understanding of the world" (Literary Half Yearly 59).
There are some things, which the Asian immigrants can never tell the Americans. For instance, Tara is unable to talk about her homesickness and nostalgia to her husband David Cartwright. In the same way Jasmine does not talk about her past crime to Taylor or Bud. Instead she confides it to Du, the Vietnamese boy who has been adopted by Bud. Likewise Jasmine understands the reasons for Du’s success in school, in a way that boy’s teachers would never comprehend. Stereotypes about Asians, which assume American superiority, are exploded as the superiority of the Asians asserts itself. In “Orbiting,” the stereotype of the backward Asian clashes with the reality of Ro, the refugee from Afghanistan. In Jasmine, Jasmine becomes caregiver to Taylor as well as Bud.

The ethnic identities delineated by these Asian American writers fall within a broad spectrum ranging from alienation, expatriation to hyphenation, assimilation, semi-assimilation and collision. Katherine Newman in her essay titled “An Ethnic literary scholar view of American Literature” writes:

Within the American experience there is a complex set of ethnic identities which appear monolithic only from the outside. From the inside, as in the literary expression of that experience, they appear to be dynamic clusters of contrasting modes and sympathies. The ethnic writer characteristically wrestles with
ambiguities, with contradictions within his traditions in order to strive for a more adequate response to life (18).

We see this psychological struggle/conflict in the second generation Chinese Americans, Waverly, Rose, Lena, Pearl, and Olivia. In Mukherjee’s novels the conflict is exemplified in the character of Dimple and to a lesser degree in Tara. We find that the immigrant psyche, in the cross-cultural American milieu is subjected to considerable stress and strain. Some like Jasmine, Lindo, An-Mei, Winnie, survive the culture collision. Others like Tara, Dimple, Suyuan Woo, Ying-Ying, Rose, and Lena are unable to resolve or achieve the transformation. Dimple becomes a victim of cultural collision; Rose, Lena, Ying Ying also, manifest symptoms of mild mental illness in a hostile cultural environment. Those who like Jasmine, Hannah, Debby adapt and accommodate, are able to achieve a synthesis between ethnicity and modernity: Old world orthodoxy and new world individualism/liberalism. They are the new citizens of multicultural America.
NOTES

1. Jasmine’s home sheltered two widows, her aunt and her mother. Her own widowhood at the age of eighteen added to this number and made the house ‘full’ of widows. In those days widows were ostracised from society and confined to the back rooms, preferably the kitchen of the house. Jasmine chooses to resist this conventionally fated confinement.


3. This is also the predicament of the Asian Indian studying in American schools. Zainab Ali expresses his tendency to lie “in order to express universality in Customs and practices” (Our feet Touch The Sky 239).