

## Chapter V

### 5. Artistic Maturity : A Kaleidoscope of Expatriate and Immigrant Sensibility

To Mukherjee, writing is always a conscious and deliberate process. She used to revise her stories. She shapes the narrative. For example in **Days**, she describes her obsession with “opening paragraphs, tone, feature, pacing” and emphasizes how her fiction is “metaphoric and synecdochic, how every little detail must carry an enormous weight” (253). She always pays attention to mechanics of fiction and to language. In her fiction, Mukherjee fashions her language into the casual shorthand beloved of Americans.

Mukherjee’s description is quite realistic. When she narrates incidents and describes the buildings, it seems to be Kaleidoscopic in nature. In **Daughter**, she manages to present the decay of Calcutta and the decadent life of its upper-class with considerable skill all through the eyes of an insider-out, Tara. The city, to Tara, seems to be coming apart as it seems because of a number of factors; endemic violence, chronic political unrest, economic stagnation and poverty, squalor and disease, over population, and class conflicts. The opening page description of the street scene outside the Catelli-continental, a luxury hotel that was once one of the glories of Calcutta, is indicative of the extent of the city of decline. The entrance of the hotel now seems to be “small, almost shabby”, the walls “are patterned with rust and mold”, the “sidewalks along the hotel are painted with obscenities and political slogans” (TD 3). Mukherjee realistically paints pictures of men who are “a colony of beggars”, “shriveled women”, and “people who talk without conviction, and people who are ready to mob and brutalize others” (TD 4). It is “the real Calcutta, the thick laughter of brutal men, open dustbins, warm and dark where carcasses were sometimes discarded, did not exist” (TD 4). It is as if “everything’s gone down horribly” (TD 42). Tara herself begins to feel that “the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one. That it was fatal to fight for justice; that it was better to remain passive and absorb all shock as they came” (TD 131). Even, she begins to

think that “Calcutta was the deadliest city in the world; alarm and impatience were equally useless” (TD 168).

Mukherjee has a preference for realism. In fact, Mukherjee asserts : “My fiction clearly inhabits a space in which there are extra rational presences” (Hancock 41). It is felt by her because the migrants in America go through a kind of violent transformation as felt by Dimple and Jasmine. It gives her novels and short stories violent and startling episodes – killing Dimple’s husband, brooding over the different methods of suicide, rape by Half-Face, killing Half-Face, and so on. It is the result of violence that happens in America to Asian immigrants but on the other hand, she attributes her use of the irrational to her Indian heritage where “shape-changing, miracles, godly perspectives” are common and where characters “transcend the straight jacket of simple psychologizing” (“An Invisible Woman” 25).

For Mukherjee, plot is “an arrangement or a design” and she has claimed that “the juxtaposition of images”, the composition and framing “are important aspects of story telling” (Hancock 44). In her story telling, she blends social and political visions which form an integral part of her writing. At her best, she can combine her commitment to writing fiction that communicates as a social and political vision with her belief in a religion that accommodates the marvelous. In fact, part of her aesthetic is to make “the familiar exotic, the exotic familiar” (“An Invisible Woman” 25).

In expanding on the short story’s “Jasmine’s”, idea, Mukherjee has changed the setting of the novel, **Jasmine**, from Trinidad and Michigan to Punjab, Florida, New York, and Iowa. The limited third-person perspective of the short story is transferred to be the first-person narration. Jasmine too becomes more of a sensitive survivor undergoing complex internal transformations than the shallow teenager who lives purely for the moment. Mukherjee’s **Holder** has two plots : the main plot and a subsidiary plot. The subsidiary plot tells the story of Beigh Masters, the novel’s narrator. Beigh is a very modern, very sophisticated 32-year-old woman. She makes her living as an assets hunter. It is

something of an euphemism for a job that involves ferreting out antiques and art treasures for rich collectors who are interested in collecting most precious art objects. Beigh has a lover, a brilliant computer scientist named Venn Iyer. Venn Iyer's family came to the United States from India, South India, and settled in the Boston area. Venn works in an MIT Lab for a virtual-reality project. Venn works to enable time travel to Kansas city on the afternoon of 29 October 1989. Beigh is intrigued by his project and near the end of her narrative actually does the time travelling for him. Beigh's job is to track down for a client a diamond called the Emperor's Tear. For that, Beigh travels from Boston to India and back again in search of the priceless object supposed to have been lost while in the possession of Emperor Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors who ruled India for two centuries.

The main plot has to do with the adventures of Hannah Easton, a New Englander, who was born in Brookfield, Massachusetts to Edward and Rebecca Easton in 1670. Edward Easton died of a bee sting a year later. Hannah's chief memory of Rebecca Easton is the moment when she arranged for Hannah to be left with a neighbor; so that Rebecca could fly away to her Nipmuc Indian lover. Hannah has to grow up as the adopted child of a devout puritan couple, Robert and Susanna Fitch. In 1692, she agrees to marry the dashing Irish adventurer Gabriel Legge. Then they have to come to the Coromandal coast of South eastern India as Gabriel Legge has become an employee of East India Company.

Later, Gabriel, who cannot be domesticated, turns pirate and leaves Hannah to tend for herself in India. Hannah ends up with her Indian lover, a Hindu raja named Jadav Singh. Later, when Jadav Singh has to fight against the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Hannah makes a desperate plea to the emperor to desist from destroying the raja and his kingdom. The emperor is unmoved and as a result Jadav Singh has to die. Hannah finds her way back to Salem, where she takes along Pearl, the daughter she has had because of her affair with the raja.

The main plot and the subsidiary plot are linked through Beigh Masters, who in her quest for the Emperor's Tear has come across a series of Mughal miniature painting in a maritime trade museum in Massachusetts. She comes across a miniature in which a yellow-haired woman in diaphanous skirt and veil, who has become legendary as 'Salem Bibi' or the mistress from Salem. The blonde woman from New England in seventeenth-century India seems to be holding the Emperor's Tear. Beigh understands that Salem Bibi is Hannah Easton. So, she embarks on two quests : she will not only find out where the Emperor's Tear could have disappeared but will also reconstruct the sequence of events that transformed Hannah Easton into Salem Bibi and made her come back to New England after having loved a raja and after having consorted with the mighty Mughal Aurangzeb.

The central theme of **Daughter** is also the discovery of Tara Banerjee Cartwright that the city and the people she had come back to be with after years abroad were in a state of terminal decline. She also feels that she has a growing awareness of being foreign to her spirit and to her self. She realizes that her future is in expatriation.

Mukherjee's **Wife** has as its major theme the plight of an Indian wife torn between the need to play the role the society expects of her and her need for self-expression. Another theme of the novel is her predicament as an Indian immigrant's wife in North America. Moreover, the novel tracks the violence building up inside and all around her in North American landscape until she is driven to murder her husband. In Blaise's view **Wife** is "about such a girl... whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed in the madness of emigration to New York into murder" (DNC 141). Even Mukherjee admits that **Wife** is about "a young Bengali wife who was sensitive enough to feel the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and break out" (DNC 268). In fact, it is as pointed out by Fakrul Alam in **Bharati Mukherjee**, "Mukherjee's anger at the predicament of Bengali wives in Calcutta merged with her own frustrations as an Indian immigrant in an intolerant Canada is to give **Wife** the feel of a book bred in bitterness and tinged with violence" (38).

**Holder** also has a theme of sexual awakening through an 'other' lover. In **Wife** and the stories like "The Lady from Lucknow" and "A Wife's Story", one can find the narratives of wives leading unfulfilled lives who on the verge are not quite able to find fulfillment through an affair with a man from another race. **Jasmine** and "Orbiting" celebrate tales of women who have finally broken through a moribund marriage to bliss or the promise of fulfilled life through a relationship with an alien. In **Holder** too, the theme of sexual awakening through the other is illustrated by the character of Hannah and her relationship with an Indian raja, Jadav Singh. Fakrul Alam in **Bharati Mukherjee** is of the view that

Even the first view given in the novel of Hannah Easton through Beigh's scrutiny of the Salem Bibi miniatures in the Massachusetts museum hints a woman whose movement seemed focused on contact with an 'other'. What Beigh sees in the Mughal painting is a woman whose 'hips are thrust forward, muscles readied to wade, into deeper, indigo water. But her arms are clasped high above her head, her chest is taut with audacious yearnings' (World, 16). The first memory of Hannah that Beigh can evoke is also of her identification with Rebecca's flight with her Nipmuc Indian lover, it is an image of fulfillment she will seek to experience in her own life for a long time. (125)

Hannah has no occasion for expression of her sexuality growing up among the ascetic Fitches in the strict puritan community of Brookfield. Only the embroidery work she takes up gives vent to her feelings and passions. In fact, her marriage to Gabriel also fails to fulfill her life as a housebound wife in England as it was in Salem. Although, Hannah is ready to immerse herself in the sights and sounds of the Coromandel coast, she finds herself confined to the petty and hierarchical world of East India Company officials and their wives. In fact, Hannah looks for chances to transform herself in contact with Indians. Hannah wants to run "errands... in this vast new jungle" (HW 105). She becomes a woman waiting to be awoken. It comes in the form of raja, Jadav Singh. Hannah enters the world of

romance. For a few weeks, Hannah and Raja make love every night and experience the high tide of love. Hannah contents to be a mistress of Raja. Mukherjee vividly relates: “what she had to repress in puritan Salem, what marriage to Gabriel failed to bring out in her except possibly once, she experiences in the Raja’s palace, and in the process she comes to understand the aggressive satiety of total fulfillment (World 237)”.

In **Darkness**, the theme of expatriation is linked to fragmented, disintegrating, alienated characters, while the immigrants are well adjusted to the new country and its life-style. The dominant theme in Mukherjee’s fiction is women refashioning their lives. It is conducted by a chance encounter with an ‘other’. In fact, in **Wife**, Dimple blunders her way toward freedom and liberation by having sex with the American man but ends up in madness – killing her husband; in **Jasmine**, Jasmine opts for freedom by having an open relationship with another white American man; and in the **Holder**, the narrator, Beigh Masters as well as Hannah go beyond the superficial relationship to a meaningful encounter with Indian men that allow them to be fully themselves.

In **Wife**, the setting is Calcutta and New York. Mukherjee also uses surreal scenes in the novel to convey Dimple’s descent into madness in her New York flat. As in **Daughter**, in this novel, Mukherjee also uses the adept use of a narrative tone that combines irony and sympathy. She shows her skills in parodying advice columns, magazine advertisements, talk-show inanities, and other popular discourses.

Mukherjee’s characters are intended to be fleshed out of abstractions. Tara’s friends are described as “trapped gazelles”. They are “confident, handsome and brashly opinionated” (TD 41). Joyonto is “a dying savior” (TD 83). The Maruthi business man – politician P.K. Tuntunwala is described as “a circus animal who had gotten the better of his master” (TD 20). He is imaged as a monkey, a spider, and a shark. He is considered the usurper, a captain of industry and a leader from a community of businessmen who had taken over Calcutta commerce. Equally, Pronob, the typical Bengali

businessman appears in Tara's eyes as "a man of such energy, so aggressive, so brittle, and ferocious" and he also seems to be "flabby" (TD 134). Even, Tara's father was considered "the Bengal Tiger" for his business prowess. Commenting on the use of characterization in **Darkness**, Fakrul Alam writes:

Stories such as 'Saints' and the "Imaginary Assassins" are bravura pieces in that Mukherjee is writing about characters who are as removed from her own situations as is possible, stories such as "'The Lady from Lucknow' and 'Visitors' on the other hand, have as their central reflectors the type of characters Mukherjee has made uniquely her own; the restless Indian wife who would like to go beyond the confines of her marriage to embrace, America but whose sexual adventure ends unsatisfactorily. (65)

Mukherjee's tone of voice is ironic and less melancholic in **Daughter**. John Spurling of the **New Statesman** admits that "its tone of voice less ironic than Mann's, less melancholic than Lampedusa's" and further avers that it is "a true imaginative explanation of a class in decay rather than a sociological description" (25).

In all her works, Mukherjee has striven to generate a poetics of her own that would enable her to articulate her chosen theme. Her art is her concept of voice. In **Days**, Mukherjee has described herself as a writer of an authentic voice, something that she knew best in a manner faithful to her own aesthetic (DNC 286). She has also talked about a voice that would control everything in her oeuvres. It is because voice is the sum total of every artistic trick to control her choice of texture, metaphor, point of view, and language. In a sense, the voice may be taken as the voice of her protagonists – "the main characters speak" (Connell 30). In her oeuvres, the Asian immigrants' voice is not an 'authentic voice' but a voice of the voiceless-the minority voice.

The task of finding the right voice for a oeuvre is related to choose the right point of view from which to tell a story. Mukherjee always employs the omniscient point of view with irony. She

celebrates the immigrant voices and also treats the life of exiles and expatriates with condescension. However, the ironic tone does not distance herself from her readers; instead, it is replaced by a more intimate perspective.

In **Daughter**, Mukherjee presents the novel through an omniscient narrator. The readers are made to see things mostly from Tara's point of view. She becomes the third-person center-of – consciousness through whom Mukherjee registers her disenchantment with the changes that have taken place in Calcutta. The Novel is divided into four parts :

1. Part I deals with the past life of Tara, her family background, the process of settlement in New York, and her settlement from her native soil of Calcutta.
2. Part II deals with Tara's arrival at Bombay, her journey to Calcutta, and her reaction to India.
3. Part III, concentrates on Tara's life at Calcutta with her Catelli-continental friends.
4. Part IV deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her friends to spend summer vacation, her coming back to Calcutta, her boredom and alienation, her victimization in a mob and her tragic end which remains mysterious.

The novel has the structure of an open-ending novel. Jasbir Jain in "Foreignness of Spirit : The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels" divides **Daughter** into four parts. He observes :

The four part division of the novel moves in a circle. Beginning with her arrival the novel ends with her proposed exit, rejecting India and her Indianness, unable to grasp its meaning, and equally unable to understand the America she plans to go back to. The first part is brief and deals with her responses to India; the second moves into her ancestral past, which both Tara and her father have tried to reject, a past which is overwhelmed and pushed aside by Westernization; the third section of the novel is concerned with Tara's early experiences in America, her loneliness, her attempt to

stick to Indian ways and the gradual acculturation leading to her marriage to David Cartwright; the fourth brings us back to India and Tara's move from Calcutta to Darjeeling with its own peculiar brand of foreignness. Here in Darjeeling she is seduced and this act of seduction is symbolic of her foreignness which is an experience which cannot be undone. (15)

Considering the variety of immigrant character types and the diverse narrative modes used in the stories of **Darkness**, Fakrul Alam in **Bharati Mukherjee** broadly classifies the stories under six heads :

1. Stories of the aloofness of expatriation – “The World According to Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents” and “Tamurlane” which are often called Canadian stories and better tales of people who cannot root themselves in Canadian culture because of covert or overt racism.
2. Tales of expatriation – “A Father” and “Nostalgia” which deal with South Asian men who cannot stop seeing themselves as expatriates and who still yearn for some of the values or images associated with the country of their birth.
3. Stories of immigrant youths – ‘Saints’ and “The Imaginary Assassin”, which can be grouped together because both have as their narrators, immigrant youths born in North America, who are attracted to Indian stories about saintly figures.
4. Tales about Indian wives – “The Lady from Lucknow” and “Visitors” are about Indian wives, who are frustrated in their attempt to find fulfillment outside their marriages.
5. Stories about liberation – “Angela” and “Hindus” can be considered stories about characters who have liberated themselves from the country where they were born to accept America.
6. “The story” “Courtly Vision” cannot be viewed as a story (53).

“Angela”, the first story in **Darkness** is written from the point of view of a Bangladeshi girl, who has been adopted by a family in Iowa after she had been orphaned by Pakistani soldiers attempting to

suppress her people's struggle for independence. "The Lady from Lucknow", the second story, also uses the first-person point of view; its narrator is a middle-aged Muslim woman called Nafeesa Hafeez, who has settled in Atlanta with her husband after a life full of diasporic moves across several continents. The third story, "The World According to Hsu", has the omniscient mode of storytelling. In it, Mukherjee's omniscient narration presents the story mostly from the point of view of a married woman. She is Ratna Clayton, a 33-year-old Canadian journalist of mixed origin vacationing in an island off the coast of the southernmost part of Africa. "A Father", the fourth story in **Darkness**, also uses an omniscient narrator reflecting events from the perspective of the protagonist. Its protagonist is a middle-aged expatriate engineer from Bihar, India, who has made Detroit his home. In the story "Isolated Incidents", the omniscient narrator focuses the attention on a white Canadian woman called Ann Vane, who works in Human Rights office in Toronto. The sixth story "Nostalgia", also uses omniscient narrative, which is set in New York city. It has the middle-aged psychiatric consultant Dr. Manny Patel. Patel tries to enjoy a tryst with an attractive Indian sales girl in Manhattan hotel. In "Tamurlane" Mukherjee reverts to the first person mode of writing. In it, the narrator is one of a number of illegal immigrants from the Indian province of Punjab, who works in a hotel in Toronto. The story "Hindus" is narrated by Leela Lahiri, a Bengali Brahmin woman, who is employed as an administrative assistant in a New York publishing firm. The ninth story, "Saints", also uses the first-person narration. Its narrator is Shawn Patel, the son of Dr. Manny Patel of "Nostalgia". Its setting is a small college town in upstate New York where Shawn and his mother have moved after his parents separated. In "Visitors", Mukherjee takes her stand on omniscient mode of storytelling. Its setting is New Jersey. In "The Imaginary Assassin" Mukherjee employs two narrators – a young Sikh boy growing up in Yuba city, California, who records a story his grandfather told him about the circumstances that led him to flee India in 1947. The last story in **Darkness** is not about the experience of immigration in North America. Likely, "Courtly Vision" is not a story but a description of a Mughal painting that Mukherjee uses as a metaphor for the miniaturist's vision of immigrant lives she has drawn for a novel **Holder**.

The "Imaginary Assassin" is like "Saints" in having as its narrator a youth born in America of South Asian immigrant stock who is fascinated by stories of saintly figures from India. The narrator takes no part in the incidents or the sequence of the action described in the tale. His role is first to sketch the background and then relate a tale he has heard from his grandfather about Gandhi, the most famous saintly figure in recent Indian history and finally offer a kind of coda to the tale.

In **Middleman**, Mukherjee is straight-forward and unsentimental. She shows a remarkable change in her writing style. In it, she is becoming more Americanized as she finds an energy in American fiction. **Middleman** has such an energy as each character and story suggests a different style. In fact, Mukherjee does not write a story with a pre-determined point of view. She writes some stories from a very authoritative third person point of view; with others she uses an intimate, textured style, and a first-person point of view.

Mukherjee uses first-person narrative in the first story "The Middleman". Its narrator is Alfie Judah, a professional gunman from Iraq. The next story, "A Wife's Story", has a woman narrator, an Indian wife in North America. The third story is told from the point of view of Jeb Marshall, a Vietnam veteran scarred by his experience of war. The narrator in "Orbiting" is Renata De Marcos, a second generation American woman of Italian – Spanish origins, who is dating an Afghan man. In "Fighting for the Rebound", the narrator is an American, identified only as Griff, who is asked to commit himself to his Filipino girl friend, Blanquita. "The Tenant" has an omniscient narrator, a Bengali woman adrift in America. "Fathering" is presented by another Vietnam veteran who is having to choose between the claims made on him by his half-Vietnam daughter and his white American common-law wife. "Jasmine" is also presented from an omniscient point of view but centres on a Trinidadian Indian teenager, who is savoring the United States for the first time. "Denny's Girls" records the consequences of the infatuation of its unnamed narrator, an Indian teenager, who has come to America with his family from Uganda with a Nepalese woman imported to America as a mail-order bride. "Buried lives" is told from an omniscient point of view. In it, Mukherjee traces the

peregrinations of Mr. Venkatesan, a Tamil from Sri Lanka sent on migrating to Canada. "The Management of Grief" is about Mrs. Bhave, an Indo-Canadian, who tries to cope with the loss of family in a plane crash.

"Fighting for the Rebound" mostly presents the immigrant through the eyes of a native American. "The Tenant", "Jasmine", and "Buried Lives" are in the third person omniscient narrative. Their protagonists, Maya Sanyal, Jasmine, and Mr. Venkatesan are all immigrants. "Jasmine" uses the third person narrative. Urbashi Barat in "Expatriate Indian or Immigrant American? : A Study of 'A Father' and 'A Wife's Story'" says :

Literally speaking, 'A Father' is the story of an immigrant and 'A Wife's Story' that of an expatriate, written as only an Indian could but the former uses the irony and the omniscient narration which Mukherjee regards as being the hallmark of the British tradition, and therefore by extension that of Indian writing in English, and the latter uses the subjective mode and the present tense so characteristic of the American tradition [...] (123)

In **Wife**, Mukherjee's choice of a limited third-person point of view is crucial to her overall strategy. "This narrative perspective enables her to stay close to Dimple – an immigrant wife who starts to question her traditional values – and shows the immigrant world through her" (Hancock 36). Its structure is a tripartite structure. Commenting on the narrative structure of **Wife**, Meera Manvi in "Rereading Indian Womanhood : A Note on the Narrative Structure of **Wife**" points out that "the narrative is strengthened by the opposition that is successfully manipulated between passive resistance / violence, female desire / male authority, enclosure / freedom, marriage as bond / female eroticism, reality / after dream, love / marriage" (141). M. Rajeshwar in "Sado-Masochism as a Literary Device : Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife**" also observes :

Speaking in terms of the technique, **Wife** shows at several places all the potents of frittering off and losing narratable interest mainly in the form of threats to the life of the heroine. But the different fragments of the story are held together and treated to a logical conclusion by averting the death of Dimple. (38)

**Jasmine** may be called *Bildungsroman* around the postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist agenda. “The *fabula* level of the novel, which is represented by the series of events narrated, does not coincide with the story, which is how the events are organized and conveyed. Therefore, the novel unfolds with a non-chronological order of events, creating a rather cinematic effect which makes it hard to follow the shifts in location, focalization and time” (Alponzanesi 83). The events, which have allowed Jyoti’s transformation from the ill-fated village girl to the self-assumed and emancipated American woman, Jane, are told in a narrative reversion. It is illustrated in the following lines : “I’m twenty-four now, I live in Baden, Elsa Country, Iowa, but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it. I know what I don’t want to become” (J 5). The dialectic interplay between the diegesis (past) and the narration (present), separated in time and ideologically intersecting with each other makes the novel a complicated one to follow the time frame. The distance between past and present represents the distance between two cultures – Indian and American. The voice narrating the events is that of Jasmine in Iowa at the age of twenty-four.

**Jasmine** uses non-linear narrative techniques and jump-cuts, shuffling back and forth in time. “Jasmine, in her reincarnation as Ripplemeyer, intersperses details of her present strained and unhappy life as Bud Ripplemeyer’s common-law wife in Iowa with the series of events starting with the astrologer’s advice to the seven-year-old Jyoti in Punjab to Bud’s shooting by his aggrieved client” (Alam 116). Further, Fakrul Alam in **Bharati Mukherjee** makes a detailed examination of what is happening in each chapters as follows :

Chapter 1 takes us back from Elsa country, Iowa, to 'lifetimes ago' in Hasnapur, India. Chapters 2 to 5 depict Jane Ripplemeyer's life in tense, economically depressed Iowa. Chapters 6 to 17 follow Jasmine from Punjab to Florida as she grows up as Jyoti and becomes Jasmine, bride and widow, and then recounts the violence done to her by the grotesque ship captain and her violent revenge on him in Florida. Chapter 18 alternates between a lunchtime encounter that Jasmine has with the white American Professor at the university Club of Dalton, Iowa, who has become a believer in the Hindu concept of reincarnation, and her dazed movements as she wanders into Lillian Gordon's trailer park, where she will get a new life. Chapter 19 and 20 shuttle back and forth between the narrative present (Jasmine's life as Jane) and her Americanization by Lillian Gordon and life with the Vadheras. Chapter 21 consists of an Iowa scene. Chapters 22 and 23 take Jasmine via Kate's studio to the Hayeses. Chapter 24 begins with the scene where Bud is hit by a bullet and then goes further back to Jasmine's courtship period with Bud but mentions a letter from Taylor that suggests the possibilities of a life other than that with Bud. Chapter 25 brings us back to the narrative present where Bud is asking her to marry him. In chapter 26 Taylor arrives to rescue her and she takes another plunge into the future. All this moving backward and forward is done naturally. Mukherjee captures the fluidity of oral narratives where events are foretold and told and where past, present, and the future intermingle. (116)

In **Jasmine**, the narrative swifts between the past and the present, between India of her earlier life and America of the present. The past is Jyoti's childhood in the small village of Hasnapur, Punjab, her marriage to Prakash, the young ambitious city man, who always thrashed tradition. The present was her life as Jane in Iowa, where she was a live-in-companion to Bud Ripplemeyer. Bud was fascinated by her darkness. He courted her because she was an alien. She was darkness, mystery, and

inscrutability. Considering the narrative voice in “Telling Her Tale : Narrative Voice and Gender Roles in Bharati Mukherjee’s **Jasmine**” Pushpa N. Parekh relates :

The memory of Jasmine’s personal history and environment shapes and directs the reception of her personal experiences and context and is often countered by double perspective of the shifts in time and space and their impact on the psyche of the immigrant woman can be explored through the tonal shifts with which the Jasmine-Jane protagonist concretizes her emotional and intellectual reality. Fear, anger, pain, bitterness, confusion, silence, irony, humour, as well as pathos underline her observations as she discovers for herself the undefined median between the preservation of the old world and the assimilation into the new one. (117)

Jasmine is an illegal alien who has defied the immigration laws and a murderer who has defied the ruthless violence of a male-powered capitalist society. Based on the argument, Pushpa N. Parekh further relates : “Jasmine-Jane characterizes her voice with the tone of defiance. This defiance, born of inner monologues and reflections, and of the sanity and the capacity of the human will to survive is distinct. It is at times a brash, willful defiance, at others a quietly enduring one” (117-118).

**Holder** can be taken as a quest narrative written to point to American readers how lives have been intertwined and can be intertwined across space and time. It is a story about the trauma of dislocation and joy of transformation arising out of the union of two cultures. The novel is in the form of a modern biographical fiction. The story is narrated by a detective who is searching for the diamond but Hannah’s view point is also taken into consideration. The structure of **Holder** is complex. It spans two historical periods, the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. The primary narrator, a twentieth-century American assets hunter, Beigh Masters, from Massachusetts, uses the help of her Indo-American lover (a computer scientist) to recover the narrative of a seventeenth-century woman, Hannah Easton Fitch Legge. Beigh’s initial motivation for piecing together Hannah’s story is to find

the Emperor's Tear. Beigh's narrative traces the story of Hannah from her New England origins through a brief stay in England as the wife of an English sailor to her subsequent travels to India with her husband, who becomes an East India Company factor and later a pirate. Hannah's existence as a Company spouse is transformed radically by her husband's wanderlust that leaves her in India at the mercy of a Hindu king and eventually as the mistress of the King, Jadav Singh. Beigh juxtaposes the narrative of Hannah with a narrative of her own life, where one can see her growing understanding of her role as a writer, narrator, historian, and assets hunter. As Beigh delves deeper into Hannah's life, she begins to lose interest in the Emperor's Tear and becomes involved in the intricacies of Hannah's extraordinary life. The jewel ceases to be a material object and becomes symbolic of the essence of Hannah's existence. Very early in the narrative, Beigh recognizes her changed objective and comments, "I couldn't care less about the Emperor's Tear, by now I care only about the Salem Bibi" (HW 19).

Beigh constructs the narrative of Salem Bibi (the name given to Hannah by Mughal India) through meticulous research into artifacts such as paintings, embroidery, diaries, and folk narratives, and begins to put a book together. Beigh's more traditional academic research and narrative methods are contrasted in terms of objectivity by the virtual reality program created by her lover that enables him to feed vast amounts of seemingly random data to produce in virtual space the actual event. Beigh's narrative and Venn's recreation of experience uneasily coexist in the novel, and Mukherjee uses them to question subtly the relationship between experience and its narrativization. In this novel, the tension between Beigh's narrativization of experience and Venn's virtual recreation of the experiences suggests that the Salem Bibi / Hannah Legge's identity and the cultural spaces she occupied are constructs and in imposing a narrative structure on her life both Venn and Beigh are structuring their own individual and cultural identities. For Beigh, this self-formation is through identification with Hannah as an American woman (she even sees a remote family connection between herself and Hannah), and for Venn the identity construction is in opposition to Hannah as a

white woman complicit with early mercantile imperialism in India. As they read Hannah's diaries and interpret stories about her, she eludes both their attempts to categorize her. At the end of the novel, Beigh's research data is fed into Venn's computer program. This brings both their narrative methods together in an attempt to allow Beigh to transcend time and space and appropriate the identity of Hannah's friend and servant, Bhagmati. The competing narrative structures in this novel raise questions not just about colonial relationships and experiences but also how they are signified.

Both Venn and Beigh are conscious of their authorial functions in the narrative. Hannah is the author in the most commonly used sense of the term. She records experiences and memories in journals and translates them into embroideries that tell her tale. "Hannah's work suggests that location is not so much physical space as it is an imagined landscape constructed in art / narrative" (Iyer 36). Beigh narrates Hannah's tale using "the omniscient point of view, thus blurring the distinctions between what Hannah leaves behind as records of her life and Beigh's interpretation of them. The Beigh and Hannah authorial functions combine at the end of the novel where Beigh enters Hannah's experience with the aid of Venn's programme at this point, the distinctions between real experience, virtual experience, and narrative disappear" (Iyer 36).

**Holder** also rewrites the Raj narrative which tells tales of forbidden relationships between white women and native men as seen in E.M. Forster's **A Passage to India** and Paul Scott's **The Raj Quartet**. In **Holder**, the forbidden relationship between Hannah and Jadav Singh is a passive one. Hannah's interracial sexual liaison with Jadav Singh is initiated by her. The chaos and war in which she finds herself are not the result of her sexual liaison but of her relationship with Jadav Singh. The rape trope is transformed in **Holder** by making it a woman's choice and not a man's violence.

**Holder** is also a historical novel. It is an alternative history which can revise the imaginative relations between immigrants and natives. Mukherjee has brought into the canvas of the novel, **Holder**, the recorded history of colonial New England, the East India Company, and to Mughal India.

Fakrul Alam has pointed out the amount of research done by Mukherjee for writing this novel in the book **Bharati Mukherjee**. Fakrul Alam writes :

It is not difficult for a reader of **The Holder of the World** to imagine Mukherjee doing research for her book like her *Beigh Masters* by viewing paintings in out-of-the way museums; attending art auctions; sifting through catalogs; poring over birth records, tombstones, and East India Company records; digging through archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society; talking to people adept in the history and culture of seventeenth-century America, England, and India; and travelling to Salem or Brookfield or the Coromandel coast to re-create the historical context in which she had to place Hannah Easton. Obviously, answering the question she asked herself after viewing the Mughal miniatures also required her to mull over the classic texts of American Puritanism, the published captivity narratives, and the extant letters, diaries, and journals of the men and women of the period. Undoubtedly, writing this novel required Mukherjee to assay history in her bid to create a credible world for Hannah Easton to move in. (130)

Pradeep Trikha in "**The Holder of the World** : Feminist and Cross-Cultural Overview" admits : "As far as the treatment of history is concerned the novel has scintilla of Kushwant Singh's **Delhi**, Amitav Ghosh's **In an Antique Land**, V.S. Naipaul's **A Way in the World** and Anita Desai's **Journey to Ithaca**. But as far as handling of feminist point of debate is concerned a parallel can be drawn between **Journey to Ithaca** and **The Holder of the World**" (207). Considering **Holder** as a historical novel V.C. Sudheer also in "History and Past Reality in **The Holder of the World**" says :

Sometimes one feels like reading history not from the hands of a historian but from the pen of an artist who appeals to our aesthetic sense. Bharati Mukherjee with a poetic sense reconstructs the past reality through the story of Hannah, the Salem Bibi.

In a chronological order she writes about the story and the background of Hannah from 1632 when Charles Jonathan Samuel Master arrived in Massachusetts. Then she writes about the arrival of Elias Walker and family in Brookfield and birth of Rebecca Walker. In 1661 arrived Edward Easton. The marriage of Edward and Rebecca took place in the year 1668. Bharati Mukherjee describes the lives of the puritans in the New England. Hannah, a puritan from Massachusetts, comes to India after her marriage with Gabriel Legge. After an avalanche of experiences, Hannah looks at the ebb and tide of life in India before she translates herself into Salem Bibi of Raja Jadav Singh of Devagad. (214)

Even though Mukherjee calls **Holder** as the post-modern historical novel, Laxmi Parasuram in “Holding the Colliding Walls : Cross-Cultural Perception in **The Holder of the World**” is of the opinion that

The book is by no means a historical novel as some may tend to call it. There is nothing past about the past as presented in the novel. All that is supposedly past makes up the virtual reality in the computer with which one can actively interact. Beigh has consulted five hundred books, endless number of paintings, engravings, trade records, journals, pictures, artifacts and what not to get the truth of Salem Bibi – her secret heart encoded in multiple evidence and Venn’s program X2989 has ingested all this information to reanimate and recreate the sensory and immediate world of virtual reality. Beigh can enter this world and be virtually identified with Hannah and experience the colliding worlds in which Hannah lived. (198)

V.C. Sudheer differs in his perception of the novel as he says in “History and Past Reality in **The Holder of the World**” :

In a world of rootlessness and uncertainties of immigrant citizenship, history offers a staple base on which to search for one’s past identity and perhaps that is what Bharati

Mukherjee is looking for in **The Holder of the World**. The novel is a bridge between the past and the present. One could say the novel is a form of 'computerized history'. The author has cleverly and deftly juxtaposed the apparently conflicting worlds of luxuriant past and the mechanized present. The search for the precious diamond "The Emperor's Tear" seems to be a search for the glorious past. (213)

Even the opening sentence of the novel, **Holder**, "I live in three time zones simultaneously, and I don't mean Eastern, Central, and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future" (HW 5) suggests Mukherjee's attempt at looking at the past in the present to preserve it for the future through the super computer Nova. The novel is a thorough research and artistic recapturing of the past reality as the writer herself admits that the probe into the history of three hundred years old period, its people, their experience is like "Uniting people and possessions : it's like matching orphaned socks, through time" (HW 5). Even though **Holder** can be treated as a historical novel, Mukherjee in her interview to Pinto :

I did not want **Holder of the World** to be a traditional historical novel, a period piece. I love history and I can be fascinated by the handling of data, what is called information management. As the novel grew, draft by draft, I saw a way to bring these together... To me this was an experiment in virtual reality, a way of revising, reliving history instead of rewriting it. I wanted to set up for American and Indian audiences how much Asia contributed to the notion of an American or European identity. (Pinto 11)

In **Leave**, Mukherjee's narrative skill with descriptions and conversational language, resorts to deft metaphors and colloquial expressions. "Through bold images, pithy dialogues and engaging divulgement, the novelist succeeds in presenting a firm conviction that a woman is no more a

subaltern, cannot be exploited as the weaker sex while contrarily she sustains the entire family and the social structure” (Myles, **Feminism** 117).

Just as **Jasmine** covers five decades, **Daughters** is scattered over twelve decades. The chronicle moves through reminiscences and direct narration. The title has been taken in a rather ironical sense as the three sisters in the story, Padma, Parvati, and Tara are bent upon breaking traditions and to live their own lives. Mukherjee’s **Daughters** bears a title that seems like a retort to Vikram Seth’s best seller, **A Suitable Boy**. It is made up of twenty chapters divided unequally into three parts. Four narrative threads overlap and are woven together.

There is the tale of a child bride in East Bengal in 1879, who was forced to marry a tree and remain celibate in her father’s house, since the groom selected for her died of a snake bite on the very day fixed for the nuptials.

There is the story of the three beautiful and talented Bhattacharjee sisters who grew up in their Ballygunge family home and attended the Loreto House convent in Calcutta in the 1960’s.

There is the narrative of the youngest Bhattacharjee sister, Tara, who is also the first-person narrator throughout in her life as a married woman, a mother, and a divorcee in San Francisco, California, in the 1980’s and 1990’s. This is completed by exchanges with her second sister Parvati, established in Bombay, with her eldest sister Padma, established in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, and with her ageing parents who have retired in Rishikesh, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Tara’s ex-husband, Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a computer industry tycoon, and their adolescent son Rabi, are also important centres of attention in Tara’s narrative.

The fourth narrative thread introduces an element of mystery and suspense into the novel. It concerns an enigmatic character who presents himself as Christopher Dey, the illegitimate son of the eldest Bhattacharjee sister, Padma, and whose existence had been hushed up by the family over 25

years. The investigations of a Sardarji police officer of the San Francisco Police Department reveal that there was indeed a bonafide Christopher Dey but that he was murdered and his place was taken by a terrorist criminal of the powerful Dawood gang, based in Bombay and Dubai, with tentacles reaching all over the globe.

The juxtaposition of these four narrative threads results in a moving and absorbing novel about the dilemmas and crises faced by diasporic Indian families as they adjust and adapt to constantly changing circumstances.

Commenting on the use of time sequence in Mukherjee's novels V.C. Sudheer in "History and Past Reality in **The Holder of the World**" says :

There is a sense of time found in almost all the novels of Mukherjee. The present and the past do not interact in **Wife**. Dimple, the protagonist is isolated – not merely in loneliness or isolation or cultural differences but in her estrangement from her past and her own being. In **The Tiger's Daughter**, they do interact but interaction is non-productive. In both these novels of Mukherjee, the characters are shown in their reactions to the past and present. The writer known for her novels which mirror expatriate experiences continues the trend even in **Jasmine**. She portrays the experiences of people who leave the country of their origin to settle in America. The bitter experience of shifting and adjustment come alive before the readers through the artistry of Bharati Mukherjee. Jasmine, the heroine of the novel, a Punjabi by origin, reaches America along with an avalanche of harrowing experiences. The conflicts of culture, the adjustments, the perspectives are dramatized. The changing dimensions of the American society are presented along with the changing faces of people and attitudes in an artistic way. The metamorphosis of the American life as looked at by various immigrants with diverse cultures and attitudes through time are

related with each other in a tightly knit novel **Jasmine**, known for its gentle humour and stunning expatriate experiences.

In **The Holder of the World**, the past and the present are intertwined in a beautiful way so as to represent the glories of the past to the curious eyes of the present computerized world—primarily a Western one. (213-214)

By the time Mukherjee wrote **Darkness**, she had adapted American English as her language. She moved away from using irony and was no longer comfortable in using an authoritative point of view. **Daughter** has rather a British feel to it. In it, Mukherjee adopts the omniscient point of view and a great use of irony. This is because her concept of language and the notions of how a novel was constructed were based on British models.

In **Darkness**, the expatriation is expressed through irony and an omniscient narrative with occasional shifts in perspective and also authorial comments. The immigrants often appear in first person narratives and reveal the author's supple voice which can enter varied immigrant sensibilities. In **Daughter** and **Wife**, expatriation is not only a theme but also a metaphor for deeper levels of alienation like existential alienation and self-estrangement. This is revealed in the use of images. In **Daughter**, Hotel Catelli-continent is described as the "navel of the universe" (TD 3). It becomes a symbol of a rootless existence, a symbol of Tara's expatriate sensibility. In **Wife**, the cage is an important symbol. It stands for a comfortable but restricted existence. It stands for isolation and a denial of freedom. It is also significant that Dimple kills her husband after watching a Television programme which figured a birdcage prominently. Ruth Maxey in "The Messiness of Rebirth as an Immigrant : Bharati Mukherjee's Changing Language of Migration" says :

She hints at the pain of separation from the motherland in her discussions of 'exile' ('Imagining Homelands' 73-4) 'refugee' (**Jasmine** 100), 'resident alien' (**Wife** 47,48), and 'not-quite' status (**Darkness** 25,30; **Desirable Daughters** 88); and by referring to

the sense of being reduced to a 'nobody' in the new nation (**Tiger's Daughter** 59; 'Two ways' 13). On another note, she emphasizes the practicality of emigration through explorations of life as a 'guest worker' (**Jasmine** 67,100); 'settler' and 'claimant' (**Days and Nights** 302). She skirts the fringes of illegality with a further subsection, which includes 'wheelers and dealers' (cited in Vignisson 160), 'the immigrant hustler' ('After the Fatwa' 31), 'knife-wielding undocumented' (**Jasmine** 33) and – for those who are imagined to have been discovered—'deportee' and 'outcast' (**Jasmine** 101). (183)

Just like "A Father" is written in a satiric vein, Mukherjee is parodying the romance mode in "Nostalgia". "Ruining his decision to woo Padma near the end of 'Nostalgia', Dr. Patel understands that one reason he had fallen for her so readily is that while she had appeared to him to be like an Indian goddess, she had also attracted him by displaying what he considers the liberated American woman's insouciance about sex" (Alam 62). Like V.S. Naipaul, Mukherjee uses "a mordant and self-protective irony" (D 2) in describing her characters' pain because "irony promised both detachment from the superiority over those well-bred post-colonials much like myself (herself), adrift in the new world wondering if they would ever belong" (D 2). In **Daughter**, Mukherjee alludes to E.M. Forster's novel **A Passage to India**. Prasanna Sree Sathupati in "Psychotic Violence of Dimple in **Wife**" says that Mukherjee in **Daughter** presents "a satirical portrait of Indian society from the perspective of Tara Banerjee Cartwright, a young expatriate who is not yet accustomed to American culture yet is estranged from the moral and values of her native land" (78).

In **Jasmine**, Mukherjee uses images attached to Jasmine. While scavenging for firewood, Jyoti gets a star-shaped wound on her forehead and that scar becomes her third eye. Through this archetypal image, third eye, which resembles the Lord Shiva's third eye, Mukherjee shows that Jyoti was peering out into invisible world and proclaims: "Now I'm a sage" (J 3). The other significant image that Bharati Mukherjee associates with Jasmine's rebellious spirit is the carcass of a small dog that she

encounters as a child. The protagonist does not want to become broken in body and spirit like the dog. In the course of her narrative she admits :

Suddenly my fingers scraped the soft water-logged carcass of a small dog. The body was rotten, the eyes had been eaten. The moment I touched it, the body broke into two as though the water had been its glue. A stench leaked out of the broken body, and then both pieces quickly sank.

That stench stays with me. I'm twenty four now. I live in Baden, Elsa Country, Iowa, but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it. I know what I don't want to become. (5)

The second archetypal image that Mukherjee uses to bring out the protagonist's feminist trait is that of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction. Jasmine takes the avatar of Kali, an incarnation of Durga to Half-Face who raped her. In it, Mukherjee fuses two archetypal images to enact this killing : Kali, the Goddess of Destruction and strength and the broken pitcher. Jasmine extended her tongue and sliced it too to be a true incarnate of Kali. She, in fact, becomes Kali personified, the deity of avenging fury-Death incarnate. Jasmine says :

I said my prayers for the dead clutching my Ganpati. I thought, the pitcher is broken, Lord Yama, who had wanted me, who had courted me, and whom I'd flirted on the long trip over, had now deserted me... my body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for. (J 120-121)

S.P. Swain in "Dimple in **Wife** : A Study of the Lacerated Self" considers Tara and Dimple as symbols symbolizing the predicament of "a voice without articulation and without a vision. They are visionless because they are voiceless. They are rootless because they are shootless" (82).

Thus, even the language and style of Mukherjee show that she is primarily the writer of expatriation and immigration. Her interest is centred on these two themes. Hence, one can conclude that Mukherjee has created the original and valuable fiction about the expatriates and immigrants in Canada and America respectively. She can claim to be a major ethnic woman writer of contemporary America. She relates the experience of exile, expatriation, and immigration in her narrative skills. It becomes a lovely imagination to produce memorable and colorful tales of excitement as well as the traumas of adjusting to a new world.

## References

- Alam, Fakrul. **Bharati Mukherjee**. New York : Twayne Publishers, 1996.
- Alonzanesi, Sandra. "Bharati Mukherjee's **Jasmine** : The Exuberance of Immigration, Feminist Strategies and Multicultural Negotiations". **Studies in Indian Writing in English**. Vol. II. Eds. Mittapalli Rajeshwar and Pier Paolo Piciucco. New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001 : 77-107.
- Barat, Urbashi. "Expatriate Indian or Immigrant American? A Study of 'A Father' and 'A Wife's Story'". **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1996 : 116-124.
- Connell, Michael, Jessie Gearson, and Tom Grimes. "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee". **Iowa Review**. 20.3 (1990) : 7-32.
- Hancock, Geoffrey. "An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee". **Canadian Fiction Magazine**. 59 (1987) : 30-44.
- Iyer, Nalini. "American / Indian : Metaphors of the Self in Bharati Mukherjee's **The Holder of the World**". **Ariel**. Vol. 27. No. 4 (October, 1996) : 29-44.

Jain, Jasbir. "Foreignness of Spirit : The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels". **The Journal of Indian Writing in English**. Vol. 13. No. 2 (July, 1985) : 12-19.

Manvi, Meera. "Rereading Indian Womanhood : A Note on the Narrative Structure of **Wife**". **Osmania Journal of English Studies**. Vol. 25 (1989) : 140-150.

Maxey, Ruth. "'The Messiness of Rebirth as an Immigrant' : Bharati Mukherjee's Changing Language of Migration". **South Asian Review**. Vol. 26. No. 2 (December, 2005) : 181-201.

Mukherjee, Bharati. **The Tiger's Daughter**. 1971. New Delhi : Penguin, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Wife**. 1975. New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1976.

Mukherjee, Bharati. **Days and Nights in Calcutta**. With Clark Blaise. New York : Doubleday, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. "An Invisible Woman". **Saturday Night**. 96 (March, 1981) : 36-40.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Darkness**. 1985. New York : Penguin Books, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. **The Middleman and Other Stories**. 1988. New Delhi : Prestige, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Jasmine**. 1989. New Delhi : Viking, 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_. **The Holder of the World**. 1993. New York : Fawcett Books, 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Leave it to Me**. 1997. New York : The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Desirable Daughters**. 2002. New York : Rekha Printers Pvt. Ltd., 2004.

Myles, Anita. **Feminism and the Post-modern Indian Women Novelists in English**. New Delhi : Sarup & Sons, 2006.

Parasuram, Laxmi. "Holding the Colliding Walls : Cross-Cultural Perception in **The Holder of the World**". **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1996 : 196-201.

Parekh, Pushpa, N. "Telling Heritage : Narrative Voice and Gender Roles in Bharati Mukherjee's **Jasmine**". **Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York : Garland Publishing Inc., 1993 : 109-126.

Rajeshwar, M. "Sado-Masochism as a Literary Device in Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife**". **Indian Women Novelists**. Set III. Vol. 3. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1995 : 127-139.

Sathupati, Prasanna Sree. "Psychotic Violence of Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife**". **Indian Women Novelists**. Set III. Vol. 3. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1995 : 110-116 also in **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1996 : 77-81.

Spurling, John. "Review of **The Tiger's Daughter**". **New Statesman**. 6. July, 1973 : 25.

Sudheer, V.C. "History and the Past Reality in **The Holder of the World**". **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1996 : 213-216.

Swain, S.P. "Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife** : A Study of the Lacerated Self". **Indian Women Novelists**. Set. III. Vol. 3. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1995 : 117-126 also in **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi : Prestige Books, 1996 : 82-89.

## Chapter VI

### 6. Summation