CHAPTER - IV

BHARATI MUKHERJEE
AND
OTHER
INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS
Post-Independent Indian Novel in English is characterized by a sense of anguish. The cross-cultural tension, the diasporic consciousness, and sense of being lost amidst the contemporary chaos and confusion, are some of the noteworthy traits of Post-independent Indian Novel in English. The British impact on the national life during the nineteenth century was almost traumatic. The political subjugation of India was the symbol of her cultural capitulation. The cultural collision between Indian and English has resulted in the emergence of a new India. The cultural movement (Reformation and Renaissance) was to A.V. Krishna Rao, “a purblind craze for the perfection of obsolescent and obscurantist social values” (*The Indo--Anglian Novel and the Changing Tradition* 10). There was a cultural awakening which led to the formation of modern India.

Bharati Mukherjee belongs to the Westernised Upper class. But this does not limit her ‘social experience to a single stratum’ which is generally the case with the other ‘westernised upper-class’ writers in the domain of Indian Fiction in English. In her epoch-making study of British women novelists, from the point of view of women’s experience, titled *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter divides the tradition of women writing (women experience) into three phases: the Feminine, the Feminist and the Female, representing the three different shreds of feminism. All these three experiences of women are invariably delineated by Bharati Mukherjee in the portrayal of her women characters.
Indian woman writers have evolved from insignificance to recognition since the last few decades. With the rise of feminism the ground beneath women's feet has extended. Indian literature today explores the "Woman Questions" extensively and vociferously. In the words of Navarro Tejaro:

Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self sacrificing woman towards conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood (Modern Indian Women Writers in English WEB, Feb 8, 2010).

Today the themes of Indian English Women Novelist, consists of the latest burning issues related to women as well as those issues that exist in the society for long. Feminist themes have been dealt by almost all writers either overtly or covertly. Most of the female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, their novels are a series of protest. Antonio Navarro Tejero points out:

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Thus the theme is growing up from childhood to womanhood, that is, the Bildungsroman, is a recurrent strategy (ibid ).

There are many Diasporic women writers settled in USA, Canada and Great Britain. Anita Singh defines them as follows:

Their works describe colonial and post-colonial experiences from the angle of feminine sensibility of multiple marginalization with patriarchal constrain and as stranger in an alien western society. They delve deep into the darker dreams and nightmares of womanscape and their writings are characterized by nostalgia memory frequent questions of where are you from? They are wayfarers who keep looking back, and express their desire for their roots and cling to their natal culture (The Women Question in the Contemporary Indian Women Writing in English. 40).

Kamala Markandaya is essentially a writer with sociological perspective. Unlike Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya does not treat the theme of alienation either at the psychological or at the philosophical level. Her forte lies in her sociological vision of human life. In her novels, she mainly
deals with the social alienation of her characters. Alienation as a concept is widely prevalent only in American and European countries where people, in spite of their riches, become victims of alienation. They mostly suffer from psychological and philosophical alienation. But in India, which still believes in the tenets of fatalism and in passive acceptance, we find neither philosophical alienation nor psychological alienation quite as such, although the latter seems to be prevalent among the educated and westernized people. In the novels of Kamala Markandaya, protagonists seem to suffer from sociological alienation in the beginning but in the end, they suffer from self alienation. The depiction of rootlessness and alienation forms a continuing thematic concern of Markandaya in her novels. A clear-cut pattern emerges from her novels which strongly conveys the message that if one has roots, one survives; and if one’s roots are pulled out, one dies spiritually. One either gets ruined completely or is lost. In *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) Markandaya portrays how people become alien to the new surroundings, i.e., the city, after they get uprooted from their native soil. In *The Nowhere Man* (1972), she depicts how people become alienated and suffer from identity crisis when they migrate from their native soil.

The Indian immigrants in England have been the subject of Indian novels in English. In the Seventees, the most significant works are *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* (1971) by Anita Desai and *The Nowhere Man* (1972) by Kamala Markandaya. It was at this time that Bharati Mukherjee wrote her novels, *Tiger’s Daughter* (1971) *and* *Wife* (1975) about Indian immigrants in America. Although these novels were written at one time, the experience portrayed in them is different in quality. Anita Desai explores the immigrant experience from the intellectual point of view where as Kamala Markandaya probes the emotional implications of social dislocation and alienation. Bharati Mukherjee depicts social alienation of
the immigrants and expatriates. She deals with immigrant experience of the protagonists and their socio-cultural alienation from the milieu.

The birth of industrialization is marked by the beginning of general or mass exodus from the village to the city. In the wake of industrialization; not only in India but everywhere there was a common exodus from the rural to the urban centers especially during the first half of the Twentieth Century. The uprooting of a large number of people is brought about by several factors like politics, society, economics, and religion and so on. The people, who chose to leave their familiar surroundings and life giving soil, migrate to a new environment in search of a better life. Although people have migrated voluntarily, this settling down in a new and strange habitat is inescapably accompanied by an excruciating sense of lack of assimilation and identity crisis. If the sojourn to a given situation extends to be a permanent or a long stay, the agony and the distress of the migrant is stronger and it becomes a state of inexorablest uprootedness and alienation. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is an artistic and realistic description of the exodus caused by industrialization. The monstrous growth of the tannery disturbs the feudal village set up in the novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. This leads to the eviction of Nathan and Rukmini. At the micro level, the individual suffers a lot due to the loss of identity when migration takes place from the village to the city. At the macro level, the sufferings are due to their migration from India to alien lands. Nathan and Rukmini are forced by circumstances to leave their native soil and familiar surroundings for the city. The tannery is the main contributing factor in their complete dispossession. Rukmini's observation is quite heart-rending. She says:
Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it since the day the carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty man, staining the clear soft village and cleaning its cool silences with clamour. Since then it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever little grew in its way. It has changed the face of the village beyond recognition and altered the lives of its inhabitants in a myriad ways (Nectar in a Sieve 133-134).

The only aim of Rukmini and Nathan is to save sufficient money so that they might go back to their native soil. Rukmini is able to keep her spirit intact, but Nathan becomes very weak. He had his roots deep in the land and he is able to get along as he is not uprooted from the land. As Bhagwat S Goyal states:

The prime cause of Nathan's tragedy in Nectar in Sieve is that he is involved in alienated labour while denying him the fruits of his own productive work, enables social parasites like the moneylender and the grain shopkeeper to fill his coffers. From an uprooted son of the soil to an impoverished stone breaker, Nathan presents a vital image of human alienation in a non human society built on avarice, exploitation and crass commercialism. (Aspect of Indian Literature in English 140).

In the city, Nathan is unable to survive because as a rootless person everything is alien to him. Unable to tolerate the physical and mental sufferings he pathetically says, "I shall be where I was born and bred. This city is no place for me. I am lost in it. And I am too old to learn to like it" (Nectar in a Sieve 177). Unable to bear the load of the hard work in the quarry, Nathan finally meets his doom. After the death of Nathan, Rukmini returns to her village to find her roots after her temporary sojourn in the city. The alienation of the Indians living in foreign countries, as immigrants or as temporary visitors is the leitmotif of the novel The Nowhere Man. On the thematic nature of the novel, V.Rangam observes:

The Nowhere Man, as the title itself indicates, is a novel about a displaced Indian (a South Indian Brahmin to be precise) Srinivas settles down in England, but is not fully accepted by the English Community. Srinivas becomes a rootless, restless individual dispossessed of India and disowned by England (Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya 186).
He is depicted as a figure of loneliness, a 'disoriented' person and a trespasser, who even after staying for half a century in England feels like a "nowhere man, looking for a nowhere city." (The Nowhere Man 166).

The social conditions in the post-war England with all its immigration complication is not quite conducive to people like Srinivas. The Nowhere Man is set in the early fifties, after World War II. The narrative shuttles back and forth, weaving the life story of Srinivas, and comes down to the seventies. Srinivas is forced to leave his country during the national freedom movement. He is involved in anti-British activities and leaves India on his father's advice. But when he reaches the shores of England, the host country treats him as a trespasser, having lost many colonies. He is treated as an intruder. England was economically sound and well founded, the Depression, the World Wars and the loss of the Empire brought about a definite change in the prevailing situation. Owing to the problem of severe unemployment in the country, industries and organizations inclined to prefer the natives to the immigrants. Consequently the immigrant is made to feel more and more unwanted and unwelcome. When the novel opens, Srinivas was at a crucial stage of his life:

He was, at that period of his life, beginning to lose the fetters which tied him to any one country. He was a human being, and as such he felt he belonged to a wider citizenship (The Nowhere Man 39).

He had lost his wife Vasantha and his son Seshu in the war. His other son Laxman lived separately as he had imitated Western Culture blindly; transforming himself into a Brown Saheb. The loss of the two sons one dead and other living separately makes Srinivas lose his zest for living. Vasantha symbolized for Srinivas his traditional and cultural moorings. She left Srinivas and he felt alienated, lonely and depressed. He cannot leave England as he has nowhere to go. Hence he becomes a miserable nowhere man. It is Mrs. Pickering, a destitute old English divorcee who draws him out of his shell and befriends him. The friendship between them shows the encounter of Western
and Eastern Culture. Srinivas preserves his Indian values and is horrified when Mrs. Pickering shows her the lamb’s heart. The sight of animal slaughter draws out the agony of Srinivas. His Indian sensibility rebels and revolts:

The deliberate act, and the blood and mucus pumping out while the animal kicked and twitched and spilled its guts and died and the knives began again severing and slitting, and grayish green shit befouled the floor. The trade of killing, the obscure trade so classified since medieval times which brought meat to the table.. And the business of feeding: people who ate and ate, like this woman stuffing herself with heart, unmindful of mutilation, force feeding, deprivation, the miseries of farm, market and slaughter house; or persuading themselves that animal flesh did not feel which was the worst horror of all (The Nowhere Man 60).

This shows the theme of East-West encounter in collision. Mrs Pickering has no instinct for animal suffering. The Indian mind is thus endowed with instinct and emotion and the English mind with reason and logic. Mrs. Pickering possessed the positive qualities of the English psyche: commonsense, reason, stability and efficiency. Srinivas encountered Fred Fletch’s racist hostility with equanimity and nonviolence. Fred is further angered by the lack of protest from Srinivas. Like any racist, he resents the blacks as he is unemployed and has lost his place in the housing queue. He holds them responsible for creating land and job paucity. According to him they are parasites: “In hordes, occupied all the houses filled up the hospital beds and their offsprings have taken all places in schools. They have no right to live in England” (The Nowhere Man 163).

This East-West encounter of Indian immigrants in England echoes colonial history. It evokes the direct confrontation of the two opposing forms of the colonial situation- the white master and the coloured slave. But in Bharati Mukherjee, the immigrant experience is subjective, psychological and shows the struggle for identity formation in an alien milieu. The focus is on the cultural clash rather than the socio-political atmosphere of the seventies. Bharati Mukherjee is more concerned with the internal struggle, pains and pangs of immigrants to overcome the strife and confrontation, and enjoy assimilation into alien culture.
Kamala Markandaya ends her novel, with the note that uprooting causes death. Srinivas in the end suffers from leprosy—an acute state of redundant expression of isolation. He becomes a prisoner in his own house. Even his son Laxman does not show him love and concern. Srinivas pathetically admits to himself. “He is an alien, whose manners, accents, voice, syntax, bones, build, way of life, all of him—is shrieked alien!!” (230). Despite his sincere efforts to integrate into the alien culture and the life of the country of his adoption, Srinivas fails to do so. Unfortunately, he is not aggressive enough to absorb himself into the mainstream culture. He is like Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife* and Tara in *The Tigers Daughter* who fail to assimilate into the American way of life. In *The Tigers Daughter*, Tara is the nowhere woman who feels alienated in her own country. In the end of the novel, she is found inside the car in a state of suffocation, unable to resist the riots, unable to strike out to take her flight abroad.

In Bharati Mukherjee’s *Wife*, Dimple becomes schizophrenic and psychotic. She is unable to overcome the failure of assimilation, and finally murders her husband. She fails to Americanize herself and also fails to prove herself as a faithful Indian wife. If Srinivas suffers from Leprosy, Dimple suffers from depression, psychosis and split self. The pertinent comment of Rangan deserves to be mentioned in this context:

> Srinivas represents millions of man who for some reason or other leave their own roots and fail to strike roots in the alien soil, and die as rootless and restless individuals (*Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya* 186).

Kamala Markandaya’s protagonists fails to assimilate themselves to an alien soil. But Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee is a virtual tornado, who is able to journey through the alien soil of Florida, Iowa, New York and finally to California. She is being transported simultaneously from one identity to another, leading to her own realization that her transformation is genetic. She goes
through several rebirths to become all American. Her adaptability and readiness to become all American aids her assimilation into American society. Moreover she is still open to more transformation “greedy with wants and reckless from hope” (Jasmine 241). Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonist like Jasmine, Hannah, Devidee and Tara of Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride; cross physical and geographical boundaries, and change their lives in all respects psychologically, emotionally and physically. In the process of their assimilation, by their sheer resilience, and rebellious force, they survive, victorious and self-assertive. They are unlike Kamala Markandaya’s Srinivas and Nathan, losers, who do not survive in an alien soil and die as rootless misfits. The diversion between white and black, created by colonization cannot be easily bridged. The protagonist of Markandaya’s novel have to struggle against hostility from English but for Indian characters in Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, it is a struggle within themselves, an effort to preserve their identities ethnically.

In Kamala Markandaya, the immigrant experience is concrete with overt manifestation of racialism. Srinivas faces hostility from Englishman like Fred Fletcher. In Anita Desai Bye Bye, Blackbird and Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife and Jasmine- the immigrant experience shows the rebellious feminine psyche overcoming the hostility of male counterparts as aliens of the milieu. Dimple in Wife and Maya in Cry, the Peacock become rebelliously self-assertive against their husband in the process of assimilation. In Jasmine too the female protagonist commits murder of Half Face, takes up a husband for each role she plays. Thus the immigrant experience is from a feminist perspective. It considers the male as adversaries in the quest for their Identities.
ANITA DESAI

Anita Desai has incorporated the western concept of alienation in her novels. S.P. Swain is of the opinion that alienation to her, "is more related to the emotional and mental moods and attitudes of her characters than to their moral and ethical temperaments. The alienated self in Desai experiences the pangs of emotional isolation. The struggle of the alienated self in Desai is more similar to the Kafka protagonist than to the Camus hero". (Interior Landscape 47). Like Kafka protagonists Desai characters pass through acute emotional estrangements leading to psychic derailment.

Anita Desai portrays women as not totally cut off from familiar and social ties but women who remain within their orbit and protest against monotony, injustice and humiliation. Woman in her novels is not a mere goddess or a robot but a self-actualising and self realizing individual. She has deliberately given women characters names such as Maya, Sita, Radha to suggest their mythic parallel to epics. Myths are ideals rather than facts. Bharati Mukherjee too makes use of myths and legends to show the parallel to her women characters. In her novel Wife, the infidelity of Dimple is juxtaposed against the ideal of Sita as wife. In Jasmine, she makes her women characters avenge the evil forces assuming the role of Goddess Kali. In her later novels Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride, she searches the roots of her protagonist by making use of the myth of Tree Bride in Hindu philosophy. In immigrant writers, myth acts as a kind of index to show the protagonist's distance and adherence to one's home culture. It also acts as markers or indicators of one's native culture, in the process of root search which further helps in defining the self in context of the society. Thus both Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee make ample use of myth and allusions in their novels.
In Bharati Mukherjee and V.S. Naipaul, it is the sense of “exile” that leads to the alienation of the characters. But in Desai, it is not so. Anita Desai’s novels do not deal with the theme of exile. “Exile has never been my theme, says Desai”. (Desai Interviewed, Rajasthan University Studies in English 69). Her main thematic concern is how people cope with society, alien or not alien without losing their sense of identity and individuality. However, Desai protagonists are emotional orphans. Emotionally maimed, they hail from fractured families. Dr. S.P. Swain maintains: “In Mukherjee, it is people and culture in collision but in Desai, it is people and people in collision, in Mukherjee, it is cultural confrontation but in Desai, it is psychic confrontation” (Interior Landscape 49). In Desai, the protagonists being emotionally bankrupt have no sense of inheritance and are not dependent on parents emotionally or psychologically. Jasbir Jain observes:

The protagonists either disowns or are disowned by their families. Maya’s only memory of her mother in Cry The Peacock is the photograph on her father’s desk (134); the Ray children in Voices in the City, all four of them are alienated in different degrees from their mother, their only surviving parent, as well as from their father, who is now dead. Sita’s mother in Where Shall We Go This Summer? had run away from home leaving her children to the care of a father whose concerns lie outside the family. Sita had imagined she came into world motherless. A similar withdrawal, from her parents is there on the part of Sarah in Bye- Bye, Blackbird, who by marrying an Indian has at one stroke, placed herself outside the family and the cultural situation. The children in Clear Light of Day resent the long absences of their parents and are aware only of their exits and entrances. (Stairs to the Attic 113-114).

Desai characters are intellectual and emotional rebels. They disown what little they might have inherited from their parents. They do not move with the tide but rebell against it. They “Prefer to go in the opposite direction” (ibid; 116) Heredity in Desai figures but marginally. Bharati Mukherjee on the other hand places a lot of importance on heredity. Most of her novels starting from The Tiger’s Daughter to The Tree Bride her last novel, begin by tracing several generations of family history spanning over a period of at least fifty years. In The Tigers Daughter, the father figure is inscribed in the title of the novel as-
The Tiger’s Daughter. Bharati Mukherjee traces the culture of Brahmin Zamindars by describing a wedding in the family: “In the year 1879, the English Calendar, on Monday in Sravan, Harilal Banerjee of Panchpara was standing under a wedding canopy on the roof of his house” (The Tiger’s Daughter 04)

A dominant patriarchal culture is prominent with a towering father figure. The Bengal Tiger is introduced after the description of his class. In the second novel Wife, the wife rebels the authority of her father in the arranged marriage. In Jasmine too, the protagonist describes the father from Lahore with his pure Urdu having the final say in all matters. However, In Holder of the World mother figure dominates. As in Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride the question of patriarchal culture in the form of dominating father figure is again presented in The Tiger’s Daughter:

I have JaiKrishna’s photo. I know the name of Jai Kirshna’s father, but they have always been ghosts....My history begins with a family wedding on the coldest and darkest night in the Bengali month of paush. The bride is named Taralata, a name we almost share. The name of the father is Jai Krishna Gangooly. Taralata is 5years old and headed deep into the forest to marry a tree. (05)

Tracing this history is like exploring the consciousness of people in the family. In the latest novel The Tree Bride, the same tracing of ancestry and family tree is done within a patriarchal framework. In The Tree Bride, she connects her life to the life of Tree Bride: “This was about a distant relative we called the Tree Bride, my great aunt, a point of light from the remotest darkest galaxy of my life”(22) So there is a root search for inheritance, family tradition and culture in each of Bharati Mukherjee’s novel and the father figure dominates. While searching for roots Bharati Mukherjee makes an analysis of contemporary social practices like Sati, child marriage, dowry system in Bengali Brahmin families. The social changes after colonial rule and the removal of such practices from Hindu culture is the subsidiary issues of the
novels. The self originates from the family tradition and the social praxis. Bharati Mukherjee delineated in novel after novel, the pitiable and awful plight of the alienated self. Patriarchy is the social structure of the novel where we witness the strife of self and society. Mostly the feminine self, struggles and falters, and struggles again. The despairing self of the female, encounters singlehandedly the torments and tortures of their insensitive and temperamentally callous husbands. In her Interview with Yasodhara Dalmia, Desai speaks of “the terror of facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.” (Desai Interviewed, The Times of India 13). The society and its degenerate values endanger the assaults of existence. The self frantically tries to escape but enters a world of schizophrenia resulting in self fragmentation. Desai uses the stream of consciousness technique to present the pathological psyche of the individual self. Most of her female protagonists are abnormally sensitive and morally solitary to the point of being neurotic. This is true of Maya in Cry The Peacock, Monisha in Voices in the City, Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? and Nanda in Fire on the Mountain. She is concerned more with the portrayal of inward or psychic reality of the characters. To use her own words, not “the one-tenth visible section of the iceberg that one sees above the surface of the ocean.... but the remaining nine-tenths of it that lie below the surface.” (Desai, Replies to the Questionnaire.” Kakatiya Journal of English Studies 01) Jasbir Jain confirms the above statement. According to her, Anita Desai “probes deep into the inner recesses of the psyche of the character and delves deeper and deeper into the character or a scene rather than going round about it.” (Desai Interviewed, Rajasthan University Studies in English 68).
The chief preoccupation of Anita Desai’s novels is man-woman relationship. “The great relationship for humanity” says D.H.Lawrence, Will always be the relation between man and woman. The relation between woman and man, parent and child will always be subsidiary.” (Dalmia, “Desai Interviewed”, The Times of India 13).

In Cry, the Peacock, Maya’s assertive marriage to Gautama lacked emotional attachment. She is stuck with father fixation and she is unable to establish a harmonious relationship with her husband. There is a marked similarity with regard to the central episode presented as both Maya in Anita Desai and Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee take the extreme step of killing their husbands. S.Sujatha’s pertinent observations in this context, was worth quoting: “The final act is the culmination point of gradual disintegration of personality” (Critical Symposiums 66). However, there are significant differences as the cause of personality disintegration is different. In Maya, the marriage incompatibility takes place because of over protected childhood and adolescence, culminating in Oedipus Complex, excessive dependence on father. She seeks for a father substitute in Gautama but it is not possible. Maya longs for love but at the same time is afraid of involvement. Unlike Jasmine of Bharati Mukherjee who rebels against the astrologer’s prediction of widowhood, Maya too is influenced by the albino astrologer’s prediction of widowhood after four years of marriage. The albino figure pursues her as a perilous obsession in her conscious self, a persistent intrusion in her stream of consciousness.

In Bharati Mukherjee’s novel Wife, Dimple has false notions of marriage love and freedom. She dreams of life in America, full of freedom and love. But the problem of Dimple with her husband is lack of communication, and inability to come to terms with reality. Maya is resigned to her arid marital life. On the contrary, Dimple is obsessed with Americanization. She tries her best to adjust to the alien milieu. But she fails to become part of the American culture. She starts having an affair with Mitt Glassner in the American style. Both of them
became socially and psychologically maladjusted. When they fail to conform to the norms of the American society, they are in despair, and suffer psycho-social alienation resulting in a psychosis of the self. However, the etiology is different in Maya. It is father fixation but in Dimple, it is social dislocation of Diaspora. However, the final act of murder is committed in startlingly different ways in the two novels under study. Maya plans and carries out Gautama's murder in a cold blooded manner. She shows a composure and purpose to achieve her mad design. She lures Gautama to the terrace and in sudden burst of fury pushes him off the terrace to his death. Thereafter, she tries to rationalize the act, justifying it to herself by saying that Gautam is so involved with life that he does not enjoy it and so death will not make a difference.

In Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, murder of husband is committed impulsively with the madness of a psychotic patient reenacting the American Soap Opera which she has digests for long hours to kill her loneliness. She thought her husband came between her freedom and kills him as a culmination of psychoneurosis, a psychic malady which is the result of the indifference of the husband Amit in Mukhrjee's novel and Gautam in Desai's novel. The utter despair and desperation of Maya as a consequence of marital discord is worth-noting.

Maya utters her despair:

> How little he knew of my misery for how to comfort me. Telling me to go to sleep while he marked at his papers; he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed (*Desai, 1971, 09*)

For Gautam, Maya is a mere object, not a reality, an appearance only to be looked at. To be a woman observes Benjamin, "is to be excluded from rational individualism, to be either an object of it or a threat to it." (*The Future of Difference* 47).
Maya’s state of despair is too acute and culminates in madness. She is restricted to the ribbed confines of her home and is denied free access to society. Ann Foreman considers women’s alienation profoundly disturbing because women experience themselves as a source of fulfilment of other people’s needs:

Man exist in the social world.. For the women however, her place is within the home, the effect of alienation on the life and consciousness of women takes on even more oppressive form. Man s seeks relief from their alienation through their relations with women but for women, there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression (Marxism and Psychoanalysis 1977: 101-02).

Like other Indo-Anglican writers, the theme of violence and death has been dealt in Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee, but both the novelists differ from each other in the treatment of this theme. In Bharati Mukherjee we have violence and poverty in the city of Calcutta and New York. In The Tiger’s Daughter, we have the poverty of Tollygunj slums and the socialist uprising. It is only in Anita Desai’s Voices in the City, is Calcutta associated with sinister and demonic element.

In Indian writing, violence issues out of act of freedom movement, partition of the country or around famine, flood and poverty. In Kamala Markandaya violence, is due to poverty, and in Bharati Mukherjee - violence is due to immigration and social dislocation. But in Anita Desai, treatment of violence and death is psycho-emotional. In fact, in both Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai we have violence as projection of a sensitive psyche. Cry, the Peacock begins with the death of Toto, the pet dog and ends with the death of Gautam. In Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife, Dimple kills a rat with a sinister intention and intensity. She experiences a sense of disappointment in marriage and transfers her aggression manifested in the sadistic killing of the helpless animal:

“I'll get you,” She screamed. “There is no way out of this, my friend”. She seemed confident now, a woman transformed. And in an outburst of hatred, her body sledging, her wrist taint with fury. She smashed the top of small grey head (35).
This is explained as psychotic violence, or sadomasochism. In *Cry the Peacock*, Maya is deeply moved by the astrologer's prediction of death. She experiences disappointment in life. In Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, she is also predicted widowhood by an astrologer under a banyan tree. But she rebelliously tries to prove it wrong till the end of the novel. The protagonist assumes the role of goddess Kali to avenge her rape and to murder Half Face, she cuts her tongue. In *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, violence has been sarcastically portrayed through humiliation, insult and verbal abuse to Sarah by her countrymen for having married an Indian.

The theme of exile, immigration and expatriation is the central theme of novelist like Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander and to a very less extent in Anita Desai. In Meena Alexander, the shaping and formation of identity in an alien milieu is shaped by nationalistic fervour and collective consciousness of woman. In Jhumpa Lahiri, the exile struggles and combats his split self by rationalization of responses to the changed locale.

In Bharati Mukherjee, the protagonist overcomes the pangs of nostalgia to enjoy the luxuriance of immigration by a series of transformations. Although, Anita Desai disclaims that exile is not the theme she dwells upon in her novels, still we do find diasporic characters in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Baumgartner's Bombay*. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* is about the predicament of Indian immigrants in England, their social, cultural and racial displacement. S.P. Swain opines:

The novel explores the love-hate relationship of the immigrant towards their adopted land, their sense of alienation, their several attempts to adjust and integrate into an alien society and their final realization that total assimilation to foreign culture is an impossibility...Anita Desai is concerned here with the socio-phychic experiences of the Indian immigrants in England (*Interior Landscape* 107).

Adit and Sarah, Dev feel disgusted with indifference of London city. Dev contemptuously calls it a jungle city. The nasty attitude of the Whites against the coloured immigrants derisively called "wogs" (15) breeds in Dev rancour.
and nausea. Dev's quest for identity is in each phase of his reconciliation involves a psychic situation arising out of cross cultural interactions, "I would not live in a country where I was insulted and unwanted" (18). Along with other coloured immigrants, he is successfully addressed as "Macaulay's bastards" (128). Dev is hurt by the apathy of the people in the thoroughfares of London:

If I lived on a road like this in Calcutta, I would be aware- as aware can be of everyone around me. But not here. Here everyone is a stranger lives in hiding. They live silently and invisibly. It could happen nowhere in India (Desai 1971: 64).

Thus this novel deals with the problems of exile and expatriation from a feministic perspective. It deals with the problem of social adjustment and social alienation. It shows how Dev and Adit struggle to cope with an alien society and thereafter lose their sense of identity. The woman character Sarah marries Adit but tries to adjust with her Indian husband to the extent that she gives birth to a baby in India. She even wants her baby to assimilate to her husband's pattern of life. But Adit finally plans to return to India. He explains to Sarah, "I am going back... To India...Home" (231).

Thus, we do not have assimilation as we find in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee or formation of national identity as portrayed by Meena Alexander in her novels. Rather we have social and psychological alienation, interaction between lonely individuals and the locale. The locale, known for its cold climate freezes the self of the immigrants and many become claustrophobic. Dev feels that the city is empty:

the English habit of keeping all doors and windows tightly shut, of guarding their privacy and may guard their tongues from speaking and their throats from catching cold.... remains incomprehensible to him (Bye Bye Blackbird 63).

Thus the locale becomes a powerful motif of the existential agony of the protagonists in Mukherjee, Desai and Alexander. It not only tortures and conditions, but also modifies the self. The Indo-Anglian Novel till 1970 treated themes of political and social import. It exhibited a splendid array of items:
princes and paupers, saints and sinners, whiteman and babus, farmers and labourers, untouchables and coolies, prosperity and adversity, cities and villages. Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya are pioneers in this field. Writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh deal with more path-breaking themes like independence movement, East-West encounter, tradition and modernity, materialism and spiritualism. It is only writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya who began to write on depth of mind, its penetration into the deep recesses of the unconscious mind, With Bharati Mukherjee, we have a more powerful analysis of East-West encounter. Kamala Markandaya has dealt with this postcolonial theme, but Bharati Mukherjee shows a new dimension of immigrant and expatriate experience. Her novels throw new light on cultural studies in the melting pot culture of America. As a first generation immigrant, she had overcome the pangs of nostalgia and split personality. Her protagonists knew how to overcome the trials and sufferings of diasporic experience to enjoy the exuberance of immigration through transformation of self.
Bharati Mukherjee writes with an expatriate sensibility. She shares her diasporic experiences with many other women writers, who write about the question of identity, issues of race, gender, ethnicity as related to displacement, migration and immigration to other cultures. This chapter tries to analyse how other women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Meena Alexander and Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Divakunrai grapple with the problem of the conflict between an alien milieu and the native self, and their feminine struggle to overcome the culture shock. Bharati Mukherjee’s approach to expatriation varies and often imitates the issue of sociological dynamics of self versus race, gender and ethnicity.

Bharati Mukherjee’s characters with colonial education, and an urge to escape to the west, are already in the process of hybridization even prior to their migration. As diasporic Bharati Mukherjee’s characters are infused with an “exuberance of immigration” to metropolitan culture. They embody the stereotypes of Third World with fixed notions of their country’s backwardness and inferiority. Her text has strong feminist undertones with the use of genial irony and satire. But the focus is on the issues of expatriation. In contrast, Meena Alexander’s texts use a feminist vision to question patriarchal notions of nationhood and identity. Alexander critiques normative categories of race, gender, postcoloniality, as well as empowers local tradition, cultures and institutions depreciated by a colonial past. Further, Meena’s characters resist an unquestioned assimilation into the western metropolitan centre. Such resistance is an offshoot of several external factors, such as reaction to perceived realism, a desire for a nostalgic past and most importantly a strong bond with women, familial or otherwise, who urge each other to explore their cultural roots.
In the essay, "Many Souls, Many Voices", Rebecca Sultan is of the view that Bharati Mukherjee's characters with colonial education have an urge to escape to the west and are already in the process of hybridization even prior to their migration... *(Discussing Indian Women Writers 216)*. She analyzes Alexander's resistant ideology in contrast to Mukherjee's assimilative one. I would like to counter Rebecca Sultana's stand that Bharati Mukherjee's characters have an unquestioned assimilation to western culture. They too like other diasporic characters, go through the complicated process of assimilation via resistance, nostalgia and rebellion. In the early novels Dimple in *Wife* and Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* are typical expatriates. They remain maladjusted selves unable to assimilate. It is only in later novels that Jasmine assimilates but undergoes the same complicated process of nostalgia and rebellion. Jasmine is an ebullient novel offering a spiced up version of the classic recipe of assimilation into dominant culture:

In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn't shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to adjust, to participate only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible, or so wonderful, that it won't disintegrate (181).

Bharati Mukherjee's characters also embody the same stereotypes of third world notions of backwardness and inferiority. Jasmine sticks to religion and superstitions and belief although she rebels to what the superstitious astrologer has to say. Jasmine escapes the patriarchal authority and widowhood and reaches Florida in search of a new dream. Jasmine questions the Khalistan movement, partition and constructs a new identity by breaking the norms of Third World sociopolitical conditions:

When the old astrologer swatted me under a banyan tree, we were both acting out final phase of a social order that had gone untouched for thousands of years *(Jasmine 203)*.
Unlike Mukherjee, who finds the immigrant experience exhilarating, Alexander’s experience is muted and subdued. Bharati Mukherjee achieves this state of exhilaration and assimilation after experiencing years of trials and tribulations and pangs of acute racism in Canada. In each of the novels, she questions the religious mores and cultural stereotypes. In *Wife*, she questions the concept of Sati, and Sita in the state of wifehood. In *Jasmine*, she debunks widowhood, becomes Kali to conquer evil. In *The Holder of the World*, the idolatry of Hindus is brought to ridicule by the Mughals and Puritan Hannah. Edward Said considers Alexander’s protagonist as possessing— one of the saddest fates of representation. Alexander characters are like those intellectuals as outsider in a “State of never fully being adjusted” (Said 53).

Alexander calls immigrants “patchwork creatures “where each piece of patched fabric represents an experience picked up from every dislocation. Her characters are unable to “take up life and become a citizen of just anywhere they happened to be”. (Said 62). In *Manhattan Music*, Sakhi voices a similar immigrant condition:

> Travelling places was hard, staying was harder. You had to open your suitcases, lay out the little bits and pieces into ready made riches. Smooth out the sari, exchange it for a skirt, have your hair trimmed, a little differently..... then you tucked the suitcase under the bed and forget about it started accumulating the bric a brac that made part of the streets around (207).

Salman Rushdie, another emigre from the Indian sub continent, evokes similar sentiments of fragmentation and loss through images of broken glass, which becomes, “not merely a mirror of nostalgia but also a useful tool with which to work in the present” *(Imaginary Homelands* 12). Similarly Alexander empowers characters with reminiscences of the past when nostalgia becomes a strategic tool with which to reconstruct ones’ self.
However, Bharati Mukherjee’s characters are also seeped in nostalgia for their lost homelands, for Calcutta’s, religious rituals and festivals. Especially Dimple in *wife* is nostalgic of “Durga Puja, Tara and of *The Tiger’s Daughter* forgets the religious rituals of bathing a Shiva lingum and experiences a cracking of axis. But in her later novels, Bharati Mukherjee strategically makes her characters overcome nostalgia reminiscences in order to experience healthy assimilation into the alien soil. Jasmine in her commitment to assimilation in the United States – “To bother oneself inside nostalgia, to sheath the heart in a bullet proof vest, was to be a coward” (*Jasmine* 165).

Bharati Mukherjee idealistically makes her protagonist overcome nostalgia with exhilaration but Alexander admits the excruciating pain in overcoming nostalgia. So she is realistic in combating nostalgic. The mode of assimilation remains elusive without any solution. Alexander’s ideology is enumerated in her personal narratives in the opening of her memoir *Faultline*. She wonders at her ability to piece together the fragments of her multiple dislocation. History binds together the merry times that she has left behind her, both present and past. In an interview, Alexander reveals that she would like to “give flesh to some of these fitful people in my head, living breaths; living breathing, full of hopes about their lives. And in doing that I would like to draw together India and America, flesh and blood and spirit.” (qtd, in *Rustomji-Kerns* 20).

Having grown up in two countries, India and Sudan, and having then moved to two more, Britain and the United States, Alexander wants to link herself to a history. “Coming to America, I have felt on my heart what she invokes as: “two souls two thoughts…. in one dark body. But now at the tail end of the century, perhaps there are many souls in one dark body.” (*Faultlines* 2).
The characters in the two novels are similarly multi-located and what is common to all is a desire to call a place, a home. But as Draupadi, in *Manhattan Music*, displays dislocation and can forever contemplate a return to an origin. Instead of being, “greedy with wants and reckless from hope,” (*Jasmine* 24) at the prospect of assimilating into the dominant culture Draupadi tries, but fails to cultivate for herself an Indian Identity. Bhabha’s call for an anti-essentialized hybridized self is rejected by Alexander’s exiled characters.

Bhabha’s theory of unification of colonial subject, overlooks the problems posed by class and gender differences on both sides of the colonial equation. Draupadi’s status as a coloured women, not only complicates her relations with Whites, but will show how class standing and gender complicates her relationship with other third world immigrants as well. Bhabha does not take into account differing immigrant experiences as well as differing perceptions evoking from masculine as opposed to feminine perspectives.

Sandhya marries an English Professor Stephen Rosenblaum. He believed that his Indian wife’s immigration was like the Jewish immigration. So he believes that Sandhya “should like America head on” (*Manhattan Music* 39). However, Stephen discovers his fallacy, when he realises that his wife is unable to assimilate. However integral to this immigrant psychology is mimicry and hybridity. Bhabha considers mimicry as:

> The sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which approximates the other, mimicry also however constructs and depends upon a system of difference. (*Location of Culture* 86).

While hybridity denotes a fusion, it also denotes splitting. This double hybridity has been distinguished as a model that can be used to account for the form of syncretism that characterises post-colonial literatures and cultures. Another feature of diasporic existence is ambivalence. It involves a process of identification and discrimination. It forces us to choose in which side of the
divide to reside. V.S. Naipaul has been criticized by immigrant writers, as having been transformed into a mimic man. Bharati Mukherjee, critical of both Naipaul and Rushdie unequivocally refused to dwell on the past. She opts to accept and makes her protagonist also accept the exuberance of immigration. On the other hand, Meena Alexander’s characters repeat and follow Rushdie’s thoughts that:

exile or immigrants or expatriates are haunted by a sense of loss. Rushdie considers “these shards of memory” are like “broken pots of antiquity”, from which past can sometimes, but always provisionally be reconstructed. (Imaginary Homelands 12).

Sandhya in Manhattan Music locates herself in that difficult situation. She is imbued in Indian experience and she thinks she needs to create a semblance of her past. But her efforts only precipitate hostile reactions from others. Consequently, Alexander’s immigrants have yet to locate a cultural identity, becoming in the process, troubled nomads. Sandhya Rosenblaum is a voluntary exile as she accompanies her husband Stephen to a foreign land. She felt she is the same person but becomes conscious of her difference from others. She felt and wondered if she could “peel off her brown skin, dye her black hair blonde, turn her body into a pale Caucasian thing” (Manhattan Music 7). To make a difference to her husband, Sandhya comes to United States bewildered with horrifying memories and night mares of her former lover. She has to honour her marriage, “Stephen had married her and brought her to America. She would live here, she would learn to forget” (11). Memories however could be persistently cast off “she kept returning to her childhood home, a house with red-tiled roof and a sand courtyard where the mulberry bloomed” (41). Innumerable ties to her past held Sandhya back from whole-hearted assimilation.
In Bharati Mukherjee’s world, Tara of *The Tiger’s Daughter* is also married to an American David like Sandhya. She too is engulfed by nostalgia for her homeland. After seven years, she returns to India to find her home, her surrounding alien and uncomfortable. She found her love for Calcutta waning, after getting married to a mleccha and being segregated from her friends:

For years she had dreamed for this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fear of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far her return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, than the deformed beggars in the railway station and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty one, and quick to take offense (*The Tiger’s Daughter* 25).

She feels like an outsider in the country of her birth. The second character Draupadi, is a freelance performance artist. She was part Indian and part a mixture of other ethnicities. Draupadi recounts her family history: “My ancestors were scattered from British sailing ships, dark bits of ground pepper flying onto plantations in Trinidad and Fiji (*Manhattan Music* 4).”

The novel’s initial description of Sandhya’s migration is foregrounded with an image of shifting instability. Draupadi discovered Sandhya as afloat in the city, as though seeking an anchorage. Draupadi appears to Sandhya as a semblance of security, as she is born in USA with a claim to family history and class standing. Draupadi is conscious of her family ancestors being migratory labourers from India, who were scattered by multiple dislocation. On the other hand, Sandhya’s husband was grounded in the same geographical location for generations and could recount a history equally ancient. With such a background, both Sandhya and Draupadi became hyphenated immigrants echoing Rushdie’s imagery of immigrants as “crack lenses”. Sandhya visualizes an image of herself where she is wearing coloured glasses. She had noticed people in her home town doing, allowing her to visualize everything in an unstable swirl of colors. However, Bharati Mukherjee uses the image of
"cracking of axis", when Tara of *The Tiger’s Daughter* forgets one step in the rituals while bathing the *shivalingum* after her homecoming as wife of David, the Mleccha:

When the sandal wood paste had been grounded Tara scraped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions, it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center. But her mother came quickly with the relief of words (*The Tiger’s Daughter* 51).

The phrase “cracking of axis and center”, symbolically points out the the loss of her cultural heritage. The outcome of this loss is her inability to sing bhajans which she had sung as a child. Thus Sandhya, Draupadi and Tara are exiles in the historical and political sense but also in a metaphorical sense which Edward Said describes as a “dislocation” (52) or an ‘in betweenness’ (*Representation* 58). But the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee’s later novels *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*- overcome the weakness of nostalgia and homelessness to enjoy the joys of exuberance and assimilation. Understanding the ethics and norms of Americaness, Jasmine comments:

> In America, nothing lasts. I can say that now and it doesn’t shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible that it won’t disintegrate (*Jasmine* 181)

After a series of transformation they are able to ‘reposition her stars’(240) challenging the astrologer who had predicted widowhood risks and adventures. She begins to look forward to a new life. The mental image of the astrologer has been haunting her for all these years; and she challenges, “watch me reposition the stars”(Ibid). This suggests that Jasmine has indeed achieved self-actualization in America, the only land on earth that gives ample opportunity for work, making dream a reality.
Sandhya is unable to overcome the ponderous burden of “memories swelling like black water threatened to drown her” (Manhattan Music 4). She faces the realities of coping with hyphenated identities, divided loyalties and fragmented dream. Further, she maintains, multiple identities but gradually fragments her unified self. She rushes half way across the globe to the sick bed of her father, dying and jet-legged and stumbles back to her home in New York. Like the patch work creatures that Alexander describes, Sandhya has to assume a different identity for each visit and each position she assumes. Returning home is no longer a viable option. Stuart Hall notes that these diasporans return to homeland is often metaphorical, existing in what Edward Said perceives as the “imaginative and geographic and history” (quoted in Hall Cultural Identity 401). This is found in Bharati Mukherjee’s The Tiger’s Daughter, when Tara returns home to feel twice alienated both from the family and the adopted culture. Diasporans are truly caught between two world one dead and the other powerless to be born.

For Draupadi, being born in U.S.A., her home is more a state of being rather than a geographical location. In the absence of original home, communities of diasporans often develop a sense of belonging by perpetuating tradition among themselves. Draupadi’s parents and ancestors are able to preserve their custom and values and culinary practices by interaction with their other diasporans communities even after staying many years in U.S. Hence they named their daughter Draupadi after an Indian Goddess. The young Draupadi was the only Indian in her school in U.S. She wondered, “Why couldn’t they name me Dorothy? The name would have hung better on me” (Manhattan Music 88). This close attachment to an Indian community away from home makes Alexander’s protagonist overcome their sense of alienation.
However, Bharati Mukherjee presents the exuberance of immigration, by showing reverse diaspora i.e from Puritan America to Mughal India in her work, *The Holder of the World*. Tracing three hundred years of history, we discovered the mystical life of Hannah, a Puritan woman. She migrates to India as wife of Gabriel’ Legge, a factor of East India Company and later becomes the wife of a Pirate. She assimilates with the Indian milieu, with the companionship of her servant Bhagmati and becomes the Bibi of an Indian Raja. Draped in a saree, she lives the life of a Bibi, in the fort of Devgad. Further she again, undergoes another transformation to save her lover – the Indian Raja; to become the messenger of peace. Adorned in Moghul ornaments and finery, she confronts Emperor Aurangzeb to point out her finger towards his fake quality of duty and mercy. Her assimilation in bereft of any duality and she becomes one with her servant Bhagmati. She is found wearing the same saree as Bhagmati- “The language they communicated was more Bhagmati than hers...She wasn’t Hannah anymore; she was Mukta, Bhagmati’s word for pearl. And she gave Bhagmati a new name: Hester after the friend she had lost” (271). This is an example of total assimilation, with total socio-political involvement.

On the other hand, Draupadi confronts her marginalized status as an American by writing performance piece which can reveal her cultural identity as a hybridized Indian. What develops from her writing is a conglomeration of Indian and US colonial history. “Pieces of her writing are influenced by dancers in Tamil Nadu, a mythic hero who bore a parrot, symbol of the soul, and Peter Books Production of Mahabharata” (*Manhattan Music* 52). Draupadi’s choice of cultural pieces reflected her mixed lineage. She juxtaposes traditional Indian dance with Western interpretation of an Indian Myth. As she appropriates Indian history and mythology, Draupadi realizes that:
Syncretism was part of her being and it might work for her overcoming the barriers she felt she had faced since childhood. She however realizes that such syncretism cannot always be the answer to her questions about her fragmented identity seeing her art works, Jay asks her, “But is this your past? Why call mahabharata your heritage? Why not the Iliad and Odyssey also” *(Manhattan Music 52).*

In the absence of a national identity, which could have tied her to a homeland, Draupadi cannot claim an Indian past. She is also unable to claim a past rooted in United States history, conscious as she is that she was the great-grand daughter of a women who had come as bonded labour to Trinidad. Although Draupadi might think that India owed her and she would draw what she wished from that world, “she has to acknowledge her inability to reclaim such an identity. Draupadi realizes:

> The shred of memory she got from her grandmother didn’t add up to the wild glory of the epic. All she had were whispers, shards of songs, torn phases, and could they add up to a heritage? Still, as a human being, she felt she had a right to anything out there. And what came from India was closer (520).

Draupadi, despite her family history, her father’s claim to multiple ethnicities and her own claim to everything by dint of her birth in United States, chooses to construct an Indian identity for herself. What prompts her rejection of the dominant culture is her ability to create and sustain a hybrid self one which would have facilitated an easy assimilation into the metropolitan culture.

Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists are drawn towards a formation of hybrid identities than going back home and adopting a national identity. They may search for their roots as Tara in *Desirable Daughters,* but she is able to objectively analyse the Indian ethos, her cultural heritage and then assimilate into an Indian American self- taking the best from both cultures. They are able to construct a self of a new emerging women. They study and search their roots by assimilating their Indian cultural ethos and supplement it with American experiences. So they are able to enjoy the exuberance of immigration. Tara in *Desirable Daughters* becomes Americanized after a divorce and is unable to
sever her links from her cultural roots. So she is able to search for her Great 
grandaunt. She makes the Indian myth of tree bride a part of her existence while 
leading a liberated independent life of. She has an acceptance and tolerance for 
both cultures. On the other hand, Draupadi of Manhattan Music loses her boy 
friend in the midst of racist name calling. Her parents are threatened by the 
angry father of her white lover; "Keep your girl away from my lad...Don’t want 
none of the Paki stuff" (54). Draupadi is not accepted by her Italian lover and 
she rationalizes the man’s action:“Who wants a mongrel African- American 
Asian child by a women who strolls through Harlan on full moon nights” (169).

Meena Alexander’s article on Western Feminism overlooks the 
specifications of the Third World Woman. Feminist praxes and theories around 
the world are rooted in specific material of nation, class and religion. But she 
does not present Third World women as dependant on western women as 
referral point. Rather she believes in Indian community of Third World woman 
to nurture each other; a solidarity through cultural and geographical similitude. 
In Manhattan Music, a distressed Sandhya finds comfort among a gathering of 
Indian women who have assembled to voice their suffering:

Sandhya felt she had entered a country where she needed neither passport 
nor any signs of belonging. She set back in the plastic chair to listen to the 
testimonies of the women on the platform (211).

Sandhya protests against arranged marriage and chooses a husband 
of her own, like the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee. Sandhya and 
Bharati Mukherjee protagonist Tara, receive an education which is 
Western colonial and liberating. The novel Nampally Road revolves 
around Mira Kannadical, a young woman who returns to India after 
finishing graduate studies in England. She writes about her life:

I could stitch it all together; my birth in India a few years after national 
independence my colonial education, my rebellion against arranged 
marriage, my mother had in mind for me, my years of research in 
England (15).
Mira however finds herself entangled in the city’s ongoing political unrest. The novel’s climax shows the raping of a poor Muslim woman Rameeza Begum by a group of policemen. This show of brutal force by the authorities on disenfranchised minority triggers a series of cataclysmic events whereby, Mira question her understanding of national history.

In Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger’s Daughter*, the political unrest is about the rise of socialism and naxalite uprising against the capitalist class in the city of Calcutta. The protagonist Tara becomes a passive onlooker to the riots. She visits the slum and is unable to do anything for the capitalist class she belongs to. She feels like a helpless victim and mentally makes assumption about her husband’s opinion on it. But Mira in *Nampally Road* although educated abroad like Tara, actively participated in the struggle to understand her nation better. Mira finds that her writing was of no use to the people. She is disillusioned with Gandhi and Nehru. She comprehends that “No one needed my writing. It could make no difference” (*Nampally* 28). She tried to piece together the images and people around her:

> The life that wide sense were all around me in Little mother and Ramu and the young students, the orange sellers and the violent and wretched, ourselves included. I had no clear idea, what unified it all, what our history might mean” (28).

She tries to construct a national identity inspite of her experiences of an exiled life. In *Nampally*, the violence that erupts as a result of the rape becomes necessary to bridge the gap among classes and castes. Mira’s exiled life has already taught her that:

> The self is always two, always broken and the world as it is, that’s nowhere people like us can be whole. The best I can do is to leap frog over cracks in the earth, over the black fissures (92).

Transformation is vital to assimilation. In Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, the adaptability of Jasmine is seen through the dynamics of various roles she plays. On reaching America she assumes different role first as Taylor’s Day
mummy, than as Mrs. Ripple Mayor. Finally she constructs her new self to leave crippled Ripple Mayor to live the life of her love. Each transformation of role is followed and preceded by violence. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon claims that in postcolonial societies, recently liberated from colonialism, the atmosphere of violence having coloured all the colonial phase, continues to dominate national life. Violence also becomes the mode of resistance against class struggles, economic divide or political repression.

However, Alexander differs from Mukherjee in her treatment of violence. Alexander depicts violence against minority community as the only means of grievance redressal. When justice fails to mete out justice, violence is justified. In Bharati Mukherjee, the violence is seen in the form of female rebellion. Violence in the novel *Jasmine* is for an individual and personal cause. In *Wife* too, violence is in the form of female rebellion, with sadomasochism and neurosis. But Alexander’s Mira endorses violence for socio-political cause. When Mira finds her own ideals weak against the ideological conflicts and politics of the state, she seeks the companionship of women. The female ideal in Alexander works, centres on strong and independent women who defy culturally imposed conventions as they strive to make their voice heard. Mini receives strength and inspiration from Durgabai and female companionship:

> From one women’s body into another. From this Mira.... Into little mother, into Rameeza, into Rosamme, into that women in the truck on the way into the Public Gardens(93).

Mira finds these women not only as idealized companions but as a source of her own empowerment. Further Alexander empowers all her women characters not through western intervention but through an interworking of woman’s comradeship. Durgabai is a towering presence, even though the age difference between her and Mira acts as a barrier to a more personal relationship. Alexander writes about this female bond:
Sometimes I think, I came out of my mother, and out of her mother, and out of her mother before that in the female lineage is a great comfort. A comfort in that these boundaries of the flesh have been there, well before my consciousness. (*Quoted in Rusomji Kerns 19*).

Mira expresses herself though this community of women in a dream language that is unique to Rameeza, Durgabai and Meera. At the end of the novel, a new language promises to be born for communication amongst women in Meera’s life Durgabai and Rameeza. Finally, the community of women, linked together by shared multiple visions serves as a metaphor for Mira’s layered identities. Mira becomes three different women with three voices. With this multiple voice she is able to transgress class divide. Mira develops a collective identity trying to conceive of national identity, where the social issues are strong part of the psyche of the protagonist.

In Bharati Mukherjee, socio political issues such as Naxalite uprising in *The Tiger’s Daughter* remain in the background without any resolution. The self and its dynamics are foregrounded with problems of ethnicity, racism and class difference. When Tara in *The Tiger’s Daughter* encounters the slum dwellers in Tollygunge she is a helpless victim. Tara distances herself from the class struggle and finally tries to flee from her homeland. She becomes maladjusted to the Indian milieu. Hence, she tries to escape from India with no resolution to her hybrid self. It is in the later novels that Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists enjoy the exuberance of immigration.

However, in Meena Alexander, the concept of nationalism and national identity is foregrounded. She is clear about her state of exile and the pangs and pain accompanied with it. She seems to question Bharati Mukherjee that she cannot become American by just wishing it. For her, history acknowledges the inheritability of possessing a hyphenated identity: “But as my shining past fractures, never to be reassembled, ethnicity enters, and with it a different sort of priority” (*Faultline* 201). She asks: “Am I American, now I have lost my shining picture. Now I have no home in the old way? Is America this terrible
multiplicity at heart?” (201) daringly acknowledging the multiplicity of identities, Alexander decides to conclude her agenda of identity formation:

I can make myself up and this is the enticement, the exhilaration, the compulsive energy of America. But only up to a point, and the point, the sticking point, is my dark female body. I may try the voice over bit, the words over bit, the textual pyrotechnic bit, but my body is here, now and cannot be shed. No more than any other human being can: (Faultline 202).

In an interview with Nicholas A Basbanes in 1977 Bharati Mukherjee defined her status as a writer thus: “I have chosen and achieved right to be an American, and the concept of America is what fuels all my writing.” However she does not deny her Indian heritage. While describing her niche in contemporary American literature:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I am ashamed of my past, not because I am betraying or distancing my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants, going through the pressure of making a home here…. I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather that nostalgic or expatriation. (Contemporary American Literature 21)

Thus we can conclude that in Bharati Mukherjee, the identity formation is more psycho-social. But in Meena Alexander’s works, the dynamics of self versus society-the social issues and formation of national identity is highlighted, where as in Bharati Mukherjee the maladjusted self of the immigrants becomes the central point under consideration. Nostalgia and memories are crucial part of psyche of Alexander’s protagonist. Bharati Mukherjee protagonist overcomes nostalgia and enjoys the exuberance of immigration in her later novels as in Jasmine and The Holder of the World through series of transformations.
Like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee is also a multicultural diasporic postcolonial Indian living in United States. Her works also portray the expatriate dilemma and focuses upon various shades and nuances of female diasporic consciousness. In her debut collection of short stories, the female protagonists are pulled by two diverse cultures, an inherited collectivist Indian culture with its emphasis on close family ties, duties and obligations. The other culture is the adopted individualistic American culture, driven by liberty, self reliance and the pursuit of goals and personal desires. The female protagonist faces the conflict of preserving the inherited culture and on the other hand adopting the dominant culture. The resolution to this conflict is exemplified by a synergetic articulation. The synergy of integrating the sensibilities of both the culture is epitomized as “hybridity” and valorized by Homi K Bhaba.

The process of learning, the cultural norms of the host land is done with a hope to create a footing in the alien land. However, they experience a feeling of anxiety and dissonance in the crucial encounters of the host lands: “Diaspora does not simply refer to geographical dispersals but also to the vexed questions of identity, memory and hope which such displacement produces (Ashcroft, et al. 217-218).

Negotiating with new environments eventually precipitates a sense of alienation and simultaneously an irresistible urge to cope with this dilemma. According to S. Vasigaran:

Though these transactions cause cultural conflicts and angst, yet they certainly facilitate the disturbed mind to draw a road map for constructing a new identity in the immigrant situation. Until 1990’s Asian American writers expressed cross cultural angst based upon male experience on migration. (Critical studies on Contemporary English Women Writers, 233-234)
But women writers were much influenced by view of feminist like Mary Wollstonecraft, Ding Ling, Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Estella B. Friedman is of the opinion that, “only social custom, particularly economic dependence on men, produced the negative qualities associated with women and the superiority assumed by men” (The Essential Feminist Reader 14).

Several women writers, educated abroad were much influenced by feminist movements and they started writing for a radical change in the status of women. Therefore, those women writers challenge the tradition bound roles of docile subservient woman. Further, they attempt to express the agonies and conscience of women and their quest. Thereby they defy their own culture and tradition where patriarchal norms and andocentric practices have been followed. The woman writers engage themselves in the protest against women’s inferior position in society and the unfair treatment unleashed on them by the social and the cultural order of our country. Jane Freedman comments in this perspective that:

> Despite the huge social changes that have taken place in the past century, however, the concept of difference between men and women still prevails in society (Feminism 10).

The class system and gender difference in society has encouraged inequality, oppression and exploitation between the sexes. The patriarchal process treats women as a subjugated race as evidently visible in the traditional practices of family life. More importantly these factors create a threat in men that growth of women to selfhood is a threat to their hegemony. Therefore women writers stand to break traditional andocentric hegemony through their writings. The challenge, the oppressive tradition and harsh treatment to women with the noble purpose to free women from cultural clutches and create an ambience where they may share the roles of men so far played in the society. They firmly believe and dream of women’s emancipation as a reality. In this regard Hans Bertens comments: “Once the social and cultural restrain have been
lifted, women will be as autonomous and self determining as men (*Literary Theory 101*). Consequently, the myth of male domination appeared to recede its borders and disappear.

While early writers like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu assigned suffering and sacrificing roles to Indian womenhood in their writings, Recent writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and others examine the cultural tensions experienced by the Indian women immigrants and their subjectivity in establishing an identity which is denied by the patriarchal society. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is concerned with the dialectics of the women immigrant experiences in the American soil, whose prospects are repressed by the Indian tradition. Her works mainly evaluate the roles of women both in India and America and explore the conflicts while adapting to a new way of life. Oscillating between the attraction of the host land and obedience to its culture, her prime woman immigrant characters feel a constant psychic battle, whether to break the barriers of the old order and get adapted to the new one or to remain in the ghetto of old values. They develop a sensibility, willingness to accept and absorb the new environment involving a self transformation, after a prolonged negotiation and irrevocable compromise with it. Divakaruni mainly writes about this sensibility of Indian women immigrants that causes lot of emotional stress to them. Her short stories, “Clothes” and “The Word Love” are taken here for close examination, of how successfully Divakaruni elicits the pathos of women immigrants.

In “Clothes” “Mita’s evolution from a naïve, star-struck bride to an independent widow is traced using the metaphor of Clothes. As she boards the plane to join her new husband in United States, she dreams more about the store, she looks forward to a complete integration and assimilation into the American life. “She dreams of helping her husband at the store and kissing him in front of everyone, not caring like American” (23). However, her personal aspiration and
dreams are hemmed in the patriarchal folds of the family, "I stand inside this glass world, watching helplessly as America rushes by, wanting to scream." (26)

Her first initiation into the American life comes in the form of her clandestine posing to her husband in American clothes he brings for her. Her Indian clothes which conceal her bodies symbolize Indian values of subservience and self-effacement hiding her potential while the American clothes waiting in her closet, symbolize her dreams and her husband's aspiration for her (of her becoming a teacher). She as an Indian bride had travelled to California after her marriage with Somesh Sen, an immigrant to America. But the stars from her eyes disappear when he is shot dead in the night, in a twenty four hour provincial store in which he is a partner. Sumita resolves not to come back to India in fear of the Indian traditional customs: "All over India- at this very moment, widows in white sarees are bound their veiled heads serving tea to in-laws" (Arranged Married 33). Such a dislike for original culture is so ingrained in the feminine psyche, consistently developed and sharpened at times. It gets unleashed as a storm of resentment when it encounters socio-cultural oppression under appropriate circumstances.

Sunita recollects the words of her aunt that she will be lucky if she is "chosen" (18). This word "chosen" shows the inferiority of women in Indian arranged marriages. If she is chosen, she has to follow, without any hue and cry, the one who has chosen her. Divakaruni does not hesitate to bring to focus the ill-fated traditional customs of India. Sunita says, "Besides, wasn't it every women's destiny, as Mother was always telling me, to leave the known for the unknown? She has done it, and her mother before her. A married woman belongs to her husband, and her in-laws" (18-19) Women are selected or chosen like vegetables in the market. They had been denied the rights to air out their opinion even at crucial moments in their life. Further the pathetic cry of womanhood is demonstrated through Sumita's friend Radha who has been
longing for her marriage after getting rejected three times for the only flimsy reason that “her skin-color is considered too dark” (19).

The feminist psyche, thus humiliated to lead the life of servitude, gets exposed to an advanced culture that advocates the egalitarian principle of promoting equal social, political and economic rights and opportunities to all, irrespective of their race, creed, colour and gender; It endeavours to adopt the custom and values of it and wishing it to be a safe haven for its existence. Sumita’s interest in wearing American clothes, her desire, to move away from the joint family to live alone with her husband in a separate house, and her wishes to shoulder some of her husband’s responsibilities in running the store are some instances that show the amazing metamorphosis in her, from a typical orthodox Indian to a highly sophisticated and advanced American. “Mita, I tell myself, you’re growing westernized” (26). Unfortunately, Somesh is shot dead by some robbers in his store and so her hopes and thought have become illusory. When she is left with two choices, she thinks of not coming back to India as a widow like. “Doves with cut-off wings” (33). Instead she resolves to stay in California to lead the life of her own, independently.

In Bharati Mukherjee, protagonist Jasmine hailing from a feudal background from village Hasnapur also marries the city men Prakash in Jullunder. Prakash becomes a victim to Sikh assasin’s bullet just before he migrates to USA, with fake papers. She gets raped, she murders but she continues with her mission to assimilate into American culture even after she becomes a widow. She too like Sumita does not like to lead a life of widowhood in Hasnapur village with her widowed mother. So she opts for fulfilling her mission of her husband. She escapes the colourless isolated life of a widow in India to lead a life of freedom and ambition, at the same time to fulfill the ambition of her husband as a loyal Indian wife. This was the condition
of Indian women of the seventies who tried to defy the culture of an Indian widow and accept the liberation of American culture.

The short story “The Word Love” presents the truncated life of a young girl Shona, a young unmarried Indian women immigrant in Berkeley. She does not want to let her mother know her liaison with Rex, an American boyfriend. Her mother disowns her, cuts off all connection with her, once she knows about it. Divakaruni presents a literary representation of Indian women immigrant diasporic angst, of living two cultures simultaneously. Shona is guilty of her relationship with Rex as living together before marriage is not permissible in Indian culture. Divakaruni places her women characters at the centre of her stories, to make their voices conspicuous. As they have the baggage of Indian culture, the blending of American culture does not make them comfortable. Devakaruni seems to convey that women have to adopt the culture which gives them freedom and happiness. In both the stories “Clothes”, Sumita tries to escape widowhood and in the story “The Word Love” Shona adopts American individualism and leads a liberated life. This shows that the restraint and reservations of Indian culture cloisters their existence to suffocation.

A complete contrast to these women are Aunt Pratima of “Silver Pavements Golden Roofs” and “Mother of Bats”. So rooted is their loyalty to their mother culture that like Ashima in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Namesake they do not walk out of their abusive relationships. The continuance to accept male superiority inspite of harassment and humiliation is suggested. In fact Divakaruni has established: Maitri a hotline for South Asian women who are victims of domestic abuse. She has therefore shown women protagonist who adhere to home culture and who flout customs to necessary consequences. As Nevitt Stanford in his concept of challenge ad response puts it:

People by encountering new situations are forced to invent new methods of assessing and reaching to these situations in order to reduce tension and free their attention for other things” (Standford 44).

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In the story "Meeting Marinal" begins in the situation where "Clothes" ends—a married women negotiating the role of a single women imposed upon her by circumstances. She does everything to save her marriage when her husband leaves her for a red-haired American women. True to Habermas definition of “Pygmation Effect” she tries to reshape her personality to conform to the wishes of her husband” (Habermas 887). “I’d fought the divorce every way I knew...cooked Mahesh favourite meals. I’d even bought myself a gauzy black negligence from Victoria’s street. I’d taken a long time in the bathroom that night, brushing my hair till it shone down my back rubbing lavender oil on my wrists and throats trying different lipsticks” (“Clothes” 289). What is it that keeps pulling back mother to the abusive relationship? The answer could also be found in the words of Dobash and Dobash:

Women leave for short periods in order to escape the violence and emphasize their dissatisfaction in the hope that this will stop the violence. In the beginning, they are generally not-attempting to end the relationship, but are negotiating to reestablish the relationship on a non-violent basis (Women, Violence and Social Change 222-23).

Thus Divakaruni in her stories very subtly chronicles the dichotomy of response—women rooted in the mother culture seek accommodation even in an abusive marriage whereas those with migrant hybridity or ambivalence take emancipated decision and actions. These women protagonist find themselves living on the margins of two cultures, with the values emanating from their upbringing clashing with new aspirations as women. But they progress towards becoming what Bennett calls, “constructive marginals” when they “get beyond this confusing point through a recognition of the inevitability of ambiguity and of their responsibility to think autonomous based on the assessment of the context” (Bennett 115).
These new women are the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee. They defy the traditional concepts of women and womenhood, the values of self effacement, self denial, service, sacrifice and subjugation of women. They question these values and compare them with those of the western society they live in. But this does not come easily. Divakaruni is thus very focused on issues and problems of women. But in Bharati Mukherjee the problem of assimilation in immigrant feminine psyche is the central motif. She shows the defiance of an Indian wife to become unfaithful, and murders her husband in the novel wife. The chief focus is the maladjustment in the alien land and the problems of the immigrant psyche. In *Jasmine* and *The Tigers Daughter* women is the centre but the problem she grapples is not issues relating to exploitation, harassment but the women in an alien land adjusting her old self to the new milieu and the making of the new self. Divakaruni is concerned with women’s problem like extra marital affairs, husband’ harassment and women’s inferior position.

Chitra Banerjee Divakurani’s *The Vine of Desire* was first published in 2002. It acts as bridge between life in India and life in America. It is at this time that Bharati Mukherjee published her *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and the sequel *The Tree Bride* (2004). In the story “*Sister of My Heart*” she talks about arranged marriage of two sisters Sudha and Anju in a largely female household in Calcutta. They are cousins born within hours of difference, and they got married when they were eighteen. Anju migrates to America after marriage. Sudha follows after a broken up marriage to assist her sister after miscarriage. The issues which crop up in the process are relationship between sisters, their pregnancies, the ultra-sound test that the child is a girl and that the pregnancy be terminated. These are issues relating to women not just to immigrant women. Here, she highlights upon female foeticide and the status of woman, particularly in Indian society. Divakaruni has said “it was from reading about the misuses of amniocentesis to select and abort female fetuses that the two characters Sudha and Anju come to my imagination” (Interviewed, 11 Nov, 2005). Thus it is the
issue of female foeticide that made her create the character of Sudha and Anju. In the same interview she has said:

I have given up a lot of traditional notions about place of women in the home, and what is not okay for them to do. I really do believe in women making their own choices, standing up for their beliefs, fighting for them when they have to and certainly influenced my writing. (Biography and Interviews of Chitra Divakaruni, 11 November 2005, <www.amazon.com>)

The fact that Divakaruni has started the MAITRI, a hotline for South Asian Women in distress in the USA and her work with MAITRI has probably made her feel even more strongly about women and the need for change in social attitude. Thus issues relating to distress of women foregrounds in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. And problems of immigrant women on the other hand, is the focus of Bharati Mukherjee’s novel. In Desirable Daughters she also talks of arranged and broken marriages of sisters. Tara, youngest sister is married to Bish and has a broken marriage, Padma the second sister lives in a extended family, and host to a beeline of relatives in a Bombay plush flat. Parvati the eldest sister is in a relationship, out of marriage. But the stress is not on patriarchal oppression, harassment or exploitation as in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Rather it is on searching Indian roots, socio cultural assimilation in alien soil and a pride in host culture. There is also an emergence of new woman in Bharati Mukherjee.
JHUMPA LAHIRI

Asian American literature is written by persons of Asian descent in the United States. If Bharati Mukherjee belonged to the first generation immigrants, then Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation immigrant. The role of memory nostalgia and assimilation in their works are often discovered with striking similarities. *Interpreter of Maladies* is aptly subtitled "Stories from Bengal, Boston, and Beyond." All the nine stories set in America and India and are united by the motifs of exclusion, loneliness and search for fulfillment. They do not restrict themselves only to the experience of migrant and displaced individuals. Themes that interest Lahiri are love, fidelity, tradition and alienation. They crop up in the lives of Indians and non-Indians alike; communicating the fact that exile and exclusion is not the privilege of any one group of society alone. Lahiri portrays the specific situations of individual as symptomatic of the ubiquity of loneliness and alienation.

The common theme is the inability to communicate. The dynamics of relationship, cultural differences, immigration and adjustment cause lack of communication. Often the disjointed interactions of these factors change the course of stories. She chronicles the attempts of married couples, adulterous lovers and immigrants to cross borders as E.M. Forster, wrote "only connect".

Somadatta Mandal in his introduction of essay, “Defining and Redefining” Asian American Diaspora comments that: the condition of exile and loneliness which is “the third and final continent” is expressed through an individual who ruminates on the distances he has travelled, both literally and metaphorically- is probably the beyond between Bengal and Boston. The stories portray characters who are semi real-most are composites, though the situations are invented. Although most of Lahiri’s Indian characters are Bengalis yet their situations are universal. There is no resolution offered to their maladies- and no
assurance offered that their lives would have been more meaningful, had they acted differently.

Unlike Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa writes in voices of both genders. It is sometimes the omniscient narrator in “A Temporary Matter” the first person narrator in “Sexy and Treatment of Bibi Halder” eleven years old Eliot’s observation in “Mr Pirzada Came To Dine”. Jhumpa admits that the narrator in Bibi Haldar is not anybody in particular. It is a group of women, so there is no particular identity to the narrative voice. The omniscient narrator in, “This Blessed House” complies to the young man’s reaction to his new wife’s fascination for artifacts. Like her predecessors Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakarumi, she chronicles the dislocation and social unease in a novel manner. Her stories deal with well traversed terrain presenting the trials and tribulations of displaced person struggling to make sense in an unfair world. But what makes her stories different is the freshness of her language, an ear for dialogue, use of unusual metaphors and an astute descriptive ability imbue Lahiri’s prose with rare power and grace.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni tells about the popularity of Immigrant literatures:

 growing number of immigrants read our books... and a growing number of American women who are curious about the foreigners living in their middle want to read our stories. Some of our characters are good role models for women readers and women activists (11 November. 2005 <www.randomhouse.com.>).

Like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa also makes repeated references to the cultural tradition of Calcutta and their cherished moments of nostalgia or moments of bewilderment, and their encounter with the real Calcutta. She confessed to Radhika S.Shankar in an interview,
I went to Calcutta neither as a tourist nor as a former resident—valuable position for a writer. I learned to observe things as an outsider, and yet I also knew that as different Calcutta is from Rhode Island, I belonged there in some fundamental way, in the ways I did not seem to belong in the United States. The reason my first stories were set in Calcutta is due partly because of that perspective, that necessary combination of distance and intimacy with a place”(Hyperlink, Rediff.Com 1999).

As a second generation immigrant in the United States, she still feels “a bit of an outsider too.” Further in her visit to Calcutta the city tried to claim the famous “Bengali” as its own but Jhumpa insisted that she belonged to no one place in particular and that she inhabits a perplexing universe when Gaiutra Bahadur interviewed her in City paper that Lahiri was specifically asked why her stories are not preoccupied with issues of identity. She gives an interesting response: “But I never think of it self consciously trying to answer issues of identity. I work from a character and a conflict in a character’s life”.

Phrases like “oriental alienation” “Asian Abjection” Diaspora, “difference” and “representation” have been used to define the canon formulations on race. In Jhumpa Lahiri’s case though she lives in United States, her work is imbued with Indian culture and sensibilities. Wherever they are set, she explores “Indianess in some of her stories, while others deal with immigrants at different stages on the road to assimilation.” Her confession that “it is very hard to think myself as an American” makes her predicament unique as well as an American. Her books, instead of reeking with ethnocentricity, has a universal flavour and appeal that an immigrant from any corner of the world would be able to relate to. Jhumpa Lahiri, draws her literacy excellence from her first collection of stories entitled Interpreter of Maladies which fetched her the prestigious Pulitzer Prize of Fiction (2000). The New York Prize for Best first Book. She also has to her credit a successful novel, The Namesake. It was named as the New York Magazine Book of the year by New York Times and Best Book of the Year (2003) by United States of America Today. It was made
into a film by Mira Nair released in America and United Kingdom in 2007. It has been recognized and received attention at home and abroad.

Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian by ancestry, British by birth, and an American by immigration and targets the Western audience by deliberately portraying the Indian American life. As a second generation immigrant in America, India is part of her mental makeup. She is a product of vast cross-cultural fertilization without negative feelings either about the culture of her origin or of the country where she was born and raised. She carries her India as a cultural baggage, by virtue of being born to Indian parents. She admits in an interview with Ramnarayana Gouri:

When I began writing fiction seriously, my first attempts were for some reason always set in Calcutta, a vast, unruly fascinating city so different from the small New England from where I was raised, shaped my perceptions for the world and I learnt to observe things as an outsider and yet I knew how different Calcutta is from Rhode Island. I belonged there in some fundamental way in a way, I didn’t seem to belong in the UnitedState (Times Of India 21 April 2000 12).

To Indian Academies she has written something known as Diaspora Fiction and to the USA academics Immigrant fiction, and this kind of demarcation amuses her. A heterogeneous hybrid community called Diaspora has been created by the globalised World with cultures at crossroads, confronting to assimilate. America is a favourite melting pot of culture, but this melting pot is also a space of tensions. The novel Namesake is Diasporic in consciousness and grapples with issues of adaptation and adjustments. The narrative revolves around the difficulties faced by a couple in a different country, The issues dealt with are, the clash of cultures, the relationship between parents and children, the generation gap and identity problem. Jhumpa Lahiri appears to says, man-woman relationship in marriages of first generation immigrant, is more stable and balanced than second generation immigrant.
This novel constantly focuses on the contrasting experience of two generation of expatriates. Ashok and Ashima do not attempt to Americanize while Gopal and Sonia constantly face the need to belong. They develop tastes and ideas more in keeping with the society in which they live. They seem to realize that diaspora can lead to transculturation. It occurs in contact-zones or social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination (Pratt 4). Critics favour trans-culturation to terms like hybridity:

Transculturation is an empowering term, because it suggests experiencing or dwelling in more than one culture, borrowing from different cultures, without privileging one culture over another or implying a hierarchy of cultures (Collu 61).

Ashima The novel talks about the adaptation, adjustment of Ashima - a Bengali women who moves to United States after her marriage. Her grandmother was very confident that she would not forget her native culture. Unlike her parents, and her other relatives, her grandmother had not admonished Ashima not to eat beef or wear skirts or cut off her hair or forget her family the moment she landed in Boston. Her grandmother had not been fearful of such signs of betrayal; she was the only person to predict rightly that would never change.

Moving to United States after marriage, she is like Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonist Dimple in the novel Wife. But Ashima as a wife is perfect and balanced. She loves her husband and knows his taste, although he is a reserved person, not quick in expression. Dimple tries to Americanize herself to assimilate. But when she fails, she alienates and gets depressed and murders her husband. Both Ashima and Dimple do not work outside home, do not pursue higher studies. Ashima does not have the motivation to adopt the culture of host country. She is a stable and balanced woman, as she fastidiously adheres to her own culture. She is able to instill the stability of her own culture to her children Gogol and Soni without imposing anything. She is even ready to observe
Christmas for her children along with other Indian festivals. However she warns her children against marriage to Americans as they ended in divorce. “They’ve gone so far as to point out example of Bengali men they know who have American marriages that have ended in divorce” (NS 117).

But Dimple, the newly-wed Bengali wife is not as balanced and stable. Rather she is a romantic fool. She endeavors to Americanize herself by changing dress codes and having a boy friend. But she is further alienated and New York proves destructive to her. She tries seven ways of suicide. In the end she has psychotic disorder like sleepwalking at night. She kills her husband with a kitchen knife in her desperation, in the end of the novel:

She touched the mole very tightly and let her fingers draw a circle around the delectable spot, then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times each times a little harder......... Women on television got away with murder (Wife 212-13).

Stabbing the knife seven times is breaking the marriage rituals. However, Ashima is able to harmonize her relationship with her husband successfully. She is also concerned with her son’s marriage. Her son Gogol has three affairs and dates three different girls, but they were not successful. He breaks his relation with Maxine, because he doesn’t like her interference in his family affairs, going to visit her mother every week. Even after coming to know that her son has several conflicts with his girl friend Maxine, she keeps quite, and subtly suggests about another girl Moushimi, of Bengali descent. Gogol starts meeting Moushimi after her mother tells her about it. He ultimately marries her but Gogol and Moushimi’s compatibility is not as stable as the first generation, Ashima and Ashoka. In the middle of a conversation Gogol discovers that Moushimi is having a secret affair with a person Dimitri. Immediately a hand had gone to her mouth accompanied by a small intake of breath. And then silence, “who is Dimitri?” He’d asked. And then” Are you having an affair” (282) He felt humiliated and deceived and then they got divorced.
Ashima stands apart from all the other character in her commitment towards her married life. She was fully dedicated to her husband when he was alive and even after her death. She does not like to sell the house, as she feels attached to everything in that house where she has spent her whole life. She is a devoted Indian wife who spends thirtyfive years without losing her culture keeping her cultural integrity intact. She makes America her other home. Ashima and Mousumi have striking contrasts in nature. Indian upbringing makes Ashima upheld Indian values and tradition even in America after her marriage. For Mousumi, things related to Gogol are just commodities, she is not at all devoted as she has an American upbringing. She has got affairs before marriage and after divorce with Gogol and she is not ashamed or upset.

Thus the second generation immigrants have fewer battles of assimilation and a clearer identity as they are already imbued with the American culture. However, for Gogol, his name becomes a source of identity crises. To show the power of name as makers of identity, Lahiri takes the reader through the life of Gogol Ganguly. When Gogol begins to grow into a young man he becomes painfully aware and ashamed about his funny name. Sireesha Telugu observes:

> He hates question that pour on him about the meaning of his name, he hates to sign the drawing with his name, he hates to wear a tag that has his name, he hates every bit of it that embarrass him. This name drifts him away from family, craves for a change in his name and his family (*Contemporary Indian Women in English* 37).

So when he goes to college he changes his name to Nikhil this act is a symbol of a new identity that Gogol or rather Nikhil tried to adopt. Nikhil takes up a more American lifestyle and engages in freedom hiding himself and his Indian family background. The author tries to project two identities of one single person in the novel, Gogol and Nikhil. To him, Gogol is not just a name, it signifies all his discomfort and struggle to fit into two different cultures as he grew up. And Nikhil signifies the freedom of living in American culture. Finally, Nikhil marries Mousimi as Gogol and tried to reconstruct family
tradition. He learns that the answer is not to fully abandon or attempt to diminish either culture, but to interconnect the two together. Gogol was not fully in tune with his identity until he realizes that it is embellished by both cultures. He is able to take up failures in life independently. He is no longer ashamed of himself of the way he has lived. He is proud of who he is and where he comes from.

In *Jasmine*, we have the issue of taking up new names and new identities in the process of assimilation. She is Jyoti of Hasnapur, Jasmine for Jullunder, Jase and Jane for American culture. It is with each name she has a new husband for Jasmine she has Prakash, for Jane she has Bud and for Jase, Taylor. She transforms herself and her identity and finally she reaches complete assimilation into American culture. Jasmine has indeed achieved self actualization in America- the only land on earth that gives one ample opportunity to work for making dreams a reality. To change from Jyoti to Jasmine, Jasmine to Jase, and Jase to Jane is not an easy process. She survived hideous times that involved rape and murders, terrifying challenges and unimaginable crises. She is not sentimental about her Indian identity nor does she suffer from nostalgic longing. Instead she used all her strength and resolve to forge new alliances in the friendly soil of the adopted homeland. According to S. Indira, “the fusion between East and West pleases her and she rejoices that her journey to America has unfolded her affirming self...” (*Critical Symposium 171*).

Bharati Mukherjee admits in an interview that “her characters are a breed of pioneers who have the guts to forsake a predictable life in order to throw themselves into a new one” (*Times of India*). As Jasmine is a first generation immigrant, her struggle for assimilation and identity formation is more painful and she has to undergo a series of transformations than Gogol who has just to change his role from Gogol to Nikhil.
Bharati Mukherjee as a first generation immigrant writer has a unique position amongst the other five immigrant Indian women novelists. She shows maturity and stability in handling the issue of diaspora and sets a moral tone for assimilation. She has made it clear that a plural self is always dynamic and flexible to survive by making series of transformation and considers this as one of the resolutions to the problems of diaspora. She has presented several manifestations and variations to the forms of diaspora, in her novels. In the novel *The Tree Bride* colonial rule shows certain migrant Britishers transformed to British Hindu. She traces history to the Sixteenth century, and brings alive the life of Hannah, a Sixteenth century New England women transformed into Sari clad bibi. This variation of transformation of self throws new light on the issue of cross cultural migration. In her later novels, she has attempted a systematic research on the theme of assimilation. Her contemporary women writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Chitra Banarjee Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, supplement and complement to her unique status as a writer of South Asian diaspora.

Kamala Markandaya in her presentation of east-west encounter is confined to a sociological vision of rootless misfits who fail to assimilate. However, Anita Desai shows her protagonist as emotional orphans alienated to the fringes of the society. She shows the emotional alienation existing between man and woman relationship. But Bharati Mukherjee shows the cultural negotiations and assimilation of immigrants. She is totally preoccupied with cultural, geographical gaps existing in the migrant world of diaspora. Chitra Banerjee Divakurani is focused on social issues like extra marital affairs, female foeticide and problems of arranged marriages. She champions the cause of women issues, their oppression and their marginalization. But diaspora and migration is never her chosen topics. But Meena Alexander is clear about her stand regarding racism and state of exile. She also affirms that pangs and pain of exilehood can never be prevented. In her Memoirs, *Faultlines*, she was
conscious of the ‘dark skin’ and racial discrimination of Third World women. She seems to question Bharati Mukherjee that one cannot become an American by just wishing it. This hyphenated identity can be overcome by developing a national identity. And alienation can be combated by the companionship with other Indian woman in the alien community. Jhumpa Lahiri, the second generation immigrant, like Bharati Mukherjee is not exclusively preoccupied with the theme of exile, exclusion and assimilation. Her short stories reveal the complexities in man woman relationship and the alienation in spouses. She is Indian by ancestry, British by birth and American by immigration. She too carries her Indian cultural baggage with an obsession for Calcutta, as a city of her ancestors. To her, diaspora is not a big issue, but a part of life which she has grown up with. She has the confidence for assimilation as second generation immigrant. From the feminist perspective, Bharati Mukherjee seems to present role models of real women who are courageous and bold. They indulge in violence within a mythical framework to achieve their female identity. She sets the moral tone with substantial use of myths, both Indian and Greek. For instance, she presents the myths of ideal woman hood in the figure of Sita and contrasts it with modern Indian wives who murder their husband cold bloodedly. For her myths are medium to communicate to a global world irrespective of ethnicity, class and culture. In the novel *Leave It to Me* she uses an Indian myth of Durga Maa and the Greek myth of Electra complex, to present the quest for identity of a multi cultural individual like Debby. Like Debby who murders and kills, her other woman characters also indulge in violence, change their names and metamorphise into new self in diverse geographical locales.

For Bharati Mukherejee, the dynamics of self and society achieves a new definition. Her woman character survive with plural identities adopting new customs of the adopted world but they also stick to their own tradition and
custom of their homeland to prevent a fragmented self. Thus, identity formation involves a quest for one’s roots and ancestors for a reincarnation of a new self.

Bharati Mukherjee has occupied a unique position amongst Indian women writers for her research on culture studies. Moreover, her obsession and love for history is re-captured to realize the past and one’s ancestral roots in determining one’s self. With history, the study of culture, religion, language helps in identity formation in a postcolonial world of diaspora. A study of the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, evinces the reality of the fact that literature mirrors not only the social reality but also moulds and transform the labyrinthine and intricate ways in which men and women organize and integrate themselves, their interpersonal ties and tangles and their perception of the social reality. Mukherjee’s novels are human documents that delineate and portray conspicuously human relationships from a feministic point of view. R.K. Dhawan rightly says:

Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction truly reflects the temperament and mood of the present society as experimented by immigrants in America. One of the significant themes of modern literature is the depiction of cross cultural crisis, a subject which has assumed a great significance in the present world of globalization. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the best examples of this kind of writing (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 10).

Unlike writers such as Anita Desai and R.K. Narayan, she does not write in Indian English about Indians living in India. She says that her role models view of world and experiences are unlike theirs. These writers are a part of the society’s mainstream but she (Bharati Mukherjee) is unable to identify with them because they portray characters in their works who readily fit into their community in different ways than her naturalized Americans who fit into communities in Queens or Atlanta. Bharati Mukherjee doesn’t write from the vantage point of an Indian expatriate like V.S. Naipaul. Like Naipaul, Mukherjee is a writer from the third world but unlike him, she left India on her own choice. Hers, unlike Naipaul is an instance of voluntary exile. She views herself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors. Her
novels lack the touch of universality which we find in the novels of Kamal Markandaya.

Bharati Mukherjee explores the many facets of feminism and immigrant experience in her fiction. The impact of patriarchy on the Indian Society has a different facet in the Indian context and hence Indian writers in English have mirrored the plight and predicament of the immigrant characters, diasporic in nature from the perspective of one caught between the pulls and claims of two cultures. These writers like Bharati Mukherjee “have evolved their own stream of feminism grounded in reality” (Patel and Chaudhury, On the Alien Shore (ed) Jayadeep Sarangi, 1999).

Bharati Mukherjee has used fiction to explore the tussle between self and society; identify and culture especially in the case of the displaced diasporic characters. Her novels portray the duality, the fluid identify and the bohemian impulse of the Indians who lured by the allurements of the west, migrate to the Occident and consequently encounter the problems and pangs of adaptation and assimilation. A representative of modern Indian writers writing in English, she has portrayed the Indian immigrants all agog to build a home away from home. Weaving her thematic web within a limited range and like Jane Austen, confined to her “two inches of ivory”, Bharati Mukherjee has been successful in widening her literary horizon with a kaleidoscopic variety of issues which render a unique hue to her fictional landscape.
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