CHAPTER V

SUMMATION

Bharati Mukherjee, in her novels, presents the sufferings and the survival of the Indian immigrants in America. The present study has attempted to portray the depth of sufferings, the immigrants undergo in Western countries, particularly in America. With her creative imagination, Bharati Mukherjee has attempted to explore the theme of multiculturalism, with its diverged complexity and acquires a new dimension. The female protagonists of her novels are displaced characters who, being happy and playful in their homeland, suffer the pangs of transformation in the New Land. The displacement of the women characters of her novels such as Tara Cartwright, Dimple, Jasmine, and Tara Chatterjee undergo many trials and tribulations in the new land because of the multicultural society. Because of the diasporic experience they undergo, these women characters come into contact with many cultures. The characters are in between cultures, they are cultural hybrids and do not simply assimilate their host land culture. Instead they keep a critical view of both the United States and India.

This study has been divided into five chapters “Introduction,” “The Sense of Alienation,” “The Struggle for Assimilation,” “The Effects of Multiculturalism,” and “Summation.” The introductory part introduces Bharati
Mukherjee as an established voice of the Indian Diaspora. It also focuses on the various aspects of Postcolonial literature and the chief characteristics of diasporic writing such as identity crisis, multiculturalism, hybridity, and feminism. The brief life sketch of Bharati Mukherjee is then discussed so as to establish how her personal experiences as an immigrant influence her writing and characterization. All her works including her short story collections are discussed. Thus the first chapter provides all the introductory features to the thesis.

The second chapter is entitled “The Sense of Alienation.” The protagonists of The Tiger’s Daughter and the protagonist of Wife are discussed with a special focus on the issues related to their alienation. Both are alienated from the societies they live. While the protagonist of Wife suffers alienation in the adopted country, the protagonist of The Tiger’s Daughter suffers alienation in her own country.

The first novel of Bharati Mukherjee, The Tiger’s Daughter, is the story of Tara Banerjee, the daughter of a rich Bengal Brahmin who goes to America for her higher studies. There she impulsively marries an American, David Cartwright and becomes Tara Cartwright. She suffers from nostalgia in the foreign country. She longs to get back to her homeland. Her nostalgic thoughts reveal, that she could not fully assimilate into the new land. After a gap of
seven long years, she comes back to her homeland with lots of expectations. But her long stay in the United States has changed many of her notions and ideas. It had changed her manners and attitudes that she could not accommodate with her own people. She discovers that she no longer belonged to India and that she is no more at home in India than she was in America. Though surrounded by friends and relations, Tara felt herself alienated from others. She felt herself “an other,” who could not mingle with them. Tara senses alienation even in the company of her close friends of the “Camac” street. They were the aristocratic group with whom Tara had shared her feelings in her Calcutta days. They were the English speaking group of Calcutta. Though they always behaved like English men in their etiquette and manners, they did not approve Tara’s marriage to an American. They accuse her of abandoning her Brahmin caste, by marrying an American who is construed a “Meleccha” an outcaste. She has committed a great blunder, which they are not ready to accept. She becomes a secondary citizen in her own country and is unable to mingle with others wherever she goes.

She had wondered at the exalted buildings in Calcutta before she went to the US but their shabbiness appalled her now. She is indirectly influenced by the Americans’ idea of India and Indians, which is seen in many occasions. She believed her visit to India would relieve her from pains.
But she suffers from the foreignness of spirit in India more acutely than she had in America. She is unable to find oneness with her own people. In one incident Tara loses her mind and shouts on seeing a small girl suffering from leprosy. Though such diseases form a part and parcel of Indian life style, Tara’s stay in the States has made her look at them with hostility. Like a foreigner, she has started to look down at her own country, as a land of poor people living in unhygienic conditions and suffering from starvation, decay, and disease. She was afraid that she may grow sick, if she preferred the food that was given to her in the train journey. So she preferred to remain fasting. She was even afraid to drink the coke which was given to her, lid opened. She assumes it may lead her to be a victim of some contagious disease. She viewed India with the eyes of a foreigner. The sights and sufferings of poor India irritated her. She realized that she could not adjust with her own people. Calcutta, the place where she was born and bred seemed an alien land to her. Her friends were not the same whom she had left seven years ago. Though they appreciated and enjoyed her stories of America and her American manners, they were not ready to approve her marriage.

But the truth is that, she was unable to assimilate into America as well. She was poised between the two worlds and she belonged to neither place. She suffered due to her
nostalgic memories of America. She could not mingle with her own people in India. Thus, she was alienated from her own, as well as her adopted country. Tara’s journey to India proves as a quest for self and for her immigrant psyche, which proves frustrating and slowly leading her to illusion, alienation, depression, and finally to a tragic end. In this novel Mukherjee has satirically portrayed the Indian society from the perspective of a foreigner.

_Wife_ is the second novel of Bharati Mukherjee. In this novel too man’s alienation due to displacement, is the main concept discussed. Mukherjee has given a psychological study of the protagonist Dimple Das Gupta, a girl of a middle class Bengali family, who expects to enjoy a carefree life after her marriage. She has colourful dreams about marriage. She dreams of marrying a neurosurgeon because a doctor alone can satisfy her aspirations of leading an aristocratic living. After her desperate waiting for many days, finally, she enters the wedlock with Amit Basu, an engineer. Against her wishes, her father could get her only an engineer groom. But she convinces herself with the thought of Amit’s plans to settle in America. After a short term of hazardous days in her in-law’s home, Amit and Dimple move to America.

Instead of getting ecstatically, Dimple gets baffled at the sudden exposure to the American culture. The host of Dimple and Amit, Mr. Sen, describes NewYork as a violence
proned city where men kill each other for petty reasons. Possessing gun was very common in America that they may shoot others even for mild irritations. This description of America terrifies Dimple. The next day she goes for a shopping along with her friend. Emboldened by the friend, she goes for herself inside a shop and asks for her favourite cheesecake. The irritated shopkeeper asks her if she does not know the law of the country. Saying so he draws his closet and searches for something in it, which Dimple assumes to be a gun. Terrified, she runs away from there. She could not understand why a man selling mutton and beef could not sell cheesecake, because in Calcutta she would buy anything from a departmental store. This incident collapses Dimple “inwardly.” So she becomes culturally and linguistically silent. She finds it very difficult to cope with the living in multicultural America. The conflict between the protagonist’s drive towards a recreation of self and her position as a wife and a member of the small Indian immigrant community is illustrated in the sudden physical isolation, that marks the beginning of Dimple’s life in New York. Instead of the freedom she has associated with marriage and America, her life is limited to the private space of the home much more than in Calcutta. She feels inferior whenever she meets other Americanized Indians in parties and get-togethers. Her shopping for a cheesecake destabilizes her confidence
level. She is terribly afraid to face the multicultural world outside. So she alienates herself. She imprisons herself within the four walls of her home. Her hobby became watching TV and sleeping for a long time. TV introduced her violence and gave her the impression that murder was a very common thing in America like weather report. Her alienation from the outer world, leads to abnormality in her psyche.

This isolation and emotional starvation starts the process of her psychological disintegration, which had been incipient even when she was in Calcutta. She has no goal in life and does nothing to do something with it. She has no understanding of the past and can do nothing to make the future meaningful. This inherent instability in her personality is intensified by her isolation in the new environment. She starts brooding over committing suicide. Later, she places the blame of her sufferings on Amit and decides to kill him. Amit was a materialist who believed material comfort alone would satisfy a wife. He did not mind spending time with his wife, even when he notices abnormality in her behaviour. Though married to an educated and liberated husband, Dimple is not able to strike a balance between the two juxtaposed worlds: the one she left behind and the other she comes to live in. Initially, she had inhibitions and taboos of her moribund Bengali life. She always thought "Marriage would bring her freedom,
cocks*tain parties on carpeted lawns, and fund raising
dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love”
(W 3). But to Dimple’s dismay, it happened just the
opposite of what she had dreamt of. She is so much
frustrated from life that the words like loyalty,
suffering, and pain on her husband’s part, lost the meaning
and instead she starts fantasizing to murder her husband.
She has been already in sick- led state of mind, ever since
she left India, but the alienation from her husband,
environment, and the sham and outward glitter, futility and
meaninglessness of American life, drive to the fits of
psychic depression and ultimate insanity. Her splintered-
self finds solution to her problems only in murdering her
husband. Thus in both the first two novels – The Tiger’s
Daughter and Wife, Bharati Mukherjee deals with the
sufferings of displaced immigrants.

The third chapter discusses the protagonists of the
next two novels with reference to their struggle of
assimilation. The third novel of Bharati Mukherjee is the
widely acclaimed Jasmine. Bharati Mukherjee portrays the
protagonist’s struggle to assimilate into the new world.
Unlike Tara Banerjee and Dimple, she assimilates into the
American main stream. Like the protagonist of The Tiger’s
Daughter and Wife she too is born in India, but in a poor
family. She was the seventh child in a big, poor family.
After a great struggle, her brothers find her a suitable
groom. Prakash was the man she was married to. He was not the typical Indian husband who simply wanted to subdue his wife. Instead he wanted to change the feudal Jyoti into urban Jasmine. Jasmine lives happily with Prakash till fate turned her life style. Prakash was killed in a terrorist bomb attack during his preparations to go to America. After a short term of living the life of a miserable Indian widow, Jasmine takes off to the US with illegitimate papers and forged documents, to follow the path of her dead husband. She lands in the US, but again violence plays havoc in her life in the form of the captain of the ship she took to Florida. The captain exploits her innocence by taking her to a remote motel and seduces her. Jasmine who could not tolerate her physical molestation kills the rapist and finds refuge in the home of a kind Quaker lady whose main activity was to help the illegal immigrants. With the help of her daughter, Kate, Jasmine reaches the home of her husband’s professor whom she came in searching for. She lives in the home of Prof. Vadera for five months. His home maintained a kind of artificial Indianness and Jasmine has to undergo the life of a miserable widow in their home too. Jasmine is a born rebel who could not adjust to such situations. Very soon she finds a way out of their home. She also manages to get a forged Green Card from Mr. Vadera.
This time, she joins the house hold of a white American couple as a care giver for their young daughter. It is said that, this is the most fruitful period in her life in America. It is here that Jasmine gets the full expatriate experience and gets the initial changes to amalgamate into the American mainstream. She says "I became an American in an apartment in Claremont avenue" (J 165). She had many new experiences at Taylor’s home. The first day morning she happened to see though her windows naked bodies combing their hair in front of dressing mirrors. She concluded that there was no concept of shame in that society. She was also shocked at the idea of the Taylors bearing up a non-genetic child and equally shocking was the concept of a small child sleeping in a separate room. But slowly and steadily she was immersing herself into the American mainstream She learns the language fluently and it becomes Jasmine’s key to understand American culture. Sumanna Coopan observes, "To fully learn a language is to appropriate a culture for language affords the means by which the identity is expressed, thus as Jasmine becomes more fluent in English discovering the intricacies of vernacular expressions, she becomes more American" (Creating Consciousness 47). The two cultures she knew got blended in Jasmine and leads to a gradual transformation in her. Though she willingly gets transformed into an American, she does not forsake her innate Indianness and
feels uncomfortable at the speed of her transformation. Taylor helps in finding a job for her at the university. Thereafter, she learns to live as an independent individual. But still she is unable to understand Mrs. Taylor’s deserting Mr. Taylor for the love of another man. The Taylors’ were loving couples and so it becomes hard for Jasmine to digest Mrs. Taylor’s desertion. Later Jasmine becomes the companion of Mr. Taylor whom she had loved since her arrival at the Hayeses. But an accidental intervention of the murderer of her husband, in her peaceful life, forces her to leave Taylor to Iowa.

In Iowa, she is courted by her employer Mr. Bud Ripplemeyer, who is a banker and a middle-aged man, with grown up children. She reciprocates his love and becomes his companion, which leads to the divorce of Mr. Bud and his first wife Karin. They live happily in the outskirts of the city, with their adopted adolescent Vietnamese son Du. When Bud wants to beget a child of Jasmine, she agrees to mother his artificially inseminated child. Though she adapts to the American way of living she could not kill the Indian woman residing in her. She is loved by all for the Indianness in her. But violence plays havoc in the life of Jasmine again. This time in the form of a discontent client who shoots at Bud and cripples him. Again Jasmine becomes a caretaker, this time to a middle-aged man, who has been crippled to the wheelchair. She undergoes another great
change in her life, when Mr. Taylor arrives and reclaims her. She readily goes with him without least bothering for the crippled Bud. For Jasmine there is no going back: the only home is the one she creates for herself. She has found a new identity in the New Land. She is an immigrant, who is reborn in an adopted culture. It is better to adapt to a new culture, rather than living as a hyphenated person. Jasmine’s amalgamation into the American melting pot is better than being torn between the two cultures. Jasmine stands on a uniquely constructed bridge, connecting the painful past, with an optimistic vision of the future.

Desirable Daughters is another novel of Bharati Mukherjee in which, she has portrayed the struggles of the protagonist, to assimilate into the American culture. It is the story of three sisters who were born to well to do Brahmin parents in Calcutta. The story is narrated by the third sister and chief protagonist of the novel, Tara. It is from her point of view, the story unfolds. Among these three girls, Tara and her elder sister Padma have settled in America after their marriage. Tara’s was an arranged marriage while Padma decided her own partner. Tara was married to a multimillionaire of the silicon valley, Mr. Bishwa Priya Chatterjee. Since Bish was an excellent provider, he did not allow Tara to engage in any kind of activity. When Tara first came to America as a newly wedded wife to Bish, she was deeply rooted in Indian tradition and
culture and exhibits the behaviour of a typical Indian
wife. She was too submissive to her husband and was well
versed in domestic duties such as serving pakoras and
freshening drinks while Bish and his friends enjoyed
watching Sunday football game. Bish takes great pride in
showing his parents, particularly his mother, that his wife
is a traditional Indian wife. She wanted to pursue her
higher studies, but had to stay at home to take care of her
son, just like all the other Indian wives in Atherton,
California. Tara devotes her entire life to supporting Bish
and raising their family, for the importance of fulfilling
the domestic responsibilities as it has been inculcated in
her since birth. In her beginning days of American life,
Tara seemed to enjoy her life as a submissive wife. But she
soon realizes that this style of life is not fulfilling
her. She wanted to do something creative in her life. She
cannot attain it as the wife of Bish, so she asks for a
divorce. After the divorce, Tara ceases to be a good Hindu
wife. She strives to live like typical American lady. Her
concept of sex undergoes a great change and she starts
living with her boy friend Andy. She liberates her role of
a traditional Indian mother and tries to be an American
mother to her son Rabi.

Though Tara sees herself an American she is constantly
aware of the Indian inside her. She reveals her deep-rooted
Indianness every now and then. When Chris Dey steps in her
life, claiming himself to be the illegitimate son of her sister, she is completely shocked. She is unable to believe that her sister went astray before marriage. Again when her son Rabi discloses that he is a gay she is taken back. The Indian woman residing in her could not tolerate such misgivings.

The story of both her elder sisters is revealed through Tara’s point of view. The eldest is Padma Mehta who lives in New York with her husband Harish Mehta. She is a TV persona and her husband lives in her shadow. After her diasporic experience, Padma, like her sister, does not express a desire to simply assimilate to the American way of life. Although she is smart enough to take advantage of the freedom she has in the USA, she also tries to maintain the appearance of being a traditional Hindu Brahmin woman by taking advantage of that exoticized image. The next sister of Tara is Parvati who, though married to a man of unequal status, leads a contented life. She lives in Mumbai with a huge number of relatives always visiting her.

Tara and Padma somehow are displaced within home, as the relations of their homes in India oppress them and restrict their life options. In spite of the suffering and feelings of alienation associated with leaving home and placing oneself in a foreign land, the outcomes of such experience still seem to be positive ones. Moving away from home and putting down roots elsewhere provide them with the
opportunity to transform their once believed stable identities, and as a consequence, open space for new subjectivities and for agency. In *Desirable Daughters* the celebration of a forever-evolving identity is seen, one that is constantly moving as quickly as cultural connections are lost and found in the diasporic experience, resulting in the creation of selves that are endless in their possibilities and uncertain in their futures.

“The Effects of Multiculturalism” is the fourth chapter which discusses the effects of a multicultural society on the individual. All the selected four novels are viewed in the lights of multiculturalism in this chapter. Multiculturalism is the phenomenon of multicultural society existing within one society. Multiculturalism is the cultural diversity of communities and the policies that promote this diversity. Bharati Mukherjee’s first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a fine manifestation of the effects of multiculturalism on an individual. It is the story of a Bengali Brahmin girl, who goes to America, to pursue her higher studies and accidentally marries an American and happens to settle in the US. She strives hard to establish herself as an American wife. After a long break of seven years, she returns to her homeland, only to find herself a complete stranger. She could not arrive at the conclusion whether she is an American or Indian until the end of the novel. Bharati Mukherjee’s second novel is *Wife*, in which
she explores the challenges and hardships, a multicultural society places on the immigrant. The novel sets its atmosphere both in India and America. After marriage, the protagonist sets off to America with her husband. The protagonist is completely baffled by her sudden exposure to the American culture. She suffers a psychological drift from the pain caused by the multicultural society. Only by subordinating both her isolated Indian and American cultural identities through violence can Dimple assert her individual identity. Dimple, the protagonist, at the end of the novel, decides to kill her husband due to the frustration she feels in the multicultural society. Bharati Mukherjee’s *magnum opus* is her third novel, *Jasmine*. The protagonist inspires us with her innocence in the beginning, later, she assimilates herself in to the American mainstream with all her Indianness. Wandering between two worlds, she realizes the American dream with all its dangers as well as its possibilities. *Jasmine* claims “not choosing between men” but between “the promise of America” and “old world dutifulness” (*J* 240). In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee has delineated the influence of multiculturalism, on the two Bengali sisters - Padma and Tara, who happen to settle in America. They undergo completely oppositional experiences of cultural acclimatization. Padma, the elder sister, is shown as a resistant to alien culture while the younger sister Tara is
shown having a desire to assimilate into the adapted culture. The immigrants in an adopted country often try hard to find a synchronization between the native culture and the adopted one. But this has often resulted in psychological eccentricities, that are alien to both the cultures. Hence the solution to this problem is retaining one’s culture as far as possible even while living in an alien soil.

This thesis, discusses the four novels of Bharati Mukherjee in various aspects. The experience of the Indian diasporic woman, is one in which the psyche is always in-between worlds, where time and space have created a sense of psychological uncertainty. While this state of uncertainty often disorients the individual, making one subject to an indeterminate identity, it also allows her to exist as many, expressing the voices of the multitudes that lie within her, and promising to sound the voices of those selves that have yet to be discovered. Even though contemporary times are changing and liberal ideas have been influencing the way women are treated and given opportunities in societies that are still patriarchal, it is mainly because of their displacement from home that the protagonists are given the chance to modify their gender relations so as to adapt to their new realities in the United States. The methods of the formation of identity and the creation of consciousness for Indian diasporic women
continue to evolve, the complexities that will emerge in
future diasporic generations will, no doubt, yield new
means and mechanisms that will redefine what it means to be
an Indian woman in America.