SUMMARY

Bharati Mukherjee is a strong voice of Indian diaspora in America. She celebrates a different diasporic identity in her writings and tends to focus on cross cultural issues where diaspora means ‘gain’ and no ‘loss’. She illustrates the fluidity of cultural boundaries, putting hybridization, migration, ethnicity and globalization at the top of her literary agenda. Her nativity provides colorful material for her texts in ‘ethnic high fashion’. She achieved a fine balance between nativity and globalization. The specificity of experiences, in particular cultural locations have been abolished and at the same time maintained in her writings. It was not only displacement and dislocation but her sensitive handling of other postcolonial complexities made her a global writer.

As a creative writer she belongs to that section of diaspora that deals with the centre and the fringe position of the diaspora along with assimilation and subversion tendencies. To her, life on the margin seems to be full of possibilities and power. Instead of attaining centre position, she wants to stay at the margin and is willing to celebrate from here the success of her being an artist and writer of immigrant tradition. For her, this space politics is a strategic device to attract the attention of the West. This strategic move has helped her creating a niche for herself and earning an envious position as an immigrant writer in America. In the modern times, America is considered as ‘a country of immigrants’, for it provides better prospects for life, so it has become the ultimate ‘Eldorado’ of new generation. Mukherjee’s success will act as a source of inspiration for those who are, chasing the American Dream and they too are influencing America because
according to her, they are the characters in the latest America and changing the face of America.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the different aspects of Postcolonialism - its meaning, Diaspora as its offshoot, South – Asian diaspora with emphasis on Indian – diaspora, and the different complexities that have evolved due to postcolonialism like alienation due to dislocation and displacement, cultural confrontation, rootlessness, Identity crisis and the different dilemmas, which a modern man has to face in the postcolonial era. This chapter also gives a glimpse of Bharati Mukherjee’s literary career and her evolution as a writer. She is a writer who promoted mythic – realism as a strategy to deal with postcolonial complexities.

The first part of the second chapter deals with the history of South – Asian Diasporic tradition in Canada with reference to Indian – immigration history. It is essential to know the historical background that had provided ground for the seeds of the present day South – Asian diaspora to germinate in Canada. By going through this historical journey it becomes crystal clear that the present day South – Asian diaspora is the outcome of the hardships faced by their forefathers and it is no doubt that today it has become an integral part of the multicultural Canadian mosaic. South – Asian writers of Indian origin have proved their mettle and enriched the Canadian literary tradition.

The second and third part of this chapter is devoted to analyse Mukherjee’s first two novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*. *The Tiger’s Daughter* deals with the dilemma of unbelongingness to both her land of adoption and her native land. To Tara her return journey to Calcutta, after a period of seven years proves to be an utter failure as she is unable to correlate herself with her family, friends,
relatives, Calcutta and her country. Like a Trishanku, she finds herself a nowhere man, swinging between her ‘unhousement’ and ‘rehousement’, a typical postcolonial complexity. Her another novel *Wife* too, explores the other dimensions of the postcolonial complexities. It reflects the cross-cultural dilemma faced by Dimple Dasgupta as she fails to create balance between her Indian ethics and American sensibility. It leads her towards nervous breakdown and makes her a misfit in the alien cultural milieu.

The third chapter speaks about Mukherjee’s ‘dark phase’ both in her real life as well as in literary career. According to her, Canada is not a fertile land for creative immigrants. Her dark days of both physical as well as mental abuse in Canada make her to decide for American immigration. Finally, this shift proved beneficial for her. That’s why this period has been named as ‘Transition period’ in her literary career and for her “is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration” (Intro. to *Darkness* 3).

Four stories of *Darkness* “The World According to Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, “Courtly Vision” and “Hindus” were written in Canadian soil. The purely Canadian stories in this collection were difficult to write and even more painful to live through. They are uneasy stories about expatriation” (Intro. to *Darkness* 2). The rest of the stories of *Darkness* seem to celebrate her Indianess. “Instead of seeing my Indianess as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration, I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated” (Intro. to *Darkness* 3).

Fourth chapter deals with the ‘Immigrant Phase’ of Bharati Mukherjee’s literary career. It starts with the publication of another short – stories collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*, which is a fascinating collection presenting a rich vision of the new world through a variety of characters, who are immigrants
belonging to different countries of the world. The stories in The Middleman—competently reflect the trials and tribulations afflicting the American society, but the immigrant experience is not shown as trauma or pain, the immigrants are not caught in the process of becoming, but are presented as finished American products.

Through these stories Mukherjee has tried to reflect that feeling when the Third World meets the first in the exuberant possibilities of the American melting pot. For her, assimilation is the way to cope with the changing environment and its approach in two way. If on the one hand immigrants are transforming themselves than on the other, American society is also getting transformed by them. In these stories the theme of immigration and transformation has been emphasized by Mukherjee. These immigrants are determined to reach America despite being going through hardships; even endangering their life on fake visas, passports and passing through a network of Middleman in order to fulfill their American dream. She reveals: "My stories are discomfiting because they challenge accepted codes of behaviour in this country and show the change taking place here".

The second part of this chapter deals her next publication Jasmine which is considered as one of her best novels till date. It is through Jasmine, Mukherjee wants to convey the message that change, transformation, fluid identity, adaptability and finally assimilation are key to survival for immigrants. Jasmine narrates her story in the first person narrative. Her childhood in Punjab that ends with the death of her husband Prakash Vijn, then emigrates to the States, her rescue by Lillian Gordon, her stay at Hayes’s household, her decision to flee to Iowa, her life with Bud and their adopted son Du, and finally her decision to go away with Taylor and Duff in search of a new life show the immigrant instinct of
Jasmine. *Jasmine* can be read “as an ambitious endeavour to outline the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values”.

*Jasmine* speaks about fusion between two or more cultures which paves way for assimilation. This helps the protagonist to identify more with their adopted homeland than with their country of birth. This also shows Mukherjee’s own gradual assimilation into American ways and sensibility, and which makes her declare: “I am one of you now”. Despite all these assimilating efforts, Jasmine succeeded to maintain her identity as Indian – American in a ‘ethnic high fashion’.

The fifth chapter illustrates the final phase of Mukherjee’s literary career that is ‘Immigration’. In which the voyage she has started with the publication of *The Tiger’s Daughter* seems to change its course. In both the works of this phase *The Holder of the World* and *Leave It to Me*, the protagonists are the American, trying to relocate themselves with their Indian origin. It can be taken as an approach to cross – cultural consciousness that has a universal relevance. *The Holder of the World* can be read on several levels of interpretation. If on the one hand it is a feminist novel, on the other it is a historical one which negotiates a gap between the seventeenth century and mid – twentieth century; having a cross – cultural backdrop, it brings together a panoramic view of socio – cultural experiences of characters in India and America. Hannah Easton’s story has been used by Mukherjee to show the process of uprooting and rerooting and in this process she finally emerges as a self – actualized character, who is least bothered about the conventional society. Her journey to East brings a change in her moral and ethical values making her an ambassador of Eastern philosophy.

The second part of this chapter analyses her another novel of this phase, *Leave It to Me*. It is the story of Debby DiMartino, her search for her roots and bio
– parents. She is desperate to re-locate herself with her origin from where she has been dislocated. Though her search only results in violence and destruction but the main essence of the chaos theory is proved by it that destruction is creation’s necessary prelude. Devi Dee also gives the philosophy that “when you inherit nothing, you are entitled to everything” (LM 67). It can be taken as a message for immigrants, who in new land seem to own nothing but its up to their potential to exploit every possibility falling on their way.

Though Mukherjee’s two other works Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride are not taken in the thesis, but in order to know the development of Mukherjee’s literary career the close study of these two novels confirm that the cycle of Mukherjee’s journey which has commenced with the publication of The Tiger’s Daughter seems to complete itself with The Tree Bride. Both the works deal with the recurring themes of location, dislocation and relocation with Mukherjee’s inclination towards Indian roots and mythology. Desirable Daughters published in 2002 is a narrative told in first person by Tara Chatterjee nee Banerjee about her family and two sisters Padma and Uma. The story of her own married life and post married life goes side by side. Though Tara is married to a computer engineer Bishwapriya Chatterjee, who is a well known figure in the Silicon Valley in America. But Tara is not satisfied with her role of a mere housewife. She wants more out of life than what is offered by her husband. She walks out of their marriage with her son Rabindra Chatterjee and she works as a school teacher, trying to live an ordinary American life with an American lover. She struggles to create a space for herself and in this struggle her attitude is more assimilative and less disruptive. In this way, Mukherjee depicts the everyday reality of an immigrant
experience. She shows the little adjustment in social behaviour that have to be made in order to be accepted by a foreign culture.

*The Tree Bride* published in 2004, is the sequel of the *Desirable Daughters*. **Tree Bride** – Tara Lata Gangooly born in 1874 to Jai Krishna Gangooly as his third daughter from his first wife. She is called the Tree bride as she was married to a tall Sundari tree at the age of five. Since then she lived and spent her life in Mist Mahal in Mishtigunj, later on known as Razakpur in East Bengal. There she was revered and known by the name ‘Tara Maa’… She was a patriot, helping her natives and gave all her dowry gold for the cause of an Independent India. Her charity and patriotism was not liked by the Britishers. She was dragged from her home on the night of October 12, 1944, by colonial authorities and her death was announced on October 18, 1944 due to heart attack.

In *The Tree Bride*, Bharati Mukherjee has used history in a unique style for tracing the story of Tara Chatterjee’s great – great – aunt Tara Lata. In her search, she discovers her ancestry which has its influence on her past, present and future. The novel vibrates with Indian mythology regarding death, birth, incarnation and stills from Indian independence movement in Bengal. Mukherjee seems to believe in Faulkner when he says : “The past isn’t past. The past isn’t even dead”. For Mukherjee, “Ancestors come and go, but one’s desh is immutable” (29). Different narratives like tributaries of Ganga finally mingle in the Bay of Bengal. Mukherjee seems to be attached with her Indianness and “wants to keep her Indian “connection” alive! In this way Mukherjee echoes what Raja Rao has affirmed that India is not a country (desh), is a perspective (darsana).

From *The Tiger’s Daughter* to *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee seems to reject the immigrant nostalgia and her Indianness is projected as a secure
category. In this thesis, the scholar tried her best to explore, so far unexploited element, that is, Mukherjee’s preoccupation with essential ethnic selfhood and at the same time her unproblematised assimilation in American melting pot multiculturalism. This thesis attempted to engage in order to demonstrate that Mukherjee's apparent embrace of exotic and Indian ethnicity is far more radical than it appears.