CHAPTER III

THE POSTCOLONIAL COMPLEXITIES AND CROSS – CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF DARKNESS

“Humiliate people for long enough and a wildness bursts out of them” (Rushdie 328). The above lines of Salman Rushdie in *Shame* are appropriate to describe the immigrant situation in Canada and in this tradition Bharati Mukherjee is a well known name; occupying a unique position among her literary contemporaries. She is a diasporic postcolonial writer and her life itself bears the testimony to this fact. Marriage with Clark Blaise, who had roots in Montreal and an opportunity to teach at McGill University made Mukherjee to come in Canada. At early stage in Montreal, “everything was perfect in the ways that young academics expect things to be: Clark and I both had good jobs, a nice house, children in private school. Guess we were Yuppies before the world was thought up, Multicultural yuppies at that” (Joel 25-8). In 1969, Mukherjee got promotion as the Assistant Professor, and attained a full Professorship at McGill in 1978. At that time she decided to take Canadian Citizenship. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, she writes:

For a Commonwealth Citizen like me, becoming Canadian took no more than five minutes in an unpretentious office. A maternal French-Canadian uncle insisted over my protests that Indian citizens were British subjects. In the end undid the work of generations of martyred freedom fighters; pledged loyalty to the British Queen and became a Canadian Citizen (169).
Mukherjee’s hope to be accepted as a Canadian writer dashed as Canada did not promise any future scope for her. She regretted her decision of coming to Canada as her dream turned sour:

We were slow to acknowledge the gathering clouds. Some of us have reacted positively, working with local or provincial governments serving as consultants, as organizers, as impresarios of understanding. Others have taken hockey sticks on vigilante patrols to protect their people. Many including myself, have left, unable to keep our twin halves together (Leong 487-500).

Despite being a legal Canadian citizen, Mukherjee didn’t have the nerves to feel at home. She always felt herself as a resident alien who was a misfit in that alien set-up. She reflects her pain:

In Canada I feel isolated, separate in the vastness of this under populated country. I cannot bring myself to snowshoe or ski. Unspoilt nature terrifies me. I have not yet learned the words of the national anthem. ... In Canada I am both too visible and too invisible. I am brown; I cannot disappear in a rush hour, Montreal crowd. The media has made me self-conscious about racism. I detect arrogance in the slow-footedness or sales clerks. I am tired of being exotic, being complimented for qualities of voice, education, bearing, appearance that are not extraordinary (Days and Nights in Calcutta 169).

The increasing number of incidents related with ‘Pakibashing’ and ‘dot-busting’ towards Asians started taking place due to large scale immigration of South Asian immigrants into Canada. Therefore, in 1970’s Canada became a place of ‘rapid racial discrimination.’ Mukherjee reveals to Alison Carb:

The 1970’s were horrendous years for Indians in Canada. There was a lot of bigotry against Canadian Citizens of Indian origins, especially in Toronto, and it
upset me terribly when I encountered this or saw other people experiencing it (644-54).

Bharati Mukherjee won the National Magazine Award for the article “An Invisible Woman” which appeared in *Saturday Night*. It deals with the problem of racial strife in Canada. Here she compared and contrasted the general attitude towards Asian woman in America and Canada. She recalled that, “in the US, an Asian woman could stay in hotels and not be handled out of elevators but its one that my years in Canada and specially my two years in Toronto, have made me grateful for … I know Canadians all too well, which of us has not been harassed at customs? On a summer’s night; which of us can walk down Yonge Street without cartloads of stoned youths shouting out insults?” (“An Invisible Woman” 38).

In the Official Green Paper on Immigration and Population Mukherjee was mentioned as ‘visible minority’; which is supposed not to exist and do not have a legitimate opinion to offer. Physical assaults, the violence, the spitting, the name calling, the derogatory remarks became common day to day incidents faced by the Asians. Above all the government itself gave implied consent to racism. Such circumstances compelled Mukherjee to comment her in “An Invisible Woman”:

I can not describe the agony and the betrayal one feels, hearing oneself spoken of by one’s own country as being somehow exotic to its nature – a burden, a cause for serious concern. It may have been satirically softened, it may have been academic in tone, but in feeling it was Nuremberg. In that ill-tempered debate, the government itself appropriated the language, the reasoning, the motivation that had belonged – to disreputable fringe grounds (38).

Bharati Mukherjee has gone through the bitter experiences of the racial discrimination in Canada. Both personal and literary discrimination filled her with
acute bitterness and she evolved out as a severe critic of Canada. She noticed a ‘pattern of discrimination’, for she was refused service in stores; and “I would have to board a bus last when I had been the first person on line” (Alison Carb 652). She was considered to be a “shop lifter or even treated like a prostitute” (Introduction to Darkness 2), in hotels; and was physically roughed up in a Toronto subway station. During her Canadian days she started her literary career with The Tiger’s Daughter (1972), Wife (1975), Days and Nights in Calcutta (1977), a non-fictional work in collaboration with her husband Clark Blaise and Kautilya’s Concept of Diplomacy: A New Interpretation (1976). Despite of all these creative works, she still felt herself an outcast in the Canadian literary scene and there was not the slightest hope in that heavily polluted atmosphere of racial discrimination. She drew out the conclusions in “An Invisible Woman”:

If you don’t have a family concept nature, forget about joining us. If you don’t have Canadian content, forget about publishing here … ACBC television interviewer was rude point blank: How can you call yourself a Canadian writer if you didn’t play in snow as a child… How do you justify taking grants and then not writing about Canada (39).

All these made Bharati Mukherjee to ponder over her future in Canada. She felt that Indian writers had failed to achieve that case which would permit a writer to write about the self and the expanding consciousness. She was no longer ready to be considered as a grubby, dishonest, smelly, ignorant, job-snatching, baby breeding and unassimilatable malcontent. As a writer Mukherjee was under such distress in Canada that she started thinking about the ways of becoming a ‘human rights’ activist instead of writing. She believes that if she had stayed in Canada,
she might have ended up running for political office. In 1980 Bharati Mukherjee and her family decided to leave Canada for the United States. Mukherjee obtained a job as a visiting Professor of English at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York. It was not an easily taken step at that point of time: “I don’t regret the decision now, but I certainly felt very guilty in the beginning about having uprooted my husband and children because of my refusal to deal anymore with what I felt, was a very racially hostile situation in Toronto” (Joel 25-8). She told Hancock: “Moving out of Canada gave 'me back my voice.' The last seven years or so in Canada I felt, I was constantly being forced to see myself as part of an ‘unwanted visible minority’ (30-34).

Although the expatriation period of Mukherjee in Canada turned out to be a dark phase in her life, yet it filled her with a zest and spirit to mock the Canadian Government’s stand that reduced human rights to items on Government checklist. In an interview she admits that “my experience with racism in Canada unleashed an anger eventually led to potent fiction but initially she expended her energies in addressing civil rights problems” (Hancock 35). In Mukherjee’s aesthetics, voice plays a vital role, she feels that “there are no Indian themes, American themes or English themes”, and she tried hard to “produce is a voice perhaps” (Sivaramakrishna 71-85).

She provides an outlet for different voices by writing in many voices, strongly speaking about their efforts at maintaining balance between two cultures and their immigrant sensibility. She used her writing skills to expose the hypocritical attitude of the Canadian government towards South Asian and other
immigrants due to its policy of Multiculturalism which makes it a country officially hostile to the concept of assimilation. For Bharati Mukherjee, “writing is a political act. Her personal sense of marginalization as a woman; a woman of colour; and as an expatriate/ immigrant makes her vent out her feelings so vehemently in her stories” (57).

The above quoted lines clearly reveal the circumstances which have moulded Bharati Mukherjee into a fine balanced voice in the realm of Diasporic literature. She became disillusioned with Canada, where she felt marginalized by racism; became victim of racial discrimination and came to see herself as an ‘invisible woman’. Therefore, her earlier works reveal the dilemmas of displacement faced by South Asian expatriates. In today’s Post colonial literature ‘the expatriate sensibility’ has been accepted as a legitimate literary term and George Stainer describes the expatriate writer as “the contemporary everyman.” Thus, making the scope and approach of expatriation more enlarged, universal and relevant.

_Days and Nights in Calcutta_ describes the agonizing experiences of Bharati Mukherjee in Canada due to her paradoxical position of being ‘both too visible and too invisible’ (DNC 169). Here she is invisible as a writer that time she has been not given due recognition for her writings. She observes in an essay entitled “Immigrant Writing : Give us your maximalist” :

I was a psychological expatriate, though a naturalized Canadian for fifteen years, simply because Canada is a country officially hostile to the concept of assimilation. (It proclaims the virtue of its multicultural policy.) Perceiving myself to be in a comfortable but
unwelcoming environment, I struggled to maintain various emblems of my difference” (150).

II

The hollowness of the official policy of multiculturalism of Canada fosters racism, marginalization and ‘ghettoization.’ Mukherjee’s personal experience of racism in Canada is revealed through her short stories written in the book named *Darkness*. The title itself is very suggestive as she found no ray of hope in the prevailing Canadian set-up. It is, “a reference to racial prejudice which is after all, a darkness of the mind towards the darkness of another person’s skin” (Chua 51-61). It is symbolically used by the writer to show and emphasize the pessimism related with the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism. Despite being a tenured professor in Canada, she felt humiliated and on the edge of being a “housebound; fearful, aggrieved, obsessive, and unforgiving queen of bitterness” (Alam 10). All her bitter experiences proved better for her as they helped and enabled her in creating a niche for herself in that invisible literary scenario. In an interview with Alison. Carb, Mukherjee talks about her personal trauma in Canada and the hostility and misbehaviour towards Indians in Canada:

... the attitude in the sixties and seventies was that if one hadn’t played in snow and grown up eating Oatmeal one didn’t have anything relevant to say to Canadian readers. The seventies were horrendous for Indians in Canada. There was a lot of bigotry against Canadian citizens of Indian origin, especially in Toronto... Toronto made me a civil right activist. I
wrote about the devastating personal effects of racism… (651-52).

Mukherjee’s personal sufferings has fore-grounded the matter for her short stories in *Darkness*. It is therefore, the result of that wild agony which was lying latent within Mukherjee. In her introduction to *Darkness* and her interview with Barth Healey, she made it clear that Canada was many times more hostile than the U.S. to immigrants from the South Asian countries. This is the reason that she becomes hostile to Canada as the latter had “officially incited its less-visible citizens to react” (Introduction to *Darkness* ii). Projection of racial prejudices against Asians consequently becomes the main theme of Mukherjee’s stories but they also deal with “individual’s yearnings to flee the world of bourgeois morality and middle-class superficiality in which they are trapped” (Parameswaran 184). Her characters are mostly ‘Indians abroad’ especially in North America. They face the dilemmas of displacement, became victim of racial discrimination and marginalization, and above all they mock the Canadian Government’s official policy of multiculturalism. In *Darkness*, Mukherjee has directly attacked on “our comfortable notion that the Canadian Mosaic⁴ despite its shortcomings, was superior and far more tolerant than the American model of melting pot” (Joel 27). The message of the book was that, “she was never expected to become part of Canada, she was never welcome” (*Ibid*). The Canadians were unwilling to accept the fact that the Mosaic was simple rhetoric; “what you are talking about is a harmful model which says if you can’t scrub down your ethnic peculiarities and remakes yourself as mini-Anglo than you’d better not come to this country” (*Ibid* 28).
Regarding her candid and harsh introduction to *Darkness*, which angered and offended a lot of Canadians, she says, “having to write it, though, made me come to terms with my feelings about Canada once and for all” (Introduction to *Darkness* iii). In the Canadian context she had tried to expose the whole matter of assimilation and multiculturalism:

> In the year that I spent in Canada – 1966 to 1980 – I discovered that the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in the hot, moist continent like Asia; that the country proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation (2).

The whole concept of cultural assimilation is being loathed by Canada. It promotes the idea of the multicultural mosaic which encourages the retention of separate linguistic and cultural identities. In this way the nation not only preserves but also fosters ethnic diversity. Sudha Pandey feels that, “Mukherjee is scathing in her attack on what she considers the ethnic mosaic myth: by choosing to be a mosaic, by preserving differences, Canada also preserves biases” (68-73).

Canada has declared itself a multi-cultural country, who believes that different cultural groups while working for the betterment of their society will maintain their distinct identity. In this way government itself promotes racism between separate identifiable cultural groups. Instead of Multiculturalism it ought to be Cross - culturalism, the term propounded by North American feminist Elizabeth Meese, which seems to be more positive and comprehensive approach based on complete equality to different cultural identities as they are the outcome of mutual influences:

Cross - culturalism offers a preferable alternative as it dispenses with the notion of separate cultural groups
by acknowledging the fluidity of cultural identity and the mutual influence of one cultural identity on another (Bowers 52).

Being a positive approach ‘cross-culturalism celebrates fluidity of identity’ which ultimately stands for fusion and assimilation, which means frequent give and take from each other’s cultures and redefining one’s hopes and aspirations. Whereas, Multiculturalism in Canada restricts the scope of assimilation and develops a negative aspect of culture by giving birth to racial discrimination and tension. Linda Hutcheon also highlights this demerit of Multiculturalism by saying that, “the tensions between the ideal of ‘multi-culturalism’ and the actuality of living it are a powerful source of irony in minority writing” (52). Their writing has a strong ironic tone, describing those difficulties of adjustments which they face among different cultural identities. They become victims of racial abuse, discrimination and violence which create dissatisfaction with Multiculturalism that only promotes ghettoization and isolation. The multicultural pattern of mosaic presents a heterogeneity of national space. The official multiculturalism does not offer a space for immigrants because the moment government get involve deeply, personal gets simplified and transformed into a kind of propaganda. By remaining in the cocoon of their cultural heritage immigrants cut themselves off from wider possibilities. An official policy that encourages the preservation of the cultural cocoons perpetuates limitations on immigrants. In the end the ethnic groups are isolated into cultural ghettos whose members being viewed as stereotypes by outsiders. On account of this policy immigrants are placed “outside” of
Canadianness. The policy of recognizing distinctiveness of cultural groups operates like a type of cultural apartheid:

[Multicultural policy] entertain [s] and encourage [s] [...] cultural diversity, [while correspondingly] containing it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that these other cultures are fine but we must be able to locate them within our grid (“The Third Space” 208).

Mukherjee’s stories of *Darkness* too reveal this irony and fervour. Some stories of *Darkness* are woven with the thread of assimilation and some reflect alienation as they criticize and mock multiculturalism of Canada. Stories like “Angela”, “The Lady from Lucknow”, “A Father” and “Courtly Vision” celebrate their assimilation, whereas, “The World According To Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, “Hindus”, “Nostalgia”, “Saints”, “Visitors”, Tamurlane” and the “Imaginary Assassin” are ironic in tone as they are “the stories of fragmented individuals clutching to an irrevocable past, trying to adapt to the new world, about their courage, loneliness, humiliations, disappointment and achievements” (Pan deya 70). Uma Parameswarn also feels that the stories of *Darkness* disclose much more than what appears at the outer level: Between the Canadian stories, wherein the majority culture refuses to assimilate Indians, and the American stories, in which Indians are shown as resisting assimilation, there is much food for thought as to just what and who are the targets of author’s indictments (184).
Mukherjee has also categorized her stories as pure Canadian and American. “The World According To Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, “Courtly Vision” and “Hindus” are the Canadian stories as they are written in Montreal and Toronto, and they “were difficult to write and even more painful to live through. They are the uneasy stories about expatriation” (Introduction to Darkness ii). Some of her American stories of the Darkness also echo the same voice of the Canadian stories but the rest of American stories enjoy and celebrate their assimilation. Mukherjee says:

I see most of these as stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond ourself to a new community, against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal” (3).

In the story “The World According To Hsu”, the title itself is very suggestive. It reflects one’s own view or philosophy regarding life. Here in this story; Ratna is of Indian origin and her husband Graeme Clayton, is a Canadian professor of Psychology at McGill University, Montreal. An island off the coast of Africa is their destination for holidays. Clayton goes there to see the Southern Cross and to persuade Ratna to move from French dominated Montreal to English dominant Toronto, where he has been offered by the University, the chair in Personal Development. Their arrival is marked by the disturbing events and turmoil within that island. Mukherjee has used this disturbance of island symbolically with the upheavals going within the inner self of Ratna. Graeme tried to console her about the dangerous situation of the island. She replied; “I’m not
worrying about the island.” “I am worrying about Toronto” (47). Ratna has been haunted by the spectre of Toronto’s violence throughout her vacation, which not only spoils her spirits but also reflects a tortured existence.

The title of the story ‘The World According to Hsu’ has been taken by the article written in Scientific American; brought by Graeme. While having dinner with his wife, he tells her about the article; “When the Black Sea was Drained”, by Kenneth J. Hsu (52). He starts his conversation with an emphasis on the words, “Did you know, according to ...” (52). Thus, giving an extra edge of appreciation and an air of importance to the theory of Hsu. Likewise he considers his decision of moving towards Toronto as sound and apt. Whereas, Ratna is disturbed over his decision. She prefers Montreal. “... She claimed to be happy enough in Montreal, less perturbed by the impersonal revenges of Quebec politicians than personal attacks by Toronto racists. In Montreal she was merely “English”, in Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called after the important idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell” (41). She further tells him about three incidents of violence. Only a week before their flight, a Bengali woman on the street was beaten and nearly blinded. Hardly a week prior to that a Punjabi, eight year-old boy was struck by a car announcing on its bumper: KEEP CANADA GREEN. PAINT A PAKI! (Darkness 47).

In the third incident an Indian Professor’s wife was jumped at a red light, right in her car. Her groceries were thrown on the street and they said Paki’s shouldn’t drive big cars. Ratna is very much perturbed over Graeme’s decision as she has a sense of insecurity and fear of becoming the victim of violence. Clayton
tried his best to pacify her – “Look – violence is everywhere. Toronto’s the safest
city on the continent.” “Sure, she said, “for you” … “If you don’t want to go to
Toronto, we won’t.” “But you want to go. It’s the best place for you. You said
Montreal’s finished” (47).

Despite of all her arguments, Graeme has made up his mind for Toronto. Just before going out to see the Southern Cross, he informs Ratna regarding his acceptance of the job in Toronto. Graeme’s attitude is in complete contrast with hers. He is cold and indifferent towards her fears and insecurity. Ratna reads the label on the wine bottle ‘Cote de Cassandra’. The name may be symbolic of Cassandra vision of doom. Graeme’s continuous unsympathetic, indifferent and cold attitude; his total ignorance regarding Ratna’s existence is also symbolic. Graeme Clayton stands for Canadian Authorities; who are quite indifferent and unsympathetic towards violence hurled upon the expatriates. Whereas, Ratna despite of her husband’s ignored attitude, acquires the knowledge of her expatriate existence and fulfills the criteria or viewpoint of “The World According to Hsu”.

In the other story “Isolated Incidents” Bharati Mukherjee has ridiculed the hollowness of the Government’s official policy of Multiculturalism. Ann Vane is the chief character of the story. She is the supervisor of the Expatriate Grievances Cell. Her job is to file complaints from immigrants on problems concerning Human Rights. The establishment of the Expatriate Grievances Cell, which talks high of Human Rights is nothing better than a farce. The futility of documenting cases related with racial violence is shown in a sarcastic tone. Canadian authorities are
aware of its futility. ‘And Torontonians were proud of their subway, their politeness, proud of their moral spotlessness (82). Mukherjee has already mentioned in the earlier story ‘The World According to Hsu’ that Toronto is hell for immigrants.

Ann Vane is symbolic. She stands for Canadian’s attitude towards an expatriate. Regarding expatriates discriminatory existence, Ann is amazed to see that, “they come to her, cowering, crying, thundering, insulting – rehearsed or spontaneous – and still they found reasons for stay.” (D 79). Such is the spirit of Dr. (Miss) Supariwala whose case of racial discrimination was handed over to Ann. Supariwala was a forty three years; well-built woman having doctorates from Western Ontario and Bombay. She claimed to be under-estimated at job interviews in favour of lesser candidates. “And in spite of everything, The Supariwala wanted to stay on. That was what amazed Ann” (D 79). Here Bharati Mukherjee has shown the indomitable spirit of the expatriates to survive against all odds.

In another incident of racial violence the victim was Persawd, John Mohan. It was the case of subway assault. “Chipped teeth, cut lips, broken nose; blackened eyes, cuts and abrasions” (82). The victim was physically tortured. When Miss Vane enquired if they had reported the matter to the police. John Mohan’s lawyer replied in a acidic tone that police are of no use. Lack of witness, fleeing of assailants had made that boy feel like a complainer and here “the victims are made to feel guilty” (82). Though in her thoughts Ann knew the situation, but alongwith it she was aware that Human Rights could do nothing in this matter. She did her work of documentation and created fodder for another Royal Commission
... “This after all was not New York. Assaults on John Mohan Persawd and dozens like him would always be considered isolated incidents, and who’s to say they were racial in nature? Police treated it as simple assault, rowdiness and drew no necessary inferences regarding race. No witness, no case and police involvement ended” (83). Thus, this case was considered as simple case of violence and that made John Mohan Persawd utter “Canadians are mean as hell.” “Life is hopeless; man, no justice, no redress.” On this comment of Persawd, Ann replied: “If this had happened in New York you’d have been left for dead.” The lawyer of the victim asked Vane to correct himself as “If this had happened in New York, he’d have been mugged for his money; not racially assaulted” (84). The conversation shows the great difference between American and Canadian attitude regarding the expatriates and immigrants. It is somewhat a reflection of Mukherjee’s own understanding of Canada and America.

Ann Vane, who symbolically stands for Canadian authorities, her detached view of the case is tinged with irony. Authorities are well aware of the futility of documenting such cases in the name of Human Rights. Here in this story Bharati Mukherjee has given the glimpse of Canadian authorities, cold and indifferent attitude towards the victims of racial discrimination, who belonged to the expatriate community. The story also gives us the message that “Justice delayed is justice denied” which is applicable in the case of violence and racial discrimination hurled upon the immigrants.

In this regard the story ‘Hindus’ is worth mentioning. It is written in Canada but set in America. In this story; Mukherjee presents an expatriate in juxtaposition
against an immigrant and clearly and very vividly brings out the contrast: Leela Lahiri, the protagonist of the story is the mouth-piece of Mukherjee, she is quite autobiographical as she represents or stands for Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee’s concept of an immigrant’s ‘fluid identity’ is represented through Leela Lahiri. She proudly proclaims, “I am an American citizen.” (pp 133) At the same time, her Bengali Brahmin ancestry is also a matter of pride for her. His Royal Highness (H.R.H.) Maharajah Patwant Singh of Gotlah, the other character of the story stands for expatriates, having a grievance against India. Meeting between Leela and the Maharajah takes place after the span of two years. The Maharajah is writing his memoirs. Here Maharaja has shown the contrast between an expatriate and an immigrant. While the Maharajah narrates his woes, Leela celebrates her new identity as an immigrant. She also feels proud in her Hindu past. Thus, she accepts her dual existence.

“Courtly Vision” is the last story of the anthology Darkness. Though written in the Canadian days, it is different from other Canadian stories in its vision and subject matter. The story is about a Moghul painting, conveying so many messages for interpretation. According to Uma Parameswarn:

Several characteristics stand out in her writing: a Moghul-miniaturist delicacy of craftsmanship, which is spelled out in the central metaphor of “Courtly vision”, a vignette built around an actual Moghul miniature painting (183).

Mukherjee has given a vivid and live description of the Moghul court with minute details as she excels in describing matters dealing with history. At the end of the story we find that it is not court’s description but it is a painting, hanging inside an
American art gallery, really to be sold for a meager sum of seven hundred and fifty dollars. Apparently Mukherjee seems to describe and admire the grace of the painting but there is further clue about the subject matter of her forthcoming writing that is *The Holder of The World*:

Give me a total vision, commands the emperor. You Basawan, who can paint my Begum on a grain of rice, see what you can do with the infinite vistas the size of my opened hand. Hide nothing from me, my co-wanderer. Tell me how my new capital will fail, will turn to dust and these marbled terraces be home to jackals and infidels. Tell me who to fear and who to kill but tell it to me in a way that makes me smile. Transport me through dense fort walls and stone grilles and into hearts of men (*Darkness* 199).

Mukherjee considers painting as a two-dimensional cage and it is the writer or the artist who liberates people from this bondage of two-dimensionalism. Therefore, being a writer herself she understands the meaning well and knows her potential for the use of self-liberating technique. Like the courtly painting her novels too reflect complex explorations of human psychology. She speaks and longs for assimilation by breaking the barriers of culture. She wants to reach to the masses by creating an appeal to their heart by strongly advocating for cross-cultural fusion:

The literary artist, Mukherjee has penetrated below the surface, found the reality and told the truth on several grains of rice. The leader wanted to be told the truth, even the bad news. She also celebrates life, the creative possibilities contained within people whose ability to give up fixed worlds, to break out of cages and relate to a complex, multicultural world (*Nazareth* 190).

These Canadian stories do not give any solutions for the problems faced by these expatriates. Certain crucial moments in their lives are shown by the writer.
These moments are indeed moments of revelation or as James Joyce, who was also an expatriate called it ‘epiphany’. There is an uncertain distance between narrators and the characters. Narrators are the interpreters in the stories, thus, making uncertain distance between themselves and the characters. A.J. Gurr has identified this sort of narrative detachment as the clearest hallmark of the exile (34). T.S Eliot and James Joyce also shared this characteristically modernist stance.

Other stories of *Darkness* like “Angela”, “The Lady From Lucknow”, “A Father”, “Nostalgia”, “Saints”, “Visitors”, and “The imaginary Assassin” show that temperament of Bharati Mukherjee which felicitates the change from expatriation to immigration. Thus, preparing background for her another collection of short-stories - *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

Angela is the protagonist of the story “Angela”. As the title of the story is christened after her name, it shows her importance and significance in the story. She is the pivotal point around which the whole story revolves. Angela is an orphan from Dhaka, Bangladesh, who became a war - victim. But she is fortunate enough to survive those war-atrocities and above all is adopted by a Midwest farm family, the Brandons Van Buren country in Iowa, U.S.A. She is narrating her story, “I believe in miracles, not chivalry. Grace makes my life spin. How else does a girl left for dead in Dhaka get to the Brando’s farm house?” (10). Presently she is living a secure life without any nostalgic yearning for her birth place Bangladesh. She doesn’t bear any hatred for it either. Angela shows balanced temperament of cool detachment and total objectivity, continually makes contrast between
Bangladesh and America. She further narrates her story: “I am Angela the Angel. Angela was sister Stella’s name for me. The name I was born with is lost to me; the past is lost to me. I must have seen a lot of wickedness when I was six, but I can’t remember of it. The rapes, the dogs chewing on dead bodies, the soldiers. Nothing…” (13).

One of her sister’s, daughter of her new parents, Delia is in coma after an accident. Dr. Vinny Menezies attends her. He is an Indian doctor from Goa in his forties. Angela is courted by this successful but tasteless doctor. From the point of view of Angela, he is old fashioned but cultured. It is quite interesting to observe how Dr. Menezies is almost different from Menezies, the lover: “In the hospital he seems a man of circumspect feelings, but on Sunday afternoons when we drive (as is disclosed by Angela) around and around in his scirocco, his manner changes. He seems raw, aimless, lost” (13)

Dr. Menezies used to visit Brandons on Sundays and enjoys with appreciation “Bravo” (17), Angela’s afternoon piano playing. “I play Mozart on the piano for Dr. Menezies. He likes to watch me play, he says” (16) Dr. Menezies; as a suitor of Angela presents his candidature: “I think when school is over, you’ll be wanting to find a full time job. Yes you'll want to find a job or a husband. If it is the latter, I’m a candidate putting in an early word” (19). In this way Dr. Menezies offers financial security and pleasures of domesticity to Angela: “He offers me intimacy, fellowship. He tempts with domesticity” (19). Angela’s own sufferings have made her tough and instead of Dr. Menezies persuasions she is determined
to fight alone. In Angela’s heart there are no feeling for Dr. Menezies, she feels no passion for him:

Being an orphan from the East, she realizes that her middle-aged suitor offers financial security and the secret desire of his raw and wild heart. As she contemplates accepting Menezies, she is aware of her own body mutilated in childhood by soldiers. ... The cutting of her nipples at the age of six has left her unable to feel positively about her own sexuality. Between the war atrocity which she has left behind and the powerful call of the traditional male in Menezies, Angela remains enmeshed in the net of old world patriarchy. Her belief in her own assimilation into the American melting pot is therefore ironic (Nagendra 70).

Through Angela’s dual existence, Bharati Mukherjee has given us a glimpse of an immigrant’s ironic assimilation into the American melting pot. Angela truly presents the immigrants psychology. Physically or superficially she appears to us as happy, contented and enjoying every moment of her present life but the truth is that she is still tortured by the painful memories of her past. Past still fills her with pain and horror and she still dreams of being chased by soldiers. It is another kind of postcolonial complexity where assimilation and detachment go together in a psyche of an immigrant.

All this shows that Angela has still not overcome that catastrophe. She is still haunted by the bitter memories of the past. Her wounded, disfigured body with scars made her utter, “only a doctor could love this body” (19). Despite all this there is no desire in her to return to the country of her origin; new place guarantees a better future but the irony is that it does not necessarily guarantee happiness. Angela’s zest for life, her urge to survive against odds made her a true
immigrant, who is anxious to live her life according to her own whims and for that she is even ready to give up a secure future in the form of Dr. Menezies, her suitor.

Another story of Darkness which speaks of cross-cultural interpretation is “The Lady From Lucknow”. Bharati Mukherjee has shown brilliantly the real situation of the female immigrants, who have to face the dilemma of double subordination. On the one hand they have to go through all that ordeal which an immigrant faces and on the other being the weaker sex, they are always side-tracked. They don’t have any say in their domestic matters. Through them Mukherjee has shown that in the new alien culture how their unfulfilled desires provoke them for a licentious life-style. Long absence of their husbands eventually gives place to adultery. For immigrant women committing adultery becomes a common affair in their day to day life. Here Mukherjee also satirises the double standards of the society regarding male-chauvinism. The stories “The Lady From Lucknow” and “Visitors” reflect this temperament.

“The Lady From Lucknow” is a first person narration where the narrator who is a daughter of an army doctor, moves to Rawalpindi, Pakistan after partition. She is brought up under severe patriarchal and puritan society and at the early age of seventeen, she marries a good man, having a good future. Iqbal is an employee of IBM and with him she has been from Pakistan to Lebanon, Brazil, Zambia, France and now to Atlanta, Georgia. Her family comprises of two children. Thus, theirs is a small and a happy family. Despite all this, Iqbal feels himself very insecure in America and calls himself as a ‘not quite’. They live in a wide new
house with a deck and a backyard that runs into a golf course. On one occasion when Iqbal and Nafeesa are sitting together on the deck and enjoying their Sunday afternoon, Iqbal says her to sit instead of leaning against the railing. “Sit”, Iqbal tells me. “You’ll distract the golfers. Americans are crazy for sex, you know that.” He half rises out of his deck chair. He lungs for my breasts in mock passion. I slip out of his reach” (24).

Here, Mukherjee has shown a spark of dramatic irony, that is, Iqbal’ ignorance about Nafeesa’s sexual cravings. He is mocking at Americans for their preoccupation with sex but he is totally ignorant about his wife’s sexual fantasies, which Nafeesa secretly nourishes in her heart, passionate pleasures defying all taboos like the girl next door in Lucknow. Thus, her “first-person narrative indirectly contrasts the puritanical, upbringing of Islamic women with her own craving for romantic and sexual fulfillment” (Mitali 197).

Being highly romantic at heart, Nafeesa has a lover, a white immunologist who is sixty five years old. For her the feeling of winning the love of a white man is matter of pride. Her white lover James Beamish, is a flatterer and a flirt by nature. He makes Nafeesa feel “‘beautiful’, erotic, responsive” (25). She tries to express her independence and individuality by her liaison with James Beamish. She also thinks that by having an illicit affair she is somehow identifying with America. “For her first assignation, she has gone to the trouble of acquiring a front closing bra and silky new underwear but her lover wears an old T-shirt and lemon-pale boxer shorts” (30). She becomes quite upset for all this is not anticipated by her. Nafeesa is caught red-handed in bed by Beamish’s wife Kate Beamish, who is
habitual of her husband’s infidelities to care. Therefore, their confrontation proves to be neither explosive nor dramatic. Kate Beamish calls it a ridiculous one. She dismisses Nafeesa with contempt that “I might have stabbed you if I could not take you serious. But you are quite ludicrous, lounging like a Goya nude on my bed” (33). Kate Beamish sees her as an exotic capable of provoking only a passing interest in her husband. Thus, Nafeesa finds herself in utter humiliation and in a state of disillusionment but she is not ashamed of her deed. “I had thought myself provocative and fascinating. What had begun as an adventure had become shabby and complex. I was just another involvement of a white man in a pokey little outpost, something that ‘men do’ and then come to their senses while the …drink gin and tonic and fan their faces, I did not merit a stab wound through the heart” (33). Due to suppressed desires Nafeesa finds herself entrapped in a different patriarchal paradigms, where her native male counterpart is replaced by the white man, and eventually she ends his coloured mistress.

What is noteworthy in the story is - Nafeesa’s courage and willingness to take risk to discover herself and to break out of the prisons of sexual discrimination, she finds herself in as woman. She wants to enjoy that sexual freedom which the culture of her resident country provides.

The “Visitors” is another brilliant story by Mukherjee which reveals the obscure passion of the heroine Vinita as she tries to break the taboos of her traditional culture but only to find herself in a mess. She is a beautiful, docile, educated Indian girl, who accepts an arrange marriage to Sailen Kumar “a well mannered and amiable-looking man, a St. Stephen’s graduate who had gone on to
London University and Harvard and who now worked for a respectable investment House in Manhattan” (162). After marriage she takes “an Air India flight to citizenship in the New World” (D 162), where Sailen Kumar lives in a “two bedroom condominium with access to gym, pool and sauna across the river” (D 162). He is quite well-to-do and his future prospects are very high. He wants to become a millionaire in New York City. Therefore, the groom selected by Vinita’s parents promises a life of material comforts and financial security. Vinita in her turn has to be a dutiful, docile wife to Sailen Kumar, who does the household cores, attends his guests happily and bear his children. “All her life Vinita has been trained to reject passion and to adapt, these being the requisites of successful marriages in the old country” (Mitali 205). Vinita is not very much acquainted with America, whatever she knows about America through the soap operas whom she watches on television while Sailen Kumar is at work.

The very title of the story “Visitors” refers to those people who comes to visit Vinita and gives her directions and suggestions so that she can successfully lead her life and fulfill the requirements of an ideal Indian wife.

They refuse total assimilation in the alien culture. Mrs. Thapar shows this opinion while advising Vinita: “we have minted a bit of money in this country, but that doesn’t mean we’ve let ourselves become Americans. You can see we’ve remained one hundred percent simple and ‘deshi’in our customs” (168).

Here Vinita reflects the immigrants Trishanku² position, where the immigrant one the on hand wants to remain indigenous and on the other hand enjoys the freedom of the new culture. In Sailen Kumar’s absence, Vinita receives
Rajeev Khanna, a young student, who sees Vinita as a seductive temptress, siren after the fashion of Bombay films. In her deep conscience she knows that an Indian wife could never allow any stranger in her house in her husband’s absence, but she lets Khanna come in and to take liberty with her, as she wants to enjoy the company of that good looking young man. She knows that “letting him in might lead to disproportionate disaster” (168). Still she wishes to enjoy the freedom of American society. When Khanna departs, Vinita wears a purple saree and cooks dinner for her husband and his friends whom he brings home without warning her and she “serves the men and manipulates them with her youth and beauty and her unmaskable charm. She has no idea that she is on the verge of hysteria” (176).

Her husband is too materialistic and unsympathetic to understand her mental distress. He does not lend her any emotional support. “The house, therefore, becomes a sexual metaphor of female space in Mukherjee’s narratives” (Mitali 206). Vinita’s realization of her passionless marriage and lack of romantic fulfillment tortures her. Its her restlessness and boredom which makes her ponder: “Why then is she moved by an irresistible force to steal out of his bed in the haven of his expensive condominium, and run off into the alien American night where only shame and disaster can await her?” (D176).

The story “Visitors” can also be concluded as the post-sequel of the Mukherjee’s novel Wife. Where the protagonist Dimple Das Gupta goes through such emotional stress as is faced by Vinita the heroine of the story “Visitors”. Like Sailen Kumar, Dimple’s husband Amit is also unsympathetic and cold towards her emotional requirements. That’s why she finds herself misfit in the alien culture and
ends as a maniac. Vinita no doubt is proceeding towards a similar fate. The sharp contrast between the two cultures creates a complexity in Vinita’s life. The normal life of the West becomes the complex life for the eastern woman. It is the genius of Bharati Mukherjee as a writer, her capacity and art of presenting real, peculiar situations in which immigrants find themselves caught and entrapped. In the story ‘A Father’, Mukherjee has shown superbly the difference and the magnitude of the problem of reconciliation between the Indian and the American values. Mitali R. Pati comments: “The self division experienced by Mukherjee’s Indian men as they encounter the sexual liberation of the new country leads to acts of shames, madness, even violence...” (203). The story is a fine example of Postcolonial complexity. What is a matter of proud for the Americans is a matter of shame for the Indians:

The story has all the characteristics of the best in Bharati Mukherjee... this is subtle depiction of the interaction; adjustment and sometimes conflict between two cultures and often between two generations of immigrants. The crisis out of these develops swiftly. And finally there is equally sudden and startling denouncement to the story” (Sudha 68-3).

For Mr. Bhowmick’s character the above statement is perfectly suited. His bright, unmarried, engineer daughter’s artificially inseminated pregnancy is a matter of shame, violence and even madness for him in America. Mr Bhowmick hails from Ranchi, a hen-pecked husband; always dominated by his wife, who with the dowry money completed his education at Carnegie Tech. His lack of power and confidence makes him an ardent devotee of Goddess Kali, the Goddess of wrath and vengeance. His religious bent of mind seeks strength and courage from
Goddess Kali to face the world. He feels that “in the 5.43 a.m. darkness, he sensed invisible presence: gods and snakes frolicked in the master bedroom, little white sparks of cosmic static crackled up the legs of his *pajamas*. Something was there out in the dark, something that could invent accidents and coincidences to remained mortals that even in Detroit they were no more than mortal” (*D* 61). But his wife and daughter Babli don’t approve his ways. His daughter, an engineer tells him, “Face it, Dad…..you have an affect deficit” (61). Mr. Bhowmick hears her muttering that “This Hindu myth stuff is like a series of super-graphics” (65). Mr. Bhowmick’s mannerism shows his expatriate psychology whereas his wife and daughter are the true representatives of assimilated immigrants:

He is always caught in the mess of his native culture but still trying hard to cope with the new one. A dozen times a day he repeats the words ‘compromise’ and ‘adaptability’, and always tries to find a common thread of synthesis between” “new world reasonableness and old-world beliefs (64).

Discovery of his daughter’s pregnancy initially enrages and upsets him as the thought of family honour makes him restless; but he also feels a sort of inner happiness as the very thought that someone found Babli quite feminine and lovable is relieving one because he considers her very plain and unfeminine. He is always regretful that she is not the child of his dreams. “But Babli could never comfort him. She wasn’t womanly or tender the way that unmarried girls had been in the wistful days of her adolescence” (63). He silently watches the progress of Babli’s pregnancy and even prepares himself for a white son-in-law. When he hears that Babli has gone in for artificial insemination out of hatred for men, “Who needs a man? The father of my baby is a bottle and a syringe. Men louse up your
lives. I just want a baby” (72). His fury knows no bounds, he becomes violent and starts attacking his pregnant daughter with a rolling pin. His violence shows his frustration and inability to find a balance between the wistful expatriate in himself and with the immigrant in his daughter. On the other hand his so called Americanised wife too becomes hysterical and violent when she discovers Babli’s pregnancy. She behaves almost in the manner her counterparts in her native country would have behaved in that particular situation. Her violent outburst is reminiscent of the old country. Urbashi Barat feels:

Babli’s rejection of a father for her unborn child is also her rejection of her own father and everything that paternity stands for and that Mr. Bhowmick had clung to in the exile of an adopted home; indeed, because he can suddenly identify Babli with Kali, it seems to him that his goddess, too, has deserted him (120).

“Tamurlane” is another remarkable story which depicts the expatriate’s zeal for his existence amidst hostile and violent circumstances. The very name of the title “Tamurlane” has got its own significance. Tamurlane refers to the historical invader, who despite of his crippled leg plundered and exploited India. His crippleness did not act as hindrance in the way of his ambitions. Thus, he was a true fighter, and such is the spirit of Gupta, whose physical disability which is the outcome of racial discrimination, had still all the nerves to fight with the Canadian police department; who were on a mission to catch the illegal deportees. Mr. Aziz’s restaurant ‘Mumtaj’ is the place where the whole incident of the story takes place. Among the workers of Mr. Aziz, there were six illegals and they have to be always extra careful as the sword of Domiciles was hanging on their head round the clock. Though Mr. Aziz was an established, owner of two motels, one Mumtaj in Toronto
and a 67 – unit motel on the Gulf Coast of Florida; yet according to him, “Canadians don’t want us; it’s like Uganda all over again, he can feel it in his bones” (D 118).

Gupta, the new tandoor chef, is a perfect worker. He is capable of doing wonders by using the broiler of old gas stove and cooking chicken breasts and lamb chops. While Gupta is busy in his work, his companion, an agent, a Muslim, a Ugandan, a victim of Idi Amin; is talking to him: “The man said, “Maharaj, I don’t know why you stay in Toronto. I really don’t” (119). ... If you stay here, trouble’s going to find you. I can guarantee you that, my friend Aziz – Sahib has the right idea. Get out while you can. You’re one of the lucky ones.” He further says, “You don’t have to go looking, friend. Because trouble’s coming. If you stay in Toronto, it’s coming to your door” (120). Then he narrates the bravery of Gupta, “This man is a hero to us all. Six years ago, he was thrown on the subway tracks in this city. He would never walk, they said. Now look. Like a true Gandhian; he forgave them” (121). It is quite evident that the immigrants often become prey to the violence and authorities are inconsiderate and unsympathetic towards the victims. “Hooligans and everyone else can do what they want and they know we don’t dare complain” (122). Such is the deplorable existence of the immigrants. When Mounties raid the restaurant, all the illegals hide themselves. Gupta alone handles them. He is having Canadian passport, still he fights with them bravely and dies gallantly.

“That way, he never saw the drawn gun, nor did he try to dodge the single bullet” (125).
Thus, the story shows the significance and importance of self-esteem imbibed with the question of identity as faced by an immigrant. Despite of his physical inability, which is the outcome of racial-violence, Gupta is not ready to give up Toronto. When he is having the legal passport then why to flee? Instead he is ready to face any situation bravely and he proves himself in the end of the story. Thus, mocking the Canadian claim of curbing racial, ethnic and gender discrimination against immigrants through the official policy of multiculturalism.

Dr. Manny Patel is the protagonist of the story Nostalgia. He works as a psychiatrist at a state mental hospital in Queens, New York. “He had chosen to settle in the U.S. he was not one for nostalgia; he was not an expatriate but a patriot” (D 98). In America Dr. Manny Patel has acquired a fortune. His life style is quite luxurious. He is the owner of an expensive car, Porsche, a house worth three hundred dollars, has married a white American, Camille and a son studying in Andover costing nearly twelve thousand dollars a years:

America had been very good to him, no question; but there were things that he had given up. There were some boyhood emotions, for instance that he could no longer retrieve. He lived with the fear that his father would die before he could free himself from the crazies of New York and go home. He missed his parents, especially his father; but he couldn’t explain this loss to Camille (99).

Dr. Manny is the only issue of his parents born in their old age out of the blessings of Goddess Parvati. His parents for his sake, his future, let him go to John Hopkins for medical studies. They loved him with same intensity, as he loves his own son. Therefore, the guilt of neglecting his own parents in the old age, makes him quite nostalgic. He misses his parents and his inability to look after
them, often makes his mood pensive and sad. One day in such a mood, lost in thoughts of his parents, being slightly nostalgic, he drives to Manhattan, New York’s ‘Little India.’ There in the grocery store, a youthful attractive sales girl rises passion in him. His romantic desires, being suppressed in his stable marriage with Camille, encourages his long lost desires. Smitten by her charm and finding her irresistible, he asks her out for dinner and takes her to a “nice Indian restaurant, an upscale one, with table cloths, sitar music and air duets sprayed with the essence of rose petals. He chose a new one, Shah Jahan on Park Avenue; Just suitable for a lotus – padma; The Goddess had come to him as a flower…” (106).

After the dinner and payment of the bill, Dr. Manny took Padma to the hotel’s seventh floor room above the restaurant. “The Indian food, an Indian woman in bed, made him nostalgic… He wished he had married an Indian woman, one that his father had selected. He wished he had any life but the one he had chosen” (111). But within no time his dreams are shattered as he faces the most disgusting moment of his life. He has not yet dressed up, when he discovers that he has been cheated and entrapped by uncle-niece, pimp-whore team. Uncle, the waiter, threatens to arrest him through the authorities on the charge of raping a minor. “I’m telling you she is a minor. I’m intending to make a citizen’s arrest. I have her passport in my pocket” (112). Thus, in a very shocking and humiliating manner, Padma, whom he regarded as an Indian Goddess and “he had mistaken her independence as a bold sign of honest assimilation (112); startles him by turning out to be an accomplice of her uncle in this dirty game. Her uncle demands money and also for a professional favour, asking him to write a physician’s note as
he is facing some immigration problem in case of his family member. “It took an hour of bickering and threats to settle. He made out a check for seven hundred dollars. He would write a letter on hospital stationery” (112).

Dr. Manny Patel, in a perplexed state unable to withstand that humiliation, does the most odd act of entering the hotel bathroom, “squatting like a villager’s home, he defecated into the sink; and with handfuls of his own shit – it felt hot, light; porous, an artist’s medium – he wrote WHORE on the mirror and floor.” (113)

Dr. Patel has to pay too much for being emotional. The way he is befooled and blackmailed makes him in a state of shock. His reaction is the outcome of the deep humiliation suffered by him.

Mukherjee has successfully shown through the character of Dr. Manny Patel that though he is a successful American Psychiatric Resident yet he himself is neurotically sick. He abhors being called a Paki Scum and the way he reacts out of anger and frustration when is befooled and blackmailed shows his abnormality. He is guilty conscious for not being a dutiful son himself as his white wife is not willing to share his parental obligation. So, the another important aspect which is being highlighted through this story is the marital stress generated through the migratory experience. The cheating at the hands of fellow Indians is also one of the reasons of postcolonial complexity in a state of diaspora:

In the case of Dr. Manny Patel; the desire for intimacy outside the boundaries of marriage is symptomatic of larger discontents of immigrant life – the loneliness, uncertainty, and emptiness … So while giving into his hunger for something that actually has an Indian spiritual basis, Many is exploited by fellow Indians (Nazareth 18).
“Saints” is another powerful story, mocks at the one level on the hollowness of the relationship between husband and wife, their estrangement and its impact on the growing children and on the other level it shows the hypocrisy of the Eastern world and their people. South Asian immigrants want to assimilate in the mainstream life of the West, symbolizing materialism, but they adhere to their eastern values regarding their personal sexual behaviour. Though they want to enjoy the licentiousness of west, but under the covers. They want to hide that part of their behavior. Dr. Manny Patel, father of the protagonist of the story Shawn Patel, is such a character. In the earlier story “Nostalgia” this trait of his, has been very much highlighted by Mukherjee and in this story also he is being mocked at. Shawn Patel remarks that “the good Dr. Manny Patel, who sooths crazies at Creedmore all day. Nights he’s a playboy and slum landlord, Mom says” (D147).

As is said above, the story deals with Shawn Patel, a fifteen years old teenager son of Dr. Manny Patel, an Indian and Camille his mother an American. His parents are divorced due to ideological difference and their divorce symbolically represents that “East is East; West is West and never shall twin meet” (Kipling 66-70).

Shawn Patel lives with his mother in Upstate, New York, America. While his father through expensive gifts and occasional phone calls; remains in contact with him. For Shawn Patel his father’s dual existence is mysterious. My father, healer of derangement slum landlords with income properties on two continents, believer of visions, pleasure-taker where none seems present, is a mystery” (D 154). The father - son relationship lacks warmth and intimacy. He even mocks the way his
father behaves in the most strange and hypocritic manner: “I don’t remember Dad in any intimate way except that he embarrassed me when came to pick me up from my old boarding school. The overstated black Mercedes, the hugging and kissing in such a foreign way” (156). The estrangement of Shawn’s parents and his mother’s indifferent attitude towards Shawn due to her involvement for herself, has its impact on the mental and behavioural psychology of the adolescent Shawn.

Shawn shares his emotional and psychological views with his friend Tran, a Vietnamese boat person, who has survived by hiding himself from pirates and haven to chew raw fish in order to stay alive. Now, he lives with his mother and step father and shares a good friendship with Shawn. Lack of proper parental care and guidance make Shawn and Tran engage themselves in the dirty activities of making obscene phone calls and gay activities. Mukherjee shows repercussions of the materialistic society where too much individualism of the parents prove fatal for their children. Shawn observes the open, licentious behavior of his mother and her lover, his lurid advances. “Mom’s entertaining tonight” (154). This type of activities make Shawn increasingly alienated from his surroundings and he indulges himself in awkward activities. Shawn gets gifts of two books, one deals with the Mughal paintings and the other book is about a Hindu Saint who had visions, deals with Indian Spirituality. Going through the book, Shawn finds out that one day the saint while strolling along the Ganges fell and broke his arm. At that time he was thinking about his love for the young boy; one of the followers who lived in the temple. “He had been thinking of his love for them – love as for sweetheart, he
says – when he slipped into a trance and stumbled. Love and pain: in the saints
mind there is no separation.” (135).

Mukherjee here compares between the East’s spiritual life full of
restrainment and the openness and materialistic life of the West. She also
discloses the superficiality of the Indian spiritualism. How life of too restraintment
results into shocking revelation regarding sexual behaviour. Like too much
fascination of the saint for a temple boy and how the saint who had reached the
state of perfection died of throat cancer. “Cancer can ravage an ecstatic Saint”
(155). His knowledge, his life of abstinence fails to purge him both physically and
spiritually.

Being an immature adolescent, Shawn is deeply influenced by the Saint
and he tries to intimate the holy man. “I dress in the dark for a night of cold
roaming. It’ll be a night of walking in a state of perfect grace. … Like the Hindu
Saint, I walk my world in boots and a trance” (156). Shawn goes out to look into
the house of the Battliwala’s, whom he picked out from the phone book. As there
were no curtains in the Battliwala’s house, he sees through the window a dwarf kid
rocking, shouting and bumping his head. Though he cannot hear his words, but he
wants to search out to the fellow Saint. The dwarf kid wants to gain good grades,
so he is studying hard at this home of the night. “He’s is the conqueror of alien
syllables” (157). Mukherjee has highlighted the post colonial complexity dealing
with language regarding alien culture. Anyhow – the immigrant wants to learn it
and not only this he wants to excel in this field.
Finally when Shawn goes back, his mother is having a quarrel with her boyfriend Wayne. “I move from the bright kitchen into the dark dining room, and wait for the lovers to finish” (158). She is shocked to see Shawn’s guise. “How wondrous to be a visionary, he tells his mother, as she screams and sobs when she sees him. “If I were to touch someone now, I’d be touching god” (158). Shawn’s mother’s outburst is natural one as she finds her son in ecstasy and female guise which stands for Shawn’s physical transformation to the Saintly state. “The attraction to Sainthood, to a violation of the norms of social behaviour, is an indication of this search, although superficially we would consider the character to be strange or even a pervert. Shawn knows his mother would have been happier to have a daughter so he takes on the feminine side of himself, even using make up” (Nazareth 187).

In the story “The Imaginary Assassin”, Bharati Mukherjee has brilliantly used the technique of Historicity of the text: In this technique the writer distorts the historical facts for its own convenience either to propagate or reject some ideology. In this story she has used this technique to show the postcolonial complexity of rejecting Gandhism, that covers a century and is deep-rooted in Indian psyche. Through a fictitious story, she deconstructs Gandhi and his ideology.

The narrator of this story is a young male Sikh born in Yuba city, California in 1960. His grandfather is that imaginary assassin; who rejects Gandhism and promotes escapism. The grandfather and grandson share a very affectionate relationship. Grandfather is the first settler in the valley, who is a hardworking
farmer. After a shop-lifting episode, he feels homesick and returns back to India. In 1948, a month after the assassination of Gandhi, he revisits California. His character reveals the psyche of a typical expatriate, who has his grievances against the alien country: “California was paradise to striving men from dusty Ludhiana Villagers. But what good access to paradise if you weren’t happy? The first time around, California had made grandfather homesick. All the Sikhs in America, Grandfather complained; were knock-kneed and weakly. They’d landed overseas (D 179-180). He does not want to lead an ordinary life working as an engineer, which is his father’s dream but he wants to follow the Sikh warrior tradition of Sirhan and Sirhan. His grandfather tells him stories of magic and miracles in their “headless ghosts, eager to decapitate, could hide in trees along dark country lances” (184). The boy hears ‘the Cackle and swish of windblown headless ghosts.’ One day his grandfather narrates a remarkable true story. “I’ll tell you a true story. I’ll tell you why I had to come back to America to live... I killed a man in Delhi. I killed Mahatma Gandhi” (183). Grandfather claims to have killed Gandhi because “Gandhi had hurt over women. ... Gandhi was the enemy of women. And so, Gandhi, the Mahatma, the Great Soul, became my enemy” (186). Grandfather confession is highly symbolic, by Gandhiji’s assissnation he means to say rejection of his ideology. When we stop believing in somebody’s ideology it is almost like assassinating him; as he no longer exists for us or has no value for us.

“The story explains the psychology of Sikhs while letting us see the other side of the sainthood of Gandhi: the price others pay such that ‘Gandhi the celibate was the biggest rapist in history’ (D 187).
The date of Gandhiji’s assassination has been mentioned in the story is October 2, 1948. In fact, October 2 is his birth date. Mukherjee has deliberately used this replacement of historical dates as to highlight that with the rejection of Gandhism, his birth and death has also lost its importance. The story can also be seen through this perspective that “Sainthood and violence lie very close together. Sainthood can be the cause of and justification for violence. On the other hand, as we have seen, certain types of ‘violence’ are committed by people, we can call secular saints – people whose actions make survival and growth possible for themselves and for others” (Nazareth 184).

Postcoloniality is a state of marginality at one place and moving frequently from margin to centre and back at other time. The stories in the Darkness are depicting the theme of marginality in an ‘ethnic high fashion’ in American society. The politics of marginalization operates within postcolonial spaces. It is believed that ethnic minorities and the other groups on the ‘margin’ have been subordinated by the majority. Thus, it intensified the sense of ‘Otherness’ in other ethnic groups in the country. Bharati Mukherjee being a writer in diaspora is in a position to play the politics of margin. She is writing from the margin as her stories centered around the immigrant diasporic groups in Canada/America. She criticized racial conflicts in multi-cultural Canada and at the same time gender – discriminations in India and that is the space which makes her powerful subaltern voice as identities ideally operate in ever widening circles of belonging. None of these identities need to be cancelled out the other. In Darkness, Mukherjee succeeded
in moving through these identities and negotiating the politics of being writing from the margin.

Celebration and acceptance of dual existence becomes the main theme of Bharati Mukherjee’s next collection of short stories named *The Middleman and Other Stories* and her much celebrated novel *Jasmine*, where the protagonists celebrate their new identity as immigrants. In these stories one can clearly mark a definite movement away from expatriates to immigrants, which would be discussed at length in the next chapter.
Notes

1. **Mosaic** - The usual preferred term used to refer to Canadian society. It assumes the retention of difference between distinct cultures which together produce a whole yet varied cultural pattern. For Bharati Mukherjee, in the mosaic model of National Community, one’s visibility as an “ethnic” subject becomes a signifier of absolute cultural difference, working to “unhouse” minority cultures by depriving them of real power and proper representation and thereby denying them full membership of the nation. Therefore, she strongly advocates for American “Multiculturalism” instead of Canadian “mosaic”.

2. **Trishanku** – The mythical king, who desires to reach heaven in his corporal form, manages the ascent with the help of sage Vishwamitra. But he is refused admission to heaven, and remains suspended between heaven and earth, an aerial surveyor looking at two worlds and belonging to neither. Uma Parmeswaran, one of the leading voices of South Asian Canadian Diaspora, uses the Trishanku myth as a symbol of immigrant location. To stay back and struggle for a place in the new world often becomes the ethic of immigrant existence.
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