CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis makes a close study of the text of seven novels of Bharati Mukherjee, with a view to describe their theme in the wider sense of diasporic consciousness which binds together the various complexities of the postcolonial theory. The dimensions of novelistic complexities as subject of critical attention are now far extended beyond simple thematic study of diaspora, exile, isolation and alienation, to encompass all the meanings and features such as margin, construction of homeland, hyphenated identity, displacement and assimilation, ‘ unhousement’ and ‘rehousement’, and above all the complexity of a point of view of a woman diasporic South Asian writer in North America. Our century, that is, the last two decades of twentieth century and the starting of twenty first century witnessed the breaking of barriers between national/regional literature and the global/continental literature. It has provided the requisite framework and the rigorous tools to analyse the complex themes, so that it has become possible to break new grounds in postcolonial diasporic studies.

The works of Bharati Mukherjee are eminently suitable for this kind of research not only on account of her unique contribution to re-define the narrative of diaspora, but also because inspite of charges levished on her being a negative portrayal of Indian tradition and culture and to gain the benefits of Americanization
over a quarter century, the new yardsticks of analysis have not so far been applied to measure her revolutionary achievements. The restructuring of narratives of diaspora that dwindle between ‘mosaic’ and ‘melting pot’ and the rigorous investigation of some of the basic problems of research on this author, are yet to be explored. The present study humbly sets out to fill this gap.

The introductory chapter of this thesis briefly describes the dimensions of postcolonialism, indicating the significance of applying this concept to the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, especially dealing with the complexities come into being in a diasporic state of mind. The complexities such as alienation, displacement, dislocation, rootlessness, marginalization and racial discrimination evolved out of diasporic consciousness.

The expatriates are unable to understand the nature of their unbelongingness both to their native country and the adopted one. They are entrapped between two cultures belonging to none and aspiring for a ‘third space’, where they try to explore their true existence between their hyphenated identity and assimilatory tendencies. Mukherjee has also used and exploited this ‘third space’ as a tool for maintaining ethnic difference and to explore those postcolonial complexities that enable her to develop her creative sensibility.

Apart from it the chapter makes a close study of diasporic consciousness in relation with Bharati Mukherjee. Efforts have been made to delimit the meaning of diaspora for the purpose of the present study because Mukherjee claimed to be a postcolonial writer and always tries to demonstrate a medium, which reflects her
ideology as well as cultural commitments. ‘What is the mode of writing’ is a question that has been answered to some extent in this chapter. She left India in her early twenties, choosing to write in the master's tongue that can not keep her away from progressive realism. But at the same time putting herself in a contradictory postcolonial complexity, she has chosen to be nostalgic and romance/myth is a genre best suits to the purpose. The element of diaspora in this study has been dealt with the problem by balancing the glory of myth with more critical mode of reality. The chapter is concluded with a note that Mukherjee with the help of balancing genre strategy constructed a world where people can achieve harmonious balance between self and society to give some meaning to the existence of the immigrant community and its culture by adopting a mode of ‘cross – culturalism’.

The next chapter takes a bird's – eye - view of the development of the South Asian Indo-Canadian novel, noting that the history of immigration played a vital role in providing the material for her early two novels, that is, The Tiger's Daughter and Wife. The rest of this chapter is devoted to analyse the theme of these two novels, demonstrating them to be thoroughly an outburst of her 'unhousement' in Canada. The Scholar has tried her best to analyse and interrogate the multicultural policy of Canada, which forced Bharati Mukherjee to write about isolation and alienation of her protagonists of these two novels, Tara Chatterjee and Dimple Dasgupta. These novels demonstrating thoroughly the autobiographical element consequently leading towards a complex personality of un-belonging state of mind:
Mukherjee's early novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife* explore the conditions of being an Indian expatriate in North America. The protagonists of the novels Tara and Dimple respectively are expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. As any other expatriates, they too are not comfortable in both the native and alien cultures. Here expatriation is not only a major theme but also a metaphor for deeper levels of solitude and alienation (Abraham 58).

The writing style of her earlier two novels was influenced by another expatriate writer like V.S. Naipaul, who was the model that she chose for her initial fiction. Here she felt most alienated from her surroundings. A new aspect has been explored in this chapter noting that despite the cultural dislocation, Mukherjee locates the transjactory of her identity and cultural politics in the course of crossing and re-crossing multiple borders of language, history, race, time and culture. In this way she is engaged with the complexities of national narratives to offer a negotiation that moves beyond a simple acceptance of homeland or alien land, as in case with other diasporic writers.

The third chapter begins with the observations of writer's dissatisfaction with her cultural as well as social surroundings of Canada. Her 'dark days' of both physical as well as mental abuse in Canada make her to decide for American immigration. But one complex element is discovered by the scholar, that is, similar to the author’s intention, her characters in diaspora, "with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return" (Intro. to *Darkness 15*), she redefines the national boundaries and tries to interrogate as well as negotiate assimilation in a mosaic model of Canadian multiculturalism. Only the
four stories were written in Canadian soil namely, “The World According to Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, “Hindus” and “Courtly Vision” are the “uneasy stories about expatriation” (Intro. to Darkness 2). Thus, while conventional narratives of diaspora frame national identity within neatly bounded spatiotemporal parameters, placing emphasis on roots and origins, Mukherjee's narratives of diaspora, the scholar observes, offers a flexible framework which can deal with the question of home and belonging set into motion by the postcolonial complexity of identity in an age of diaspora.

The rest of this chapter describes all the stories in this collection by a detailed critical analysis treating it as Mukherjee's preparatory ground for American Citizenship. This chapter telescopes back and forth the whole subject matter of all the stories as a symbol of writer's psychological state of mind where she successfully creates an impression of 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Her aesthetic as an immigrant writer is to "to make the familiar exotic; exotic familiar" ("A Four - Hundred Year – Old Woman" 35). In his influential essay, "Dissemination: Time Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", Bhabha contends:

[T]he nation's margins, to which diaspora and other minority communities are relegated, are highly complex and flexible recesses of cultural production from where various oppositional practices and analytic capacities can emerge. The space of betwixt and between, the margin constitute that interstitial space of overlap of cultures and histories, the very site from which new narratives of national and cultural identity can be written and imagines (291-322).
The narrative structure of *Darkness* where the conventional narratives of diaspora is almost entirely abolished, comes closer to ethnic as well as global literature at the same time. So far unexploited element of ethnic difference is explored in this chapter:

The essential discourse of ethnic difference and its correlation with the politics of margin make Mukherjee’s narrative of diaspora different from other South-Asian writers of diaspora. She seems hardly interested in assimilation but tends towards dismantling the established boundaries between the third world immigrants and the hegemony of American national identities. She redefines and reshapes both the models of mosaic and melting pot of multiculturalism, where the touch of difference is used to politicize her belonging and un-belonging. The overlap of cultural spaces and criss-crossing flows. " in which there is no centre [Mukherjee] gestures at a real multicultural construction of ethnicity and national identity that is not framed within a mutually exclusive, binary opposition between assimilation within or exclusion from the dominant cultural discourse of identity (Sharmani 15).

The next chapter deals with Mukherjee’s Immigration phase during which she has written her short stories collection *The Middleman and Other Stories* and the most celebrated work *Jasmine*. It proves Mukherjee’s ability to chart the inner voyage. She attempts to depict the inner lives of all her characters. The first part of this chapter defines the narratives of *The Middleman* showing that it is not always ‘loss’ that dominates Mukherjee’s diasporic consciousness rather efforts are made to balance between cultural identities and regeneration in a new homeland. On the one hand, diaspora is used as a condition of ‘loss’ and ‘unhousement’, on the other it is used as
a powerful tool to regain that loss through ‘assimilation’ and ‘fusion’. The story entitled “Orbiting”, is a fine example of assimilation which takes place after two different cultures meet and interact together, sharing one nation. The assembly of different characters sharing the same space, Mukherjee constructs the melting pot as a symbolic site of national unity or consensus. Instead of making a ‘third space’, each character makes a space for another to adjust and settle in the America of their dream. But the ‘assimilation’ and ‘fusion’ is not easy or the writer herself avoids absolute assimilation. In the process, both kind of identities, individual as well as cultural – are interrogated:

The text clearly suggests that this is not a space of easy and harmonious synthesis. For within the characters’ interchange through their heteroglossia of cultures, accents, histories, memories and experiences, there abound also prejudices, prohibitions, misunderstandings, and confusions. Indeed, Mukherjee posits the melting pot as a space of conflict and potential tension (Gabriel 13).

The second part of this chapter illustrates her most celebrated novel Jasmin. The kaleidoscopic series of cultural narratives show the unending search for an identity with a continuous formation and transformation. In Jasmin she tries to move away from traditional Indian outlook to a growing acceptance of its ethnic diversity which in turn leads to a globalization of mind and body of a central character, Jasmine. In Jasmin her complexity of identity crisis comes on the surface by the remarkable use of stream of consciousness technique with flash backs in a fine blending of time past and time present scheme. During this period, she left Canada with her husband Clark Blaise because of racism and multiculturalism. She moved to America and claimed herself as “American writer of Indian origin” (Hogan). She argues that “In the
age of diaspora ones biological identity may not be ones identity” (“American Dreamer” 1).

In this chapter the scholar explored that passing through various shades of identity formation, Mukherjee has been able to acquire an identity which reflects fusion and a clear disengagement from national boundaries:

Perhaps instead, of crossing borders, the borders (multiple and virtual victors of energy, power, desire, and capital) will cross and criss - cross, deterritorialize and reterritorialize us...we will no longer go to the border : The border will (be)come to us (Herron 23).

Here too, in her American narrative, she enjoyed her Third World status. She makes her best efforts to assimilate as well as celebrate the touch of difference:

When [racial or ethnic] difference is celebrated [...] people must [...] find meaning in difference and this meaning comes from an endless process of contrasting one’s group with other groups (Steele, Shelby 83).

The last chapter consists of detail explication of the postcolonial complexities in her two novels *The Holder of The World* and *Leave It to Me*. The former is a documentation of a story of Hannah Easton an imaginary as well as realistic character. The complex pattern of two themes running parallel: The life of the Hannah Easton belonging to the seventeenth century and the life of Beigh Masters of the present century.

The novelist wears the mask of scientific biographer and making brilliant use of devices peculiar to the historical novels. She presents the Moghal life and times for over three hundred years on one time scale while on the other she projects the life of Beigh Masters, a young girl in her early twenties. In these two novels we have seen Mukherjee getting more and more in tune with her surroundings and also seeking an
urge to come back to her roots. The journey ‘motif’ that occurs throughout the span of Bharati Mukherjee has taken a turn from immigrant country to the country of her origin. Along with the historical events as the setting and background of the novel, the inward voyage of the character ‘Hannah Easton’ prominently covers the course of the novel. The transition from expatriate to immigrant also brought a corresponding change in her fiction:

If Debby DiMartino of *Leave It to Me* is worlds away from Tara, the expatriate in *Tiger’s Daughter*, it is also a telling symbol of the huge cultural distance the author has traversed (Ashfaq, *The Week*).

Contrary to other literary texts, in these two novels the protagonists are the Americans, trying to relocate themselves with their Indian origin. She seems quite casual by declaring that she is sufficiently satisfied to let the Indian side of her, live side by side with the American. ‘A passage to India’ in these two novels shows her ‘hunger for connectedness’. She is proud to be a minority voice, a traditional Indian voice, sub-altern voice and above all the voice of all the immigrants in America. She has shown brilliantly that exile is not always punishing but its rewarding too. Her ethnic Indianness lives side by side her Americanness.

Efforts have been made to look at how various; geographical and experiential, take shape in Mukherjee’s writing. Her writing represents both the celebration and an incisive critique of the different cultural spaces they inhabit. She is different because she ultimately assimilates and at the same time preserves her touch of ethnic difference in the course of crossing multiple spaces. By taking her protagonists from different corners of the world, Mukherjee wants to show that the large chunk of immigrants is forming the new contours of America.
Her works belong to the future as much as to the past. The publication of her recent novel *The Tree Bride* which is the sequel of the *Desirable Daughters*, is not something which already exists in time, history and culture. It is the story of being and becoming and widens the horizon of the readers because the writer does not seem to be interested in ‘fixed’ identity. It is changeable and undergoes constant transformation. This continuous transformation makes Mukherjee a prospective writer enjoying her exotic ethnic past.

The thesis projects the conclusion that Bharati Mukherjee be remembered in the history of fiction, as a strong voice of diaspora. Her contribution to the diasporic tradition of our time is by no means negligible. Her continual experimentation from the *The Tiger’s Daughter* to *The Tree Bride* leaves a body of South – Asian literature thoroughly enriched by new and curiously admirable qualities which forever delight a student of postcolonial diasporic literature.
Works Cited


*The Tree Bride*.

