Chapter 5

If we study Bharati Mukherjee’s writings as a diasporic writer we find that, diaspora enhances the standard of writing of a person as he/she knows two cultures, languages, people, traditions and ups and downs of two different societies. According to Bharati Mukherjee;

As a writer, my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show that I and the hundreds of thousands of recent immigrants like me are minute-by-minute transforming America. (Mukherjee 34)

Migration is as old as human history. The Bible talks about the exodus of Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land. Exodus of a different kind and for a different purpose takes place every day in different parts of the world. In world history, the dispersal of the Jews in different parts of the world away from their homeland is referred to as ‘diaspora.’ Etymologically, the term ‘diaspora’ is derived from the “Greek term ‘diasperien’ ‘Dia’ means ‘across’ and ‘sperien’ means ‘to sow or scatter seeds.’ The term ‘diaspora’ now refers to displaced communities which have been dislocated from their homeland through migration or immigration or exile. ‘Diaspora’ is a dislocation from a geographical location of origin and relocation in another territory or country. Another historical reference is the Black African diaspora
which began in the sixteenth century with slave trade. West Africans were taken from their native land through the infamous ‘Middle Passage’ and scattered in the New World-North America, South America and the Caribbean. Since that time, the phrase ‘Middle Passage’ has become a metaphor to refer to such forced displacements. These diasporas have been followed by numerous ‘fractured diasporas’ like the migration of Blacks living in North America from the South to the North and across the western hemisphere. ‘Diaspora’ in the fast-changing world refers to the hordes of displaced persons and communities moving across the globe. ‘Diaspora’ is used as an umbrella term to refer to all such movements and dislocations from the native country/culture.

Since being diasporic is a matter of personal choice, the journey of life becomes an exploration of an individual’s sense of ‘self’ and a quest for the liberation of the human spirit. The possibilities are diverse and varied as there are individuals. Characters in diasporic literature, particularly those in Bharati Mukherjee’s novels provide a key to unravel the quest of the diasporans. The awareness that their dislocation is final characterizes the perpetual gaze of the diasporans towards the homeland. They relate to the country of origin and their immigrant status in different ways. Ultimately, it is creating one’s own cultural space in the adopted homeland that matters. In other words, diaspora
is all about creating new identities, achieving cultural hybridity, acquiring spaces for growth, resolving cultural conflicts and forging a new culture either composite or plural. Diasporic traversals interrogate the rigidity of identity. Therefore, diasporic literature addresses issues like identity, culture, hybridity, nationality, home, homelessness, and binarisms like self/other, insider/outsider and margin/center.

Identity is an important issue in diasporic literature. Stuart Hall contends that ‘identity’ should not be thought of as an accomplished fact, but should be seen as a production which is never complete. Hall says:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity.’ The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with shared history and ancestry hold in common. […] Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised
past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history culture and power. (Hall 223-25).

‘Cultural identity’ is not a fixed essence nor is it some universal spirit within us. It is not a fixed origin to which we can make a final return. At the same time it is not a figment of imagination. Instead cultural identity is the point of identification which is not an essence but a positioning (Hall 226).

“Diasporic identities constantly produce and reproduce themselves” through transformation and difference. ‘Hybridity’ also opens diasporic subjectivity to a luminal, dialogic space where in identity is negotiated (Mannur and Braziel 5). Thus diasporans experience double identification that constitutes hybrid forms of identity which are separate from the essential form of cultural identity with its affiliations to the constructions of nation or homeland. In other words, diaspora concepts shift from essentialist notions of homeland, national or ethnic identity, probe multiple belongings and address the conditions that allow people to inhabit more than one national space. In such a diasporic context, as Appadurai opines that “the United States which is a land of immigrants, finds itself not as a melting point but as another diasporic switching point” (Appadurai 171). The diasporans in their journey through space deterritorialise and reterritorialise the blurring boundaries of nations.
The word ‘hybrid’ has biological and botanical origins. In Latin it means the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. In the nineteenth century, ‘hybridity’ was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon. In the twentieth century the cultural meaning has been reactivated. In language, the term ‘hybridity’ delineates the way in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced, double-accented and double-styled. ‘Hybridity’ describes the condition of the language’s fundamental ability to be simultaneously the same but different. Homi Bhabha considers ‘hybridity’ the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text (Bhabha 154). Bhabha defines ‘hybridity’ as a “problematic of colonial representation [... ] that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of authority” (156). ‘Hybridity’ describes a process in which the single voice of colonial authority undermines the operation of colonial power by inscribing and disclosing the trace of the other so that it reveals itself as double-voiced. In his interview to Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha has extended his notion of ‘hybridity’ to include forms of counter-authority, a ‘Third Space’ which intervenes to effect the hybrid moment of political change. While ‘hybridity’
denotes a fusion, it also describes a dialectical articulation. This ‘doubled-hybridity’ has been distinguished as a model that can be used to account for the form of syncretism that characterises all postcolonial literatures and cultures. ‘Hybridity’ works simultaneously in two ways.’ It creates new spaces, structures, and scenes and at the same time intervenes as a form of subversion, translation, transformation. In other words, hybridisation involves fusion, the creation of a new form. At its simplest, ‘hybridity’ implies a disruption and forcing together of any unlike living things, grafting a vine or a rose on to a different root stock, making the difference into sameness. Hybridisation can also consist of the forcing of a single entity into two or more parts, a severing of a single object into two, turning sameness into difference. ‘Hybridity’ thus converts difference into sameness, and sameness into difference. It is a breaking and a joining at the same time and in the same place. It is also difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity. ‘Hybridity’ is a key term in the sense it suggests the impossibility of essentialism.

Another issue that is of relevance is ‘Home’/‘Homeland.’ There are multiple versions of the same reality. What we mean by ‘Indian’ is different for the first generation settlers and second generation Indian-Americans. The first generation diasporans fall back on their idealised version of India as a way of
dealing with the crisis of fragmentation. It indicates a psychological projection of their own needs and has little to do with the reality.

By virtue of its authenticity and appeal, diasporic literature has become a genre in itself. It invariably deals with themes like: nostalgia for a home that exists only in memory; failed quests and thwarted dreams; conditions of dislocations and loneliness; the utter loss of a support system and futile attempts to forge a new support system; the identity crisis; painful quest for the lost self; intergenerational conflict between the ‘expatriate’ first generation parents and the ‘immigrant’ assimilated second generation children; marital conflicts as spouses adapt to the new culture differently; misreading of cultural codes; the experience of racism in all its manifestations. Bharati Mukherjee’s own life, with its dislocations and displacements, explains her compulsive interest in recording the immigrant experience in her fiction. Her experiences in India, Canada and America have left an indelible mark in her sensibility as a person and also as an artist. Mukherjee says in her interview with Chen and Goudie.

I describe myself in terms of ethno-nationality, I’d say I am an, American writer of Bengali-Indian origin. In other words, the writer/political activist in me is more obsessed with addressing issues of minority discourse in the U.S. and Canada, the two countries I have
lived and worked in over the last thirty odd years. [...] At this moment, my Calcutta childhood and adolescence offer me intriguing, incompletely comprehended revelations about my hometown, my family, my place in that community: the kind of revelations that fuel desire to write an autobiography rather than to mythologize an Indian national identity. (Chen and Goudie 3)

This reveals a person’s changing perception about oneself in the diaspora. Mukherjee identifies herself as an, American not because she is ashamed of her past or Indian origin but because her whole adult life has been lived in the U.S. Her artistic agenda is to write about immigrants who are going through the process of making a home in the U.S. She constantly exhorts the readers to renegotiate the immigrants’ homeland. She writes in the tradition of the immigrant experience rather than the nostalgia of expatriation. Mukherjee in all her works brings out the heterogeneity of this immigrant experience. As Mukherjee has travelled widely, she invariably talks about exile, expatriation, assimilation, immigration, and cultural negotiation. In the process of volution as a diasporic writer, Mukherjee’s views have changed over the years. As the readers move from her early novels to the later novels, they can perceive the progression of immigrant sensibility in her writings. Mukherjee’s writing begins in exile, moves on to expatriation, then to assimilation, and later to
translation and cultural hybridity. There are novels like *Wife* and *Leave It to Me* which deal with disillusionment and fragmentation brought about by the immigrant experience. In *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* there is a further widening of immigrant experience. Mukherjee’s novels raise vital questions—What makes an American, an American? Who is an American? How is it that all Europeans immigrants are called Americans whereas non-European immigrants are given hyphenated identity? What is the best alternative for an immigrant in the New World? Is it to gaze back all the while at the homeland which is again an imaginary one? Or is it a better option to get assimilated into the dominant culture? Or can an immigrant occupy a third space and be both an insider and an outsider and belong here and there at one and the same time? Mukherjee contends that the complexion of America is browning every day. Cultural interaction is a two way process that leads to the transformation of both the mainstream and the minorities.

Mukherjee’s novels have a female centrality. She portrays the transformation of women when they pass through the process of immigration. True to life, her women protagonists deal with the problems of loneliness, despair and alienation. Yet there are characters like Jasmine and Hannah who emerge as warriors. Mukherjee is interested in writing the lives of Third World women who are liberated from the shackles of constrictive patriarchal society. These
women refashion their lives, realize their ‘selves’ and get an inner sense of liberation. Mukherjee is very critical of Eurocentric feminism because of its inability in dealing with the problems of Third World women and also for homogenising women’s issues with no reference to cultural specificities. In her fictional world women are always accompanied by men in their pursuit of freedom, independence and individualism.

The terms ‘immigrant’ and ‘expatriate’ in general refer to persons who live outside their own country either by choice or otherwise. But in the works of Bharati Mukherjee these two terms assume distinct connotations. The ‘immigrant’ willingly transforms herself/himself to fit in and absorb the best in the host culture. The immigrant experience, therefore, becomes a transformative process of the ‘self’ in its relation to society. The ‘expatriate’ on the other hand is more a reluctant entrant into the new culture and finds it hard to let go a familiar way of life.

*The Tiger’s Daughter* illustrates the uprooted condition of Tara, the protagonist of the novel. Born in the family of Banerjees in Calcutta, Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries David, an American and settles down in New York. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her ‘home,’ to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of Bengal Tiger and as the great
granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Pachapara. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality. The primary concern of Bharati Mukherjee in this novel is to underscore the futility of the expatriate’s search for roots. The novel emphasises the need to reinvent and redefine the notion of ‘home/homeland’ and the notion of ‘identity’ from an immigrant’s perspective. The term ‘home/homeland’ has the immediate connotation of a natal territory or space that takes love, warmth and security for granted. Though ‘home’ basically implies a specific geographical locale, in the context of immigrant experience, because of the need to belong in the immediate reality, its parameters are enlarged.

Tara is a dispossessed exile in both the worlds. Though she has lived in the United States for seven years, married to an American and has an American passport, she is not eager to belong to America. A closer look at Tara’s days in the United States will help us understand her uprooted condition. “Each atom of newness” (10) bombards her at Vassar. She senses discrimination even in trivial things. She thinks, “three weeks and I must defend my family, my country, my Johnny Mathias” (11). She also prays to “Kali for strength so she would not break down before these polite Americans” (11).
In Madison where Tara attends the summer school she is seized by visions of terror. She complains of homesickness in her letters to her parents. Many years later, sitting by the window in a cozy apartment in 120th street, New York, Tara dreams of Hari Lal, her great grandfather and wonders at the gulf that separates her from him. As an uprooted ‘expatriate,’ Tara clings on to Camac Street and does not consider 120th street, New York, her ‘home.’ On certain days when she cannot possibly survive, she shakes out all her silk saris, irons them and hangs them to make her apartment appear more Indian. This is a fine example of ‘expatriate’ obsession. Like any other expatriate in a country like the United States, Tara creates a ‘little India’ physically and emotionally without any communication whatsoever with the host culture. As Tara’s relationship with India too is fragile, she becomes homeless.

Tara’s impulsive marriage to David bristles with a lot of problems. Doubt, fear, suspicion and misunderstanding surface in their personal relationship. Oscar Handlin’s words in The Uprooted can be used to describe Tara’s condition in America. He says:

you long of course for the safety, you cherish still the ideals of the nest.
But danger and insecurity are other words for freedom and opportunity.
You are alone in a society without order; you miss the support of the community, the assurance of a defined rank. (Handlin 5)
But Tara fails to make use of the freedom and opportunity offered by the host culture. Her problems of alienation, loneliness, despair, loss of identity and total anonymity in America spring from her uprooted condition. Her impulsive decision is to get back to India and belong there.

Tara’s relatives refuse to treat her as an insider not even as an Insider-turned-outsider. They ask her not “to look at the bad parts of India. [...] Promise to keep your eyes shut! Some parts are horrible” (18). Tara is quick to see her world of nostalgia crumbling. Marine Drive looks run down and crowded. She had admired the houses on Marine Drive seven years ago, but now their shabbiness appalls her. To Tara the train station looks like a hospital. She feels, “I have returned to dry holes by the sides of railway tracks, [...] to brown fields like excavations for a thousand homes. I have returned to India” (21).

The Howrah Station with its all-pervasive squalor and unending noise upsets and outrages her. In the midst of an army of relatives who profess to love her, vendors who ring bells, beggars who pull at the sleeves and children who cough on tracks, Tara feels completely alone.

Tara understands that she and her friends do not see eye to eye on many things. To Tara, life in Calcutta is easier and simpler than life in New York. She confides in Sanjay, “How much easier [...] it was to live in Calcutta. How much simpler to trust the city’s police inspector and play tennis with him on
Saturdays. How humane to accompany a friendly editor to watch the riots in town” (69). But life in New York is a gruesome nightmare. She says:

It wasn’t muggings she feared much as the rude little invasions. The thought of a stranger, a bum from Central Park, a Harlem Dandy looking into her pocketbook, laughing at the notes she had made to herself, observations about her life and times, old sales slips accumulated over months for merchandise long lost or broken, credit cards, identification cards with unflattering pictures by which a criminal could identify her. And more than the muggings the waiting to be mugged, fearing the dark that transformed shoddy innocuous side streets into giant fangs crouching, springing to demolish this one last reminder of the Banerjees of Pachapara. (69)

New York is so exotic that it drives Tara to despair. She is frightened of the place because policemen prowl the underground tunnels with dogs, and girls like her get stabbed in the elevators in their own apartment buildings. It is irony of ironies that New York is un-enchanting to a resident of New York whereas to Tara’s friends in Calcutta, it is a lovely place. They refuse to believe that there are ghettos and demonstrations in America. Tara’s friends in India romanticize New York as an exotic place whereas Tara romanticizes India only to be disillusioned at the end when she faces the stark Indian reality.
There seems to be no point where these two incurable romantics can meet.

Moreover, Tara becomes aware of the fact that she has lost touch with her native tongue ‘Bengali.’ She has also forgotten Indian English words like ‘fuss pot’ and the common idiom of her friends. So there is a breach in communication. When one acquires a language, one imbibes the culture too because culture is transmitted through language. So when Tara loses her language, she loses her culture too.

Tara concludes that there are “no definite points in time that one could turn to and accuse or feel ashamed of as the start of this dull strangeness that she has loved so much, is slowly becoming a nightmare. Her romanticized version of Calcutta is closer to Satyajit Ray’s Bengal. She longs for “the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces” (l05). Politically Calcutta is drifting towards the “left-of-leftists” (44). There are riots almost every day. Thus Tara’s Indian dream is thoroughly shattered. She reconciles herself to reality.

Camac Street had felt the first stirrings of death. With new dreams like Nayapur, Tare’s Calcutta was disappearing. New dreams occurred with each new bulldozer incision in the green romantic hills. Slow learners like Tara were merely victims. (199)
The discussion of the ‘expatriate’ and the ‘immigrant’ self of the protagonist leads us to the vital issues raised by the novel. It is not easy to accept Mukherjee’s distinction between ‘expatriate’ and ‘immigrant’ experience and compartmentalize ‘immigrant’ and ‘expatriate’ sensibility. In other words, no one can be an ‘expatriate’ or an ‘immigrant’ exclusively. We cannot call Tara an exclusive ‘expatriate.’ She seems to be a promising ‘immigrant’ at a particular stage. If we accept the view that they are ‘states of mind,’ how can they be two watertight compartments?

It is true that ‘expatriate’ sensibility as nostalgia for a distant place and a long cherished past raises its head quite often even when an ‘expatriate’ graduates to an ‘immigrant.’ It is definitely implausible to assume that Tara ultimately becomes an immigrant without any shade of ‘expatriate’ sensibility.

Therefore, in The Tiger’s Daughter, “there is a call to end futile engagements with the past. There is an exhortation to build a ‘home’ where our feet are” (Parameswaran 30). There is also a gentle suggestion to shun the path of an exile both in his/her own land and also in the adopted land.

Dimple, the protagonist of Mukherjee’s *Wife*, migrates to the United States with her husband Amit, an engineer from IIT, Kharagpur. While Amit is engrossed in amassing money like every other Indian expatriate in the novel, Dimple is in pursuit of happiness and independence. Since Dimple enters the
United States abruptly, without any mental preparation, the shock is too much for her. She has difficulties in understanding the cultural codes of the country. She does not want to turn to the Indian ‘expatriates’ living in the United States for emotional support as she understands the inadequacies of their style of life. Dimple is caught between the stage of ‘expatriation’ and the stage of ‘immigration’: between the ‘Ballygunje ghetto’ of ‘expatriates’ and the ‘Manhattan enclave’ of ‘immigrants.’ She is also torn between the traditional role model of a submissive self-effacing Indian wife and the new role model of an assertive independent wife offered by the West. But at a particular stage, she establishes contact with the host culture. She builds bridges between the Indian expatriates and the host culture. But, in the absence of a good facilitator and adequate knowledge to help her encounter the alien reality, she has access only to the televised version of the alternate reality. She eventually succumbs to social/cultural pressures and ultimately becomes a disillusioned ‘expatriate’.

Wife belongs to the period of transition from the ‘expatriate’ phase to the ‘immigrant’ phase in Mukherjee’s own life. The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife share many similarities. Both the novels use generic terms or kinship terms like the daughter of Bengal Tiger or wife of Amit Basu to refer to the central characters. These terms reveal the dependent selves of both the protagonists.
Mukherjee uses omniscient narration in these novels. Intelligent and still be heroic. “You had to choose between being Sita of the rounded hips who could saunter through fire or being Ratna Das who was, at that very moment, smiling tolerantly at the heavy man and patting his hairless cheeks”. (47)

Dimple’s entry into the New World is initiated with the role model of Sita. The contrast is quite evident that King Ram is seated on the throne in all regality while Sita is immersed in hip-deep orange flames. Sita’s virtual subordination to Ram is quite evident.

Mukherjee has introduced Ina in the novel with a specific purpose. Through Ina, she challenges the submissive role of an Indian woman and at the same time problematical western feminism. Jody Mason in her article “Rearticulating Violence, Place and Gender in Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife,” avers:

Mukherjee inserts Ina Mullick into Dimple’s life as a challenge to the restrictions of traditional wifehood. [...] Ina’s engagement with western feminism is a form of resistance to the confines of traditional Bengali wifehood. Mukherjee however uses Ina’s character to demonstrate the misfit between western and Third World feminism. Neither Ina nor Dimple can find expression through a feminism that forces them to abandon their Indianness, (Mason 2)
Western feminist discourse is known for its Eurocentric construction of a Third World subject that ignores cultural complexity. ‘Ethnocentric universality’ obliterates the differences within the category of the female. Mukherjee addresses their problems through Ina’s struggle. Western feminism fails to liberate Ina with a satisfying sense of the ‘self.’ Ina remains oppressed because these forms of feminism cannot adequately “deal with the web of cultural and social crossings that constitute her position as simultaneously ‘Indian’ and ‘American.’ The patriarchy that Ina and Dimple experience is not simply that of the industrialized first world, they must also grapple with the ways in which they have been named by their own specific cultural context” (Mason2). Thus Mukherjee demonstrates the fact that women’s subject positions are varied and multi layered. So the western feminist rhetoric cannot supply role models for Dimples’ and ‘Jasmines.’

The central question remains: Where do Amit and Dimple belong in the expatriate/immigrant divide? Amit’s ideology and life-style confirm that he is a thorough-bred ‘expatriate’. His mission in the United States is to earn money. His dream is to return to India and settle down in a posh locality in Calcutta. Well steeped in ‘expatriate’ sensibility, he easily slips into the company of Indian ‘expatriates’ in Queens. From day one, Amit is worried about his job. He is quite oblivious of the culture in which he lives. His
mindset has been well moulded by other ‘expatriates’ in Queens. Amit does not express any wonder or surprise at the bigness of America. He does not know how to interrogate or negotiate with American reality for cultural space. Like any other Indian ‘expatriate,’ he lives on the fringes of American society. Naturally, his experience in America is quite limited. It does not broaden his perspective and therefore it does not open up new avenues for him. He acts and reacts like an average ‘expatriate.’ He does not want to send Dimple for a job in Khanna’s Emporium. As a male chauvinist, Amit snubs Dimple every time he gets an opportunity. He tells Khanna who has been pressing Amit to send Dimple for a job that Dimple cannot count two and two and that she will ruin his business in a fortnight. Amit silences her whenever she expresses her curiosity about Americans. That is mainly responsible for turning Dimple inward. At parties, Amit is not outgoing like Bijoy and Ina. He does not feel comfortable in the company of American guests in parties. So he often bounces back to the company of Meena and Jyoti Sen. But Amit has a few strategies to survive in an alien culture. He has a ready-reckoner of American words like ‘frontier justice,’ ‘crisis management,’ ‘challenging,’ ‘constructive’ and ‘confrontation’ which will help him communicate with Americans very effectively. However, he does not show interest either in imbibing American culture or in contributing to American culture.
It is a different story with Dimple. She begins her life in the United States as a typical Indian ‘expatriate’ woman. To a woman, migrating to the United States means freedom and liberation from the clutches of a patriarchal society. Dimple’s enthusiasm and happiness on entering a new country/culture is evident on landing in John F. Kennedy Airport. Though Jyoti’s reference to the triple murder at a soda fountain frightens her and dampens her enthusiasm, she is glad to be in the United States. Amit starts silencing her free and innocent talk at the airport itself. When Jyoti asks them whether they had trouble with customs, Dimple starts telling him how the Horlicks bottles were opened and sniffed, but Amit stops her. With every such act of silencing, Dimple withdraws and turns inward. This is one of the reasons, why she recoils on Amit with renewed force later.

Dimple leads a double life. During the day, Dimple leads an exciting, liberated life with Americans like Milt Glasser and his friends, and during the night she lives a loveless life with Amit. In the company of Milt Glasser, she explores the “inhuman maze of New York” (196) which become safe and simple as Ballygunje.

When the visits of Milt Glasser and Ina become rare, Dimple feels very lonely, cut off and distressed. The loveless relationship with her husband contributes to her miseries. She suffers from insomnia. She experiences “waking
nightmares” (97) and starts brooding about seven ways of committing suicide. She is angry with the world around her as life is very slow to deliver its promises. In the apartment on Bleecker Street, she feels like “a star collapsing inwardly” (109). The crux of the problem is that she does not want to be an ‘American’ like Ina Mullick, nor does she want to be like Meena Sen or Mrs. Roy living in a little Ballygunje ghetto. Since she falls between the ‘expatriates’ and the ‘immigrants,’ she is unhappy. To add to that, too much of an addiction to television takes a heavy toll on her frail self. At a particular stage, she is not able to distinguish between reality and alternate reality. She does not know how to interpret cultural codes. Nor does she know how to handle her secret relationship with Milt Glasser. So, fear of violence, insomnia, pressure from the Indian expatriates on the one hand, and Ina’s American way of life on the other hand, Amit’s heartless attitude and persistent thoughts of suicide crack her fragile self. The ultimate end of such disturbed existence is the outbreak of violence that had been looming for so long.

Mukherjee’s protagonists always empower themselves by choosing violence. They do not seem to look beyond anger and violence. What has troubled the readers of Mukherjee’s Wife, is the final act of violence. Critics have tried to explain the act of violence with the help of different labels drawn from
Psychology. Some call it an aberration of the mind that could be traced to her
girlhood. To some, Dimple suffers from schizophrenic mind. Dimple’s mind
and body lack total harmony. M. Rajeshwar in his article, “The Inner World
of Neurotic characters of Indian Women Novelists” calls Dimple a sadomasochist. S. Indira cites Dimple’s splintered self as the cause for her
violence. Jody Mason is right when she argues:

Dimple’s mind is not an insane one; her body is not [ ... ] uncontrollable,
hysterical [ ... ] murder is a choice for Dimple albeit a choice that is
exercised in a limited oppressive space [ ... ] her violence toward Amit
is a bodily act but it cannot be read in isolation, Mukherjee insists that
we also understand the mental processes that preface this act. (Mason
5)

The act of violence that Dimple indulges in is an outward manifestation of her
powerlessness and her inability to come out of the furrow that she finds herself
in. Rajeshwar in the above mentioned article argues that Dimple suffers from
the neurotic compulsion of indulging in sado-masochistic acts in order to
conceal her own sense of powerlessness and failure. He says:

Neuroses remind us of the fact that there is a seamy side to our
civilization. Society compels every individual to repress his
instinctuality and that way foregoes the chances of deriving pleasure in
the act of living. If the individual happens to be weak and sensitive and intellectually too ill-quipped to openly defy such oppression, he finds an alternative in neurosis which is a form of both suffering and protest [...] all neuroses thus deal with intensely meaningful emotional experience. (Rajeshwar 141)

Violence amounting to murdering the husband has to be understood as one of the few options available to Dimple. Self-immolation is a common method used often by women in India to show their ultimate resistance. But in America, Dimple commits a murder. Murder can also be understood as an act of rejection and resistance. Though murder is a misdirected act of self-assertion and liberation, it is the result of her long-standing suppression, depression and neglect.

Mukherjee’s *Wife* has a special place in her fictional world mainly because it depicts the plight of an Indian ‘expatriate’ woman/wife very vividly. Mukherjee’s own ‘expatriate’ experience in Canada and the United States has given greater authenticity to the narrative. The artist’s total control over the progression of events implies autobiographical echoes in the novel.

*Jasmine* proves to be Mukherjee’s model of assimilated immigrant. *Jasmine* is a reminder to non-progressive societies which inhibit women. From the narrow perspective, Jasmine is a defiled widow. She has had so many
husbands, one for each of her transformations. But from a broader perspective, Jasmine has her own sense of morality which is quite different from the conventional notion of morality she no longer belongs to the Indian sub-continent but to the whole world. She “cocoons a cosmos” and walks ahead of Taylor “greedy with wants and reckless from hope” (240) Jasmine has not only transcended space, but also the stereotypical notions of culture, colour, creed and ethnicity.

Jasmine, who luckily escaped death right at birth, and whose future was predicted dark and dangerous develops a sort of defense mechanism, drawing strength from her culture - she transcends personal tragedy, challenges the forces of death and destruction and seeks personal identity in a bewildering and inimical world. Amarjit Singh in “Symbolism in Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine” says:

Bharati Mukherjee in Jasmine, seems to use symbolism purposely to underscore the thematic concern of clash of cultures which results in confusion and chaos. The old stable societies crumble under the weight of new technologies engendering violence and discontent. An individual can neither attain personal integration nor maintain harmonious relationship with others and often gets crushed under the juggernaut of impersonal forces. (Singh 169)
O.P. Budholia also in “Dialectics of Culture/Acculturation in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and Anita Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca*” says:

Based on metaphor of collective memories (semantic and episodic) *Jasmine* becomes symbolic of the duality of cultures—the East and the West. Jyoti, the protagonist, experiments with life in terms of human feeling, institution, sensation and the dilemma of an expatriate who voluntarily leaves India and comes to America.

(Budholia 21)

In *Jasmine*, the protagonist shares the poetic qualities of the novelist so far as the range of imagination and the objectivization of human emotions are concerned. It solves the question of otherness and assimilation through the logo centric dialectics of culture. It is through Du, their adopted Vietnamese son that Jane wishes to sustain her identity as an immigrant. All the forces in Iowa would eventually freeze her to conformity or continual alienation. However, she realizes that she cannot remake herself through Du. In evaluating her past and present and envisaging her future, she confronts the complexity and multiplicity of her identity as an immigrant woman.

Jasmine’s restless move from one place to another betrays her gripping alienation and bewilderment. She realizes that she is an ‘outsider’ and
‘other’ in America—an illegal immigrant without passport, living among aliens where ways she knows nothing about like Zaitoon who doesn’t know anything about the tribal men among the hills in Bride to whom she is to be married and later to be brutally treated physically and psychologically. In both these cases the initial elation dries slowly.

While Tara and Dimple become isolated, rootless aliens because of their ambivalent attitude to their native tradition as well as the culture of the new world, Jasmine enjoys the assimilated status of immigration by a sheer will to bond herself to her adopted land. She journeys through different continents and through hunger, violence, rape and murder but she is not frightened at any moment. In order to fulfill her desire, she is willing to make all compromises and adjustments. She hops from place to place and person to person trying to find her real place in life. From Jyoti to Jasmine, to Jase and Jane may appeal to be real transformation of the personality from Hasnapur to Jullundhur to Florida, Manhattan, Iowa may appear to be moving from old world values to the brave new world.

A translated immigrant is one who has gone through a series of transformations while he/she is exposed to a wide range of experiences in an alien land. Hannah Easton, the protagonist of The Holder of the World
emerges from Brookfield, a puritan outpost in Massachusetts Bay colony. She becomes Hannah Fitch under the care of her foster parents. On marrying Gabriel Legge, she becomes Hannah Legge. When she falls in love with Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad, she becomes Salem Bibi. Ultimately she ends up as priceless possession of Aurangzeb. In *The Holder of the world* ‘Translation’ takes place not only in Hannah but also in others like Bhagmati and Beigh Masters, the narrator. They serve as a means of bringing about a contrast between Hannah and Bhagmati, contrast in the sense, ‘translation’ works in reverse and parallel between Hannah and Beigh Masters. As such the term ‘translation’ implies linguistic connotation. But in the narrative it gains religious, cultural and racial connotation as well. The term ‘translation’ has also been used to refer to displacements through adoption and marriage. The term ‘translation’ is used in the novel particularly to describe the transformation of Hannah Easton. The pun on the word ‘translation’ is also significant. At one level, the word refers to linguistic transformation or literally changing an expression from one language to another. At another level, it refers to the ability to convey a person, place or condition. In the seventeenth century, the word was commonly used to describe physical transportation. But in this novel, it is used simultaneously in the dominant seventeenth and twentieth century meanings. This suggests that Hannah has
been translated linguistically by Beigh’s narrative into a simultaneous existence in the seventeenth and the twentieth century’s. According to Iyer “The suspension of time in both Venn and Beigh’s reconstruction of Hannah’s experience allows Mukherjee to reduce the significance of time in the narrative and to ‘translate’ culture, thereby interrogating the discourse of cultural difference” (Iyer 35). This is made possible by Mukherjee’s use of virtual reality as a narrative technique.

In *Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha interprets cultural translation as a part of the “spatial histories of displacement” (Bhabha 172). According to Bhabha, culture is both “transnational” and “translational” (172). According to Bhabha;

> It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific historical situations of displacement such as the Middle Passage or the migrations of the Third World people after World War II. It is translational because it makes a complex issue of the question of how culture signifies or what culture signifies (Bhabha 172).

*The Holder of the World* translates culture by creating a virtual space in which the narrator can suspend time, effectively “dehistoricising the narrative” (Iyer 35). In other words, the novel allows Mukherjee to question the translational
and transnational aspects of culture along with a “critical examination of the historical contingencies that produced them by playing with concepts of history, time and space” (Iyer 35). This move enables the writer to construct a subject position for Hannah Easton.

Hannah Easton is Mukherjee’s model of a ‘translated’ self. The novel has a wide canvas that sweeps across continents, cultures, and religions. The West meets the East and the New World falls in love with the Old World. In *Jasmine* the protagonist travel from the East to the West, undergoes a series of transformation and gets assimilated into the American culture. But Hannah Easton, the citizen of the New World, undergoes the process of ‘translation’ in her journey from the West to the East.

Mukherjee’s *Holder of The World* re-inforces expatriation as a journey of the human mind. Like Jasmine who travels westward, Hannah’s voyage to the orient is a pre-determined truth which effectively voices and manifests the latent tensions aspirations and ambitions of the protagonist. Hannah, like Jasmine becomes an expatriate as a result of a quest for a ritual life of feeling and emotions. Her movement to the physically conscious, self-indulgent and fastidiously passionate world of the east is no accident nor is her role of an expatriate that of chance. Her early life points most emphatically to a new life of passion and
feeling. It is a life denied to her in Puritan New England. She as an expatriate can only embrace the new world in its entirety; for it is this world that she has been in quest of ever since the fateful evening of her mother’s abduction. Just as Jasmine is destined to go to America, Hannah is fated to go to India to be in the arms of an Indian lover. She has to participate in passions and emotions alien to the world to which she belongs.

*Leave It to Me* is the most American of Mukherjee’s novels. Apart from the American English style in which it is written, it expresses her ideas on another dimension of the immigrant experience. Having moved from one geographical and cultural space to another, from India to America, her writings speak of the inevitable changes involved in such transitions. She has made important contributions to the multiethnic literary field of the United States. She realizes the fact that she is no more an Indian writer or an exile or an expatriate. Her ambition is expressed thus:

> I am an American writer, in the American mainstream, trying to extend it. This is a vitally important statement from me. I am not an Indian writer, not an exile, not an expatriate. I am an Immigrant; my investment is in the American reality not the Indian. (Naik and Narayan 108)
Mukherjee expresses the immigrant sensibility through Devi. She claims to be no more an expatriate but makes an attempt to acclimatize herself in the country to which she is no more a newcomer. Even in San Francisco when people mistake her identity, Debby turned to Devi, envies them as they had an identity of themselves and she was in search of it. She was not a geek, a freak, or a weirdo. She had a life and the chance of a big life and lost it, temporarily. Then she thinks, “For now why not be Devi, the tenderloin powder, all allure and strength and zero innocence, running away from shame, running to revenge?” (66-67). She adopts a new philosophy of her own to make a living, “When you inherit nothing, you are entitled to everything that’s Devi Dee’s philosophy” (67). The city seduces her and she gets intoxicated by it. She acquaints herself to the different ways of living in America like many others. She sets herself to tapping businessman for fives and tens, picking up pennies and dimes, paying attention to the bases of parking meters, then lifting wallets from too tight jeans, snatching purses off coffeehouse tables etc. Thus she gains a lot of knowledge about the city moving around. She starts following the Hare Krishnas, Buddhists, Baptists, and black Muslims who entwined love and profit, charity and sex faith and ecology, space and time, and combinations she had not stumbled upon. She encounters various colorful ex-hippie personalities who, having given
up the flower-trail, had settled down to middle-age respectability. Yet some people still lived on with their own casual living codes.

In the postcolonial diasporic context, violence is the other face of power and it gains an understanding. The women protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee adopt violence to fight against the evil they face and move further courageously. Jasmine kills Half Face who rapes her. Hannah kills Morad Farah when he attacks Jadav Singh. Devi burns the house given by Francis A. Fong and kills the friends of Jess Du Pree to create fear in her.

All these characters do not preserve their own life or try to protect the lives of others; through destruction they re-create themselves. Thus the themes of notable identity and dislocation become important. *Leave It to Me* remains Mukherjee’s most American work: an enigmatic and alarming meditation on the consequences of America’s recent past—the hippie culture of the 1960s Vietnam-rather than a novel of dislocation in the diasporic sense of her earlier fiction. Here her shift from an immigrant diasporic writer to a multicultural one is complete.

In *Desirable Daughters* Padma represents the way of life of hundreds of immigrants in the United States. To feed the nostalgia of Indian settlers in the United States is her-cultural mission and also her survival strategy. It is a good proposition for the new entrants to the host culture. In
contrast, Tara’s way to belong is a complex one. In the United States, she internalizes the progressive views of the host country and its culture. But, at the same time, she understands that there is no support system to back her life-style. So, she falls back on her family, native culture, and homeland. From her ancestor Tara Lata, she learns the courage to face life in the midst of difficulties. From Parvati, she learns confidence and clarity in life. From her parents, she learns the care and concern that are the hallmarks of the family tradition in India. With a fine blend of tradition and modernity, she becomes a new woman of the twenty first century.

Desirable Daughters is a multilayered novel that attempts to bridge countries, cultures and generations. It works at multiple levels as it tries to bridge between the past and the present and the world of suspense and the underworld. It is also, a telling commentary on the, many-hued lives of the American Indian community today. The novel traces the life of the three Brahmin daughters, Tara, Padma and Parvati, all keen to forge an identity of their own in very trying and complex socio-cultural situations. They are born into a wealthy Brahmin Bengali family presided over by their fond father and a tradition-bound orthodox mother. The daughters are intelligent and artistic. They never feel suffocated by a conventional
society which has little regard for women. They rebel against this hackneyed and constraining socio-cultural set up and chart out their own course of action. Moving in different directions and different straining circumstances, each of them tries to carve out a unique identity of their one. But it is an identity in flux since all of them are ever on the go towards self-realization and self-actualization. Each of them tries to connect her past with the present, memory with desire. Each of them is on the move. Mukherjee portrays through these three moving and identity-shifting characters, who have partial affiliations, disinterested identities, tactical belongings, their sense of belongingness, which is constantly reinvented and relocated. Tara of *Desirable Daughters* has deep affiliations with her ancestry and her culture. She wants to connect her own with the mythic Tara Lata, the “Tree Bride”. This myth provides the base for Tara Lata’s curiosity to establish her identity through interrogations of cross-cultural re-approachment and conflictual cultural ties. The novel is not just an idyllic tale of the three desirable daughters and their diverse circumstances of upbringing but it is a complex narrative commenting on the intricate and enigmatic process of growing up and of the feminist struggle of these three sisters to stick to their own mutable self, their cultural moorings in times of crisis. Their fascinating childhood
reminiscences are dovetailed with dramatic scenes from Indian history:

In a palanquin borne by four servants sit a rich man’s three daughters, the youngest dressed in her bridal sari, her little hands painted with red lac dye, her hair oiled and set. Childish voices chant a song, hands clap, gold bracelets tinkle [...]. A Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history all that is unjust, in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness. (4)

The novel is not only a nostalgic romanticisation of the past but also a reconstruction and revalidation of Tara’s identity. It is her inverted story of mobility. The events and locales that form a part of her identity have been nostalgically delineated by the narrator. The novelist portrays her as a hybrid subject, mimicry of the American socio-cultural ethos. She travels through a hybridized space where the novelist reconstructs the notion of home/land in the context of a rapidly transitional society in the era of hectic globalization and consumerism.

The concept of home and migration is much embedded in the narratology that Mukherjee presents in *Desirable Daughters*. It is the sense of migration which brings about a change to the identity of Padma, who has
finally made New York her home, her land of choice. But her inalienable attachment to her home makes her the sustainer and preserver of Bengali tradition in America. The alien culture thus fails to subvert her traditional identity. On the other hand, it only remaps and reconstructs her cultural identity. Hence, migration plays a crucial role in restructuring individual identities and cultural attitudes and perceptions. In order to assert her femininity and reconstruct and redefine her identity, Tara leaves her husband for a life of her own, chooses a school for her son which is “slanted to the arts” (153) and even takes the bold step of sharing her house with her lover Andy.

Mukherjee looks at India from the perspective of a Third World writer, an expatriate and an immigrant. India figures in the novel as a part of memory, as a Third World place, as a fragment of nostalgia. Experiences, psychic or fictional which are so common place like that of Tara Lata, the Tree Bride, to be of little or no importance to the readers become extraordinarily significant to the expatriate novelist. The ‘Indian’ self of the novelist is receding and then tries to restore or save it through her writings, a typically postcolonial situation. Mukherjee provides the west a picture of India such as Westerners themselves might not have dared to provide. India in this novel is not an identifiable presence. It is just a
psychic reality. Though far away from India, Parvati is still conscious of her tradition. This is what she writes about in her letter to Tara:

We Indians don’t run to psychiatrists for every problem. Come to think of it, I don’t know a single psychiatrist […]. I hope you aren’t doing bad things to yourself like taking prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Please, please, don’t become that Americanized. (104-105)

Tara’s positioning is different from Padma in the sense Padma is a hyphenated immigrant. Mukherjee vociferously talks against the status of a hyphenated immigrant because the hyphen marginalizes the Asians as minorities. Parvati symbolises the traditional life of an Indian woman with a western orientation. Each one traverses her own path of immigrant life quite happily but often has a nostalgic past which continues to linger on the immigrants as talking about the society to which she belonged, Tara says:

To be Calcutta bhadra Lok, as we Bhattacharjees were, was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement, and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born, and from which we have made our separate exists (22).
Parvati’s consciousness of the Indian tradition and an Indian’s socio-cultural identity is further manifested in the following lines which describe her Daddy’s renunciation and detachment from the mundane world: “Daddy is becoming more and more detached from the world, which I suppose is a good thing, at least it is something we are supposed to aspire to, but in his case I feel Daddy is feeling this world, rather than seeking the next [...] (106). Parvati alludes to Aunt Bandana’s love of the Bengali tradition and the laws of Manu. Aunt Bandana wants a suitable Bengali girl for her fourth son, a good Hindu Brahmin family settled in California. A good family is indeed but not an Indian citizen. Aunt Bandana’s two main requirements are: “that the girl be an American citizen or green card holder who can legally sponsor her husband’s immigration to the United States, and that she be a Brahmin” (107).

Parvati’s identity crisis is not so acute as in the case of Tara. Parvati is a static type of identity with her emphasis on tradition and convention whereas for Tara, identity is dynamic; it is in flux, constantly changing. Her lifestyle is totally different from her other sisters. Dislocated as she is, she lives in San Francisco, still cherishing the American Dream of possibilities and promises, but to her utter dismay, she finds that life fails to deliver these promises. Hence, she frustrates and feels lonely. The
milieu dissatisfies and disappoints her. She feels in her a longing for the past:

It has a happy landscape, I like to think, reaching from the shallow depression of Golden Gate Park and climbing to the communication towers atop Twin peaks. The area is given to summer fogs that make conventional gardening impossible, but that remain, me, not unhappily, of mountain resorts in India. I almost expect the chattering of monkeys, corn and peanuts smoking on open braziers, the tinkling of women’s bangles and Buddhist prayer wheels. (24)

Tara is but partially assimilated into the alien soil of America. Her attachment to the American culture is only skin-deep and superficial.

In the sequel *The Tree Bride*, there are various sets of three women writing and rewriting texts/histories. In the multi axial locations of Tara, Tara Lata, and Victoria Treadwell-Khanna, the disordered mass of Tara’s diasporic consciousness starts taking shape as it unfolds the puzzles hidden within the triangular locations of Tara, Tara Lata, and Sameena, and connects them through the power of violence. The third set, formed within Tara, Victoria, and Tara’s unborn daughter to be named Victoria, completes the assimilation of oral, written, and re-written histories and individual consciousness entrapped within history’s cracks as Tara goes back to India to perform a
ceremonial cremation ritual in honor of Tara Lata by placing a raffia body over a pyre to bum as history’s proxy. The ultimate trio is however however within the protagonist herself, which she realizes after Victoria’s murder. When Victoria dies in the bomb detonated by Abbas Sattar Hai, Sergeant Jack Sidhu asks her, “What did you ever do to him?” Tara replies ‘I’m sure I never did anything to him.” Yet in her interior monologue she continues, “But I know I had. Maybe not this I named Tara and living in San Francisco, and not even the distant I of Calcutta” (246). It is the other I-Tara Lata, her namesake-who did something which caused different lines get tangled in the “wire-web of History” (246)

“Diasporic identity is always gendered” (Clifford 226), and women’s experiences regarding displacements are much more revealing. Tara as a displaced Calcutta girl in San Francisco exposes diasporic ambivalences more clearly than her husband does. Bish is a myth of success in the Western world of communication technology and yet he expects his wife to reciprocate his cultural beliefs regarding marriage and marital responsibilities; in the process, he fails to communicate with his wife in a displaced home even though they speak the same language and share the same religious and social culture. Tara’s strategies for survival in a displaced world involve subordination, resistance, reformation, followed by a fear of eradication and a desire for
resurrection through a rewritten history—an act that can be seen as a way of resolution—and a fairy-tale ending imposed over an overstretching sensationalism of dispersed history.

Clifford says “Diaspora women are caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways” (Clifford 227). Tara in two novels finds herself caught between patriarchal histories of her past home and legends created by her husband in the acquired home. She cuts short the legend by walking out and, in turn, gets stagnant in a relationship of retrofitting with a man who leaves her alone in her time of need. In the two novels, the stories of the tree bride, John Mist, Rafeek Hai, Sameena, Shafiq Hai, Vertie Treadwell, and Nigel Coughlin connect with the ambiguous present, where a criminal repeatedly tries to kill her, a sister’s past scandal resurfaces, a friend’s life is sacrificed, and a remarriage with a broken down and physically crippled ex-husband becomes inevitable. All these ambiguities point to the future when a girl child is born, who would contain within her the ambiguities of her mother’s “overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins” and the futile desire to “return to the beginning is like the imaginary in Lacan,” which, according to Stuart Hall’s argument in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” can “neither be fulfilled nor requited” (Hall 236)
As her quest for diasporic consciousness progresses from *Desirable Daughters* to *The Tree Bride*, Tara ends up becoming one of those typical Indian wives. She eventually learns to abide by the epistemic laws and surrenders to the epistemic violence of a diasporic world. In San Francisco, it is the home that is demolished by a firebomb, detonated by an Indian-cum-Bangladeshi who is connected with Tara’s memory of past home in Mishtigunj.

In an interview with Michael Krasny included in *Conversations with Bharati Mukherjee*, Mukherjee comments that “Ethnic lives are full of great heights and great lows” (129). Tara’s “mission of discovery,” her American style “roots search” (17) reaches its goal in *The Tree Bride* making all the heights and lows of ‘ethnic lives’ clash and concede in convoluted and at times melodramatic manners. While *Desirable Daughters* writes three sisters’ texts with a dead namesake connecting three countries, two continents and different histories (Colonial British and Indian History, histories of expatriation and migration, and family histories of prides and secrecies), *The Tree Bride* writes parallel texts and histories of people across culture, religion, nation, and gender.

Mukherjee begins with the use of the omniscient point of view. Influenced by V.S. Naipaul’s ‘expatriate’ sensibility she uses irony as a technique
extensively. The use of language is controlled without any attempt at excessive use of new expressions or coinages. Mukherjee continues the same technique of omniscient narration in her second novel *Wife*. In her collection of short stories *Darkness* and *The Middleman and Other Stories*, Mukherjee establishes her mastery of the language. She has given up the omniscient point of view and exploits the short story form thoroughly to present her perspective of the themes handled. A remarkable change in her style of writing is evident in *The Middleman and Other Stories* as her language has become more Americanised.

In American fiction, she finds a kind of energy that fiction from other cultures seems to lack. The stories in *The Middleman* have this energy and passion as well. Each character and story suggests a different style. Mukherjee does not write a story with a predetermined point of view. She writes some stories from a very authoritative third person point of view; with others she uses an intimate, textured style and a first person point of view. (Dhawan 13)

Mukherjee’s contribution to diasporic literature lies in her significant analysis of cultural collision in *The Tiger’s Daughter*, disillusionment in *Wife*, assimilation in *Jasmine*, cultural translation in *The Holder of the World*, fragmentation in *Leave It to Me*, cultural negotiation in *Desirable Daughters*
and diasporic, convergences in The Tree Bride. Mukherjee takes up these seven strands of immigrant experience and creates various models of expatriates/immigrants. Immigrant sensibility in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee becomes an artistic expression of both cultural loss and gain, a redefining of cultural identity, cultural syncretism and a definite revisioning of the American national identity. In Mukherjee’s opinion, fiction writers see a literary text as a process whereas readers reduce it to a product.

As Mukherjee’s immigrant ideology undergoes the process of evolution and her immigrant politics is also ever changing along with the growth of the artist and her personality, the present study has made an attempt to react her fiction as a process and not as a finished product.

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries. When we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb two hundred years of American History and learn to adapt to American society [...] I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country (Mukherjee “Interviewed”, The Times of India, October 1, 1989)

Numerous women novelists focus attention on a journey, a move from
one country or city to another, the experience of meeting other people, strange environments and all the paraphernalia that goes with actual, physical movement from one place to another. The undertaking involves two processes: the first representing upheaval and withdrawal of oneself from a familiar social set-up and, the second, braving a new and unfamiliar location which simultaneously lures and repulses. The second demands not only a mental and emotional acculturation of the new environment but also a physical reorientation in terms of surroundings, climate and terrain; in short, a substantial change of both landscapes-mental and physical. This is, precisely, the substance of immigration.

An increasing number of third world writers have emigrated to the west and have chosen to write in English language. The style and content of their writings have been greatly influenced by the extent to which they have been able to identify and adapt to their new surroundings. Manju Sampat in “Bharati Mukherjee: The Fiction of Alienation and Identification” says:

Those who still feel alienated in their new country tend to write about people and events which are ‘typical’ of their country of origin and are anxious to infuse Indian local colour in their
writings. However, those who have been able to identify with their new host country are blessed with a bi-cultural perception which enables them to write from a wider and more exciting angle (Sampat 140).

Mukherjee’s inability to return to India and the sense of her difference from other Indian women finds resolution in her art. She has to live and write on the cultural divide. Unlike a writer in exile who writes about a lost home, she feels that as an immigrant writer she needs to focus on her present surroundings and invent “Indians of the mind” (Rushdie 10) with the help of a constantly evolving imagination. Displacement in her novels leads characters to alienation and a search for self. Her protagonists face a multi-cultural society and exhibit a deep awareness of the social reality surrounding them. The multi-cultural ethos with which they are confronted leads to a struggle for a new life but not a complete break with the past.

Mukherjee’s works emphasize the need for immigrants to choose their home by constantly adapting themselves to the new homeland. The immigrants’ relationship with the old home and the new home is neither static nor monolithic. Hence, they emphasize the heterogeneity of the immigrant experience. They express their concerns related to
contemporary themes such as quest for identity of their immigrants in America’s frustrational and multicultural milieu for a materially better life. They make the immigrants face the tensions of adaptation and assimilation through the emotional and psychic syndromes. Their characters are the victims of double civilizations in their migrated souls. They struggle in distant bends in search of identity. They understand that the new home, the host society to immigrants is a melting pot of multiculturalism where the expatriates become immigrants truly breaking the umbilical cord with their home land.

Mukherjee probe deep into the inner conflicts of well-educated, sensitive, adults whose traditional codes of economy of passion and material desire collapse amid their inadequate comprehension of the American paradigms of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They show their protagonists living in between two cultures, constantly journeying into new meanings and fashioning new identities.
Bharati Mukherjee’s contribution to diasporic literature lies in her significant analysis of

- **Disillusionment** in *Wife*
- **Assimilation** in *Jasmine*
- **Diasporic Convergences** in *The Tree Bride*
- **Cultural Negotiation** in *Desirable Daughters*
- **Cultural Translation** in *The Holder of the World*
- **Fragmentation** in *Leave It to Me*
- **Cultural collision** in *The Tiger’s Daughter*

---

Fig. 6. Analysis of Bharati Mukherjee as a Diasporic Writer
In Mukherjee’s works there is no migration without loss. Migration is one of life’s essential rhythms and the losses it incurs are made good with gains and self-knowledge. Jasmine, Tara and others realize that they are poised between two cultures. Their journey is risky, and arrival both provisional and tentative. They will never be entirely at home in the country they have left neither do they wish to be totally absorbed into American culture.
References


