CHAPTER 5

TRANSFORMATION: PHYSICAL, PROXY, METAPHYSICAL AND ABSOLUTE
Mukherjee deals with the life of immigrant women who undergo various transformations for the sake of survival. The transformation that Mukherjee presents through her novels has different phases. She deals with it through her personal experiences. She claims that the immigrants of her “stories go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they alter the country’s appearance and psychological make-up.”¹ This establishes that she is using her experiences to demonstrate the changing shape of American society.² In American Dreamer she writes:

As a writer, my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show that I (along with the hundreds of thousands of immigrants like me) am minute by minute transforming America. The transformation is a two-way process: It affects both the individual and the national-cultural identity.³

Thus her novels reveal not only the individual’s transformation, but also the changes occurring in society. As far as the individual’s transformation is considered, one can see three stages; physical transformation, proxy transformation and metaphysical transformation. It ends with the individual’s demand for absolute transformation, which is possible only when the world around the individual also adapts and transforms in keeping with the aspirations of the individual.

Physical transformation includes geographical changes, the physical setting of the heroines and the physical growth as a woman after losing their virginity or after conception. In this journey they discover their own physical strength, weakness and power as a woman.
When a woman migrates either alone or with her husband to America this geographical change in her life constitutes a physical and mental transformation. She is at first at a loss because of socio-cultural changes around her. Nobody asks or understands: what she wants or feels and the effect of this physical transportation affects her psychology. If in other writer’s novels, like that of Naipaul, this change of place is considered a loss, in Mukherjee’s novels it becomes “successful ‘conquest’ of the New World.” Transformation, in Mukherjee’s novels, is meant for happiness for both individual and society. When she was asked to explain the transformation she wanted to achieve through her novels, she told Russell Schoch that her desire was:

To make people realize that we have to get away from thinking of ourselves - of our identities - as fixed, as dependent only on inherited things: language, race, class, culture. And instead to improvise identity, to see ourselves as part of a changing community in which our loyalty depends on what community we have adopted and decided to give our loyalty to. I’ve always felt that individuals are a series of identities, simultaneous identities. Identity is not fixed. The moment you think there’s only one way, you’re going to crack.

In her work “Jasmine” - Identity in Exile, Roopa Malavally Belur says that

The state of exile, a sense of loss, the pain of separation and disorientation makes Bharati Mukherjee’s novel “Jasmine” a quest for identity in an alien land. Jasmine, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes several transformations during her journey of life in America, from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane, and often experiences a deep sense of estrangement resulting in a fluid state of identity. This journey becomes a tale of moral courage, a search for self-awareness and self-
assertion. Uprooted from her native land India, Jyoti does her best to introduce herself into the new and alien society as an “immigrant”; the culmination finally indicated in Jasmine’s pregnancy with the child of a white man – Bud.  

This is true of all of Bharati Mukherjee’s novels. In them the heroine undergoes a long journey. Tara Cartwright of The Tiger’s Daughter 8, her first novel, journeys back to her native place, India, and Tara of Desirable Daughters 9 and The Tree Bride 10 does the same. Yet there is a huge difference in the circumstances and mental conditions of the two. In the first case the heroine is overwhelmed by nostalgia, whereas in the second the heroine goes in search of her ancestor’s past and to perform her cremation. Tara of The Tree Bride is free from the nostalgic desire though she still holds deep rooted “habit” formed in her native land. (The Tree Bride 280)

Further, in every novel of Mukherjee, one can see various forms of physical journeys which in a way help the heroine develop into a new personality and form a new definition of life. For example, in the novel Wife 11, the heroine Dimple is presented as a continuous traveler. She first shifts from her maternal home to her in-law’s home in India, then to Jyoti’s home in America and from there to Marsha’s home. Each of these places has a definite effect on her mental and physical conditions. If in her parent’s home she had a secure life full of facilities and free of duties, then in her in-law’s place her life becomes hard and as a result of disillusionment in marriage, she becomes cynical, violent and cunning, which are not the features of her original character. In the beginning the girl who has been depicted as innocent, submissive and docile, turns into an ambitious woman so determined to achieve her goal that the failure of it might lead her to suicide. In her maternal home
she thinks of marriage as a means to get love, respect, status and money and so is willing to give up her self-respect. But in her husband’s house, she realizes the futility of her surrender as she fails to understand the negative and indifferent feelings of her husband towards her, and loses self-confidence. Even at this stage she devotes herself to her husband’s welfare and tries to love him and be the way he wants her to be. Later on in Jyoti’s place, all the previous norms of marriage seems to be worthless and Dimple, who feels marriage as only means of achieving love, concludes that marriage is “a chancy business.” (Wife 85) She lacks confidence in Amit. She finds him weak and feels herself more confident and capable. She feels, “Here in New York, Amit seemed to have collapsed inwardly, to have grown frail and shabby.” (Wife 88) She realizes that marriage can fail to provide all that has been sought from it and she also recognizes the double standards of society.

She was bitter that marriage had betrayed her, had not provided all the glittering things she had imagined, had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies and three A.M drives to dingy restaurants where they sold divine kababs rolled in roti. (Wife 101-2)

She starts becoming more self-confident and criticizes her husband and her parents for daunting her:

She remembered that Milt Glasser had set her on a counter, fixed a drink and said she was pretty, and that Jyoti had said she was smarter than Ina Mullick, and Ina had said she used to look a lot like Dimple. So many compliments in so short a time; she’d never been complimented in her life before coming to New York because it would have made her egoistical and hard to marry off. (Wife 102)
She now knows her sex appeal and decides to use it to improve her condition and find respect, identity, self-expression and true love. She quickly adopts American life-style and learns their way of cooking and salad dressing. At Jyoti’s place Amit, for whom she once seemed ready to surrender herself, becomes worthless till he gets a job. She believes that “a man without a job wasn’t a man at all.” (Wife 102) Money and luxury become her criteria to measure the worth of people and the utilitarian approach builds up in her character. From now onwards, she uses Amit for her own benefits and as a step to move upward. Marsha’s home atmosphere and Ina’s regular influence on her life end whatever feelings she has for Amit and she becomes, mentally if not financially, independent. She knows that in America to be financially independent is quite easy, as she has already been offered a job. The only trouble in her life is marriage. As far as she is considered, her marriage has been fruitless. She wanted to get married to a doctor and ends up marrying an engineer. She wants a sleek, well-equipped house. Instead, she gets a place lacking even the basic facilities like water and electricity. She wants to decorate her house and express herself through her artistic talent, but fails there because of the negative influence of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. She does everything to please her husband and finds him desiring a tall convent educated woman. She wants to get appreciation from her husband and gets it from everyone except from him. Finding her marriage a complete failure, she decides to end the relationship, but knowing Amit’s orthodox and egoistical nature realizes divorce is impossible and kills him instead. All this happens in Marsha’s house. Marsha is American and to her, being woman is no reason to lack the blessings of life. She is a professor, has married the man of her choice and is living on her own conditions.
Similarly, in the case of Jasmine, the place where she lives determines her way of thinking as well as her personality. If in an Indian village Jyoti’s brother decide to marry her off to a man of her choice, it is not because they are advanced people, but because they are too poor to give dowry and buy a rich husband of same caste and religion for their sister. Here to Jasmine marriage is a means to a better life. A girl who initially wants to be a doctor surrenders to becoming a docile housewife who is willing to serve her husband and live a so-called normal life and to conceive at the age of fourteen. Marriage to her is the way to achieve love and respect. In her husband’s home she feels happy, for she has married a man who loves and cares for her. Prakash teaches her the importance of money, education, technology, and a woman’s significance in a man’s life. His influence and the city environment encourage her to take up a salesgirl’s job. His desire to move to America firmly implants the importance of the English language in Jasmine’s life. Thus, the poor village girl, to whom marriage had meant producing children and serving her husband, becomes a woman who learns how to enjoy life and be resourceful. After the murder of Prakash, Jasmine returns to her village and lives with her widowed mother, but fails to adjust because of the changes in her character that have resulted from the influence of city life. She decides to go to America alone. Though the journey to America has been an escape from the “public humility and secret bitterness” destined for a widow in India (Jasmine 97), it ends up with Jasmine’s rape and her decision to start a new life. The struggle she goes through during her voyage teaches her to understand her own mistakes. Although in India she has already learned the ways in which widows are rebelling against society, she dare not do more than commit ‘Sati’. Now in America Jasmine learns fast. She first lives with Mrs. Gordon and learns the futility of clinging to the past and the possibility of getting a job in America. Even at
this point she feels insecure and decides to go to her husband’s ex-professor in the hope of living with Indians. Mrs. Gordon has taught her to become American, but when she comes to Professorji’s house she finds “artificially maintained Indianness.” (Jasmine 45) Jasmine sees that the “Vadheras, who would soon have saved enough to buy a small apartment building in Astoria, had retired behind ghetto walls.” (Jasmine 145) It was due to the influence of Mrs. Gordon that Jasmine feels it would be better to leave the safe surroundings of Flushing and start an independent life in New York. At Taylor and Wylie Hayes place, as caregiver to their adopted daughter Duff, she learns about the freedom promised by America and how it can significantly change her life. The couple and their family atmosphere add new experiences to Jasmine’s journey. She now becomes independent, emancipated, empowered and capable of taking decisions. Later on, she decides to move to Iowa to save her and Taylor’s life from Sukkhi /Sukhwinder, a Khalsa terrorist. Here, in a big American village, Jasmine forms a relationship with an orthodox banker Bud and gets pregnant. Under the influence of people like Karin and Mother Ripplemeyer she becomes opportunistic and develops a utilitarian approach to life. She discards all the norms of orthodox society and decides to have a baby outside marriage. At the end, she leaves Bud and re-unites with Taylor feeling, “I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness.” (Jasmine 240) Thus through various journeys from one place to another, Jasmine turns into an absolute American like her creator Mukherjee whom Fakrul Alam has called an immigrant living in “a country of immigrants”.12

The case of Tara, of Desirable Daughters, is different only on the ground that she has transformed much faster and in the most appropriate way. Her rebellious tendencies emerged only after marriage under the influence of young Indian wives
like Meena Melwani. The reason behind it is her convent education. The rational thinking, the desire to be loved, to be noticed, and to belong and the feeling of loneliness, the knowledge of her own beauty and capabilities, transform Tara. Her journey from India to America is not only a changing of places but also a transformation of personality. If in India Tara has been a most obedient daughter, then in America she is the one who dares to break all the socially approved norms of marriage. She not only divorces Bish but also indulges in illegitimate relationships and forms a live-in relationship with Andy, her Hungarian lover. Later, when she symbolically as well as physically journeys back to her sister’s and parent’s lives, she realizes the worth of the good things life has offered her and which she has foolishly rejected. So without wasting time, she re-establishes her relationship with her ex-husband. At this time, her decision is unorthodox and self-regulated. In The Tree Bride, sequel to Desirable Daughters, Tara’s life undergoes more changes as she experiences more and her sense of belonging becomes so intense that she wants to give birth to her ex-husband’s baby even without re-marrying him. That is, all the prevailing norms of marriage have no significance for her. It is only love that matters to her. She is no more interested in attaining the socio-economic aspects of marriage. Her sole aim is to attain the emotional comfort through marriage. At this stage, neither sex nor money, neither traditions nor social mores, have any significance. Rather, it is the stage where a couple thinks only about giving and taking love, care, respect and enjoying the bliss of life. There is no kind of discrimination and their level of understanding as well as their tolerance reaches the height where the whole world becomes a family to them. Thus at the end, respecting the feelings of her ex-husband with whom she is now in love, Tara accepts his marriage proposal and gives birth to their daughter after re-marriage.
Proxy transformation through imitation, to achieve happiness, is the next stage of transformation adopted by the female protagonists of Mukherjee. Understanding the external changes occurring vis-a-vis place, culture, tradition, language and society, immigrant women decide either to change themselves or to shell themselves inside ghetto walls. Bharati Mukherjee’s heroines are all strugglers. Instead of letting their man’s personality overshadow them, they want to establish their own identity. Thus, it is Jasmine not Nirmala who is heroine of *Jasmine*. It is Dimple, not Meena or Ina, who is the heroine of *Wife* and it is Tara, not Padma or Parvati, who is the female lead in *Desirable Daughters*. Even in *The Tree Bride*, the sequel to Desirable Daughters, Tara’s life is the center of focus, though in it the lives of Tara Lata Gangooly and other characters like Victoria, John Mist, Jai Krishna Gangooly and Vertie Treadwell have been elaborately presented.

Mukherjee’s heroines first try to transform themselves by proxy, which means they imitate others in a hope of assimilating in the American society and being accepted by Americans. Initially they fail to understand the essence of the new world they are in blindly copy the people around them. Imitation of foreign culture results in a gradual growth of mental transformation. Realizing that their traditional, orthodox ways are out of context in their new homes, immigrants learn to live in America like Americans. A lot of patience is needed for this and those who lack patience fail to become part of their adopted land.

Even in India, Dimple tries to please her husband through proxy. She copies her sister-in-law (*Wife* 22). She feels surprised when Amit tells her about his desire of marrying a slim, tall, convent-educated girl. Even then, she fails to learn that it is for her own happiness that she should have worked. She suffers in America as well. There, she feels an alien and after meeting a modern Indian wife Ina, she feels
“ashamed” of herself (Wife 103). Frustrated, she tries proxy transformation by learning the ways of the foreign culture, but all she has as companions are Meena, a family-oriented wife always busy in household activities; Ina, a reckless, fun loving wife of a rich Indian businessman; and characters from commercials. To her, modernity lies in wearing pants and short dresses, eating and cooking foreign food and flirting shamelessly. She, in fact, tries all of them when she goes out with Milt, Ina’s American boyfriend, wearing his sister Marsha’s clothes, she feels she can risk anything and “get away with it” (Wife 175). However, she soon realises its futility. She feels that though she is not happy in America, yet she does not want to be like Ina or Meena. The thing she has been seeking is a marriage in which a couple is in love with each other and each respects the other’s feelings. They enjoy life within their marriage and not outside it. But there Amit, who believes that “healthy society and mutual respect are based on the clear distinction between the appearance and the functions of the sexes,” fails to help her (Wife 158). Ina, who understands the problem, points out: “Our trouble here is that we imitate badly, and we preserve things even worse.” (Wife 95) Dimple’s desperate attempt to copy the American lifestyle reflects her sense of insecurity. Her transformation is proxy and an absolute failure as she feels uncomfortable and guilty wearing Marsha’s clothes and enjoying time with Milt.

Jasmine’s case is different because she meets the right women, who have taught her the smooth ways of transformation and make her accept the proxy transformation wholeheartedly. Lillian Gordon, an American woman gives her food and shelter and teaches her the art of living in America as an American. She tells her that “shoes are the biggest giveaway,” for “Undocumented aliens wear boxy shoes with ambitious heels” (Jasmine 132). After adopting Lillian’s suggestions, Jasmine
feels “shocked at the transformation” (Jasmine 133). She feels confused and cannot “tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle” she has “also abandoned” her “Hasnapuri modesty” (Jasmine 133). Unlike Dimple, Jasmine accepts her proxy transformation without regret and feels that her current life is better than the one she had in India as a widow.

Tara of Desirable Daughters experiments with all she has read in American magazines

Those magazines encouraged women to talk over their problems, to share their disappointments, to experiment with their hair color, sexual positions, and pointedly meaningless one-night stands. (Desirable Daughters 83)

She imitates not only the dressing and eating habits of American women, but also their urge for freedom. She feels that marriage has cramped her growth as a woman and decides to divorce her husband. She then gets involved in a live-in relationship with Andy. Her decision proves to be ill-thought and too selfish. Her only son Rabi suffers because of it and, due to the lack of a father in his life, becomes gay. He attaches himself to a man who impersonates his cousin Christopher Day after having killed him. Tara tries hard to bring Rabi to see sense, but fails to do so. She feels the loosening of ties between Rabi and herself. Soon she finds out that the man impersonating Christopher is actually an international terrorist, Abbas Sattar Hai. At this crucial point of her life her lover Andy deserts her. Only then does she realize what a false life she has been leading. Her proxy transformation is a drastic mistake. She now understands that the blind imitation of foreign culture can be fatal. In this strange country where she has attached herself to various people, there is not a single person to whom she can go for help. At this stage of her life she goes to her eldest sister Padma to find out the truth regarding Christopher and also to blame her for
being a heartless woman as she has left her son with his father just after his birth so to have a glamorous life abroad. But there she discovers her sister’s hard life, her relationship with gay people and also of her parent’s role in stopping Padma’s marriage to Ronald Day, Christopher’s father. All this is a shock to her and she feels completely betrayed. At this time her ex-husband Bish comes forward to rescue her. He offers her safety and company. He actually saves her life when Abbas Sattar Hai bombs her house. This brings the couple close once again and she without delay offers re-establishment of the relationship. He accepts it and soon she gets pregnant with his second child, this time a daughter.

Till her relationship with Andy, Tara’s transformation is proxy as she has discarded all the norms of relationships thinking of it as an obstacle her freedom, but after getting re-involved with Bish she realises the essence of the man-woman relationship. She now understands that freedom comes with responsibilities. She also understands that true happiness can be achieved only when one has someone else to share it. She learns that differences in culture, tradition, religion, and race can be sorted out with the feeling of respect, love and understanding, but differences caused due to ego can never be mended. It needs a lot of tolerance and patience to overcome one’s ego and it is the biggest evil of today’s world. She also begins to understand that illegitimate relationships are only a satisfaction of ego.

It is only the heroine’s desire of happiness in marriage that is the common factor among the female protagonists of her novels. They are always transforming themselves in their search for true happiness. However, happiness is very treacherous. They seem to be running after a mirage in the desert of life.
Proxy transformation in itself proves to be a complete failure in this regard, but it teaches them lessons in truth and brings about an emotional and spiritual transformation their metaphysical transformation.

The imitation of foreign culture leads to the formation of new habits and it ultimately transforms the whole personality of an immigrant. This is metaphysical transformation in which the nature and views of an immigrant change and also change the way of reacting to the situation. It is a gradual process.

Katherine Miller has pointed out that “Jasmine does impose her will on her life.” According to her, “Jasmine’s desire to change transcends all of the limitations imposed by her race, class and gender.” Jasmine’s only desire is to change and be accepted by her new surroundings. It is not an imposed change so it is permanent by nature. The men in her life have loved her for what she is, so there is no need for transformation. Jasmine transforms because she wants to do so. She wants to discard all the bonds of past.

Roopa Malavally Belur writes:

The author depicts this transformation and transition as a positive and an optimistic journey. Jasmine creates a new world consisting of new ideas and values, constantly unmasking her past. She tries to establish a new cultural identity by incorporating new desires, skills, and habits. Jasmine wants to change because she loves America, she likes the life-style of people there and loves the way the people enjoy freedom. America has become her home and there is no question of return to India. In her words:

I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On
Claremont Avenue, in the Hayes’s big, clean, brightly lit apartment [her lover Taylors, apartment], I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase. (*Jasmine* 185-86)

After her rape, Jasmine even feared her degradation due to transformation.

I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I’m on. Down and down I go, where I’ll stop, God only knows. (*Jasmine* 138-39)

After learning the American way of life by Lillian Gordon, who used to help immigrant women, Mr. Vadhera’s apartment depresses her. There she feels “deteriorating” and “immured” (*Jasmine* 148). She suffers feeling:

An imaginary brick wall topped with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time. Without a green card, even a forged one . . . I didn’t feel safe going outdoors. If I had a green card, a job, a goal, *happiness* would appear out of the blue. (*Jasmine* 148-49)

At Taylor’s home she feels transformed. She feels her old self is dead now. She starts enjoying life there and feels:

I should have saved; a cash stash is the only safety net. I’d learned that if nothing else from the scrimping Vadheras. Jyoti [name given by Jasmine’s grandmother] would have saved. But Jyoti was now a *sati-goddess*; she had burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine [name given by her husband Prakash] lived for the future, for Vijh & Wife. Jase [name given by her lover Taylor] went to movies and lived for today. In my closet hung
satin blouse with vampish necklines, in my dresser lingerie I was too shy to wear in a room I share with Duff. Profligate squandering was my way of breaking with the panicky, parsimonious ghettos of Flushing. *(Jasmine 176)*

At Bud’s place in Iowa, Jasmine becomes Jane Ripplemeyer without getting married to him and lives a safe life. But the moment she sees her lover Taylor she decides to become his Jase again. Such a rapid change of mind is possible because she has already changed metaphysically. Her thoughts express her emotions when she is leaving Bud.

It isn’t guilt that I feel. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through un-caulked windows. then there is nothing I can do. *(Jasmine 240-41)*

She has no care for the future, nor has she any regrets about the past. All that she wants is her present. She is confident of herself and feels as a part of it.

America may be fluid or and built on flimsy, invisible lines of weak gravity, but I was a dense object, I had landed and was getting rooted. *(Jasmine 179)*

Roopa Malavally Belur points out that Jasmine’s “transition is defined not only in the changes in her attitude, but more significantly in her relationship with men”.  

As long as Jasmine lives in India her attitude towards marriage was just like that of any Indian girl of her age. To a woman, marriage is meant for serving man and taking care of children. When her husband Prakash dies in a terrorist attack she feels that a widow’s life is a most depressing one and it is better to commit suicide than
bear the humiliation of widowhood. So she decides to commit sati in America where her husband had planned to go before his death. In America she meets various people and goes through various transformations. Her rapist Half-Face transforms her from a Sati to kali; Lillian Gordon teaches her that one must never waste time on regretting the past; Wylie, her employer, teaches her that in America people are free to break their marriage if they feel that love is lacking in their relationship. From Taylor and Wylie, she learns the American concept of adopting a child. She also learns that producing a child is not the only aim of marriage. Wylie has married Taylor despite the fact that he is impotent. From her she also learns to be friendly and sympathetic. Wylie has known since the beginning that Taylor, her husband, is in love with Jasmine and she tells Jasmine about it. She has, in fact, introduced Jasmine to Stuart, her new lover. Even at this time, Jasmine dares not break her old mentality regarding widow re-marriage. Knowing that the Khalsa terrorist Sukhwinder, who has killed her husband Prakash, is still after her and might attack Taylor, she leaves Taylor. Then she forms a live-in relationship with Bud, a banker. With him she adopts a Vietnamese boy, Du, which shows her changing attitude towards children. Later she gets pregnant with Bud’s child but refuses to marry him. She also becomes a good friend of Bud’s ex-wife Karin. At the end of the novel, still pregnant with Bud’s child, she leaves Bud to Karin and re-joins Taylor and Duff, Taylor’s adopted daughter. She also plans to meet Du who has left after knowing that she is pregnant with Bud’s child. The marriage of Taylor and Jasmine is possible only in America where individual freedom is the essence of life. Though even there terrorists like Sukhwinder are haunting the peaceful atmosphere, yet with the power of love these couples dare to re-start life. Through Jasmine, Mukherjee depicts the metaphysical transformation of her heroine from being “cattle” to a rational woman;
emancipated, empowered and capable of taking independent decisions regarding her married life. This is also true of her other female protagonists, Tara and Dimple.

In Desirable Daughters, Mukherjee presents a very rebellious woman, Tara, who, under the influence of freedom and loneliness in America, decides it is better to get a divorce and lead a life of one’s own choice. But within five years after her divorce and after living with many men, she realises that one should not run after a mirage. Freedom extracts its own cost. Family values are important not just to maintain social order, but also for the welfare of the new generation. Realizing that a selfish ego is destructive, that rules and discipline, while they should not be rigid, are desirable for growth and harmony, she sheds her vanity and arrogance and goes back to her husband, Bish.

In the case of Dimple, her whole attitude regarding marriage changes and she transforms from being a docile daughter and compliant wife to be a most practical, calculative and selfish women. In India her whole interest has been to learn how to attract her husband’s attention and how to please him. She feels that it is through marriage that a woman gets respect in society. Marriage brings luxury. After marriage she feels that money and not marriage is the source of happiness. The reality is a jolt. Her husband is ill-paid and insecure, her mother-in-law is the typical complaining, fault-finding kind and the house lacks basic facilities. She blames her parents for her circumstances. She stops pleasing Amit, her husband and starts revolting in her own way. She aborts her child to live freely in foreign land. Watching life in America, she concludes that both husband and wife have equal responsibility in sustaining a marriage. She feels her own importance. She finds out that America provides a lot of opportunities to women. Things that she has read in magazines and watched on television seems real to her now. The whole concept of marriage changes in Dimple’s
mind. Marriage, which has been a dream of love and happiness to her, becomes a confinement. Sex and money become very important to her. Only rich men seem to be of some worth. Love seems unreal and she becomes too practical and too cynical. She then tries to enjoy life by attracting an American man, Milt, but soon realizes that infidelity is no solution to her worries. She now desires companionship and fulfillment within marriage. She tries to talk with her husband to find a solution, but when she finds that he is too orthodox to understand her feelings and emotions and is too egoistic to respect her and acknowledge her talents, she feels it is hopeless to carry on life with him. She has been interested in securing her future only. For this she has accepted the humiliating life of a silent server, but when she discovers that her husband is incapable of even saving enough money for future, she suddenly becomes desperate and kills him. Marriage has not given her love, respect, understanding, affection and happiness, or money and a safe, secure future.

After trying all sorts of transformations Mukherjee’s heroines realize that their transformation is futile as it is one-sided transformation. In order to merge in the American society they have compromised to the extent of losing their own identity, yet they are still considered aliens for they are facing an unwelcoming society. Through her novels Mukherjee points out that these immigrant women do not want to live an alien life in America. They are here with the hope of starting a new life. They want to enjoy the freedom and opportunities that America promises to deliver and so they have adopted proxy and metaphysical transformation. However, when they find America lacking in providing those facilities because of racist attitudes, they hide behind ghetto walls. They have tried to blend into the American culture and it is for the Americans to also transform to accept these immigrants wholeheartedly. Only then is absolute transformation possible. As Bharati Mukherjee writes:
I need to feel like a part of the community I have adopted (as I tried to feel in Canada as well) . . . I need to put roots down, to vote and make the difference that I can. The price that the immigrant willingly pays, and that the exile avoids, is the trauma of self-transformation.  

Mukherjee believes that to achieve absolute transformation both the individual and society have to change. She suggests that immigrants should not leave their cultural treasure but accept the changes and mould them to suit their current surroundings. . In *American Dreamer* she writes:

> What excites me is that as a nation we have not only the chance to retain those values we treasure from our original cultures, but also the chance to acknowledge that the outer forms of those values are likely to change. Among Indian immigrants, I see a great deal of guilt about the inability to hang on to what they commonly term “pure culture”. Parents express rage or despair at their U.S.-born children’s forgetting of, or indifference to, some aspects of Indian culture. Of those parents I would ask: What is it we have lost if our children are acculturating into the culture in which we are living? Is it so terrible that our children are discovering or are inventing homelands for themselves? 

There are, however, certain obstacles that form a cultural divide, obstacles that rise from the attitudes of both Americans and immigrants. These work against the kind of transformation that would allow the immigrant to blend smoothly into American culture.

Bharati Mukherjee is conscious of the negative effects of the feeling of alienation on immigrants. She believes that immigrants should feel free in America.
They should utilize all the facilities to live happily. Hiding is of no use. They must face the reality of discrimination and fight against it. She writes:

Some first-generation Indo-Americans, embittered by racism and by unofficial “glass ceilings”, construct a phantom identity, more-Indian than-Indians-in-India, as a defense against marginalization. I ask: Why don’t you get actively involved in fighting discrimination? Make your voice heard. Choose the forum most appropriate for you. If you are a citizen, let your vote count. Reinvest your energy and resources into revitalizing your city’s disadvantaged residents and neighborhoods. Know your constitutional rights, and when they are violated, use the agencies of redress the Constitution makes available to you. Expect change, and when it comes, deal with it!  

Mukherjee feels it is degrading to be forced to discard one’s own culture. She does not like the melting pot theory of the Americanization of the immigrants. In an interview she tells Russell Schoch:

America has traditionally expected immigrants to do all the transforming and accommodating, and the old “melting pot” model encouraged new comers to discard, or conceal their foreign heritages and subscribe to an Anglo-American ideal. But the post-1965 immigrants, especially those who have come to America as economic refugees, rarely subscribe to such a “melting pot” model. Their conflicts have to do with nostalgia and discovery: how much original culture to let go, and how much American culture to embrace? As see it, over time - and often in spite of the immigrant’s best efforts - the inherited and the adopted values fuse together.  

Further she says:

My point is that all Americans - not just us newer immigrants – are being forced to recognize the reality of this de-Europeanization. The original heirs to the American Dream encounter us on a daily basis: We are their doctors, their housekeepers, their grocers, their accountants, their golf heroes, their filmmakers, their spouses, and their lovers. We and they have fused into us. There’s a healthy mongrelization of heritages and values going on in today’s America. That’s the two-way transformation that I dramatize in my fiction, especially in novels like *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*. 21

In all her novels Bharati Mukherjee has presented different ways in which immigrants take on the process of Americanization. She is not against any of them. Virginia D. Lively points out in her work *Three Immigrant Types in Bharati Mukherjee’s “Jasmine”* that:

In the novel *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee describes in detail the changes immigrants undergo as they forge new lives for themselves in America. Some, like Professorji and Nirmala, never truly let go of their past lives, creating for themselves a world in America that is never really American. Instead of wanting to live the American Dream, they instead long for the mother country they no longer live in, and become refugees to that lost dream. Others, like Du, are able to be both the image of an American and yet always retain with them the memories of the world that they left behind. Du never completely abandons his past, and so lives a life caught between two cultures, and is able to survive in both. Finally, immigrants like Jasmine find themselves
constantly reinventing themselves in order to adapt to their changing world. By showing how immigrants survive in unique ways, Mukherjee is able to throw off the concept of the generic immigrant and instead shows immigrants for what they truly are: individual people who cope the best they can with the new environment thrust upon them.  

Mukherjee herself talks of these transformations, but her attitude is a positive one. Through the lives of Jasmine, Du and Professorji, she shows three types of survivors. Their response to the situation is based on their own circumstance. She tells Tina Chen and S.X. Goudie that:

The “opposed parallel” that moved me [Mukherjee] most as I was Writing was the one between Jasmine and Du. Jasmine’s very open to new experience and optimistic about outcome. Her attitude is: Hey, you can’t rape me and get away with it! You can’t push me around! I’m here, I’m gonna stay if I want to, and I’m gonna conquer the territory!

Du, who has to attend school in the U.S., probably outwardly dresses more like U.S. born Americans than does Jasmine, and certainly is more familiar with American colloquialisms and pop culture, but he’s cynical of post-Vietnam America, he’s aware of the limits of the American Dream and makes his guerrilla attacks on that Dream.  

Mukherjee appreciates all those who struggle. No matter whether they succeed or not, at least they have tried. They are not escapist. She questions why it is that if a white man does something out of the way he becomes hero, but when an Asian tries to do something different he is considered pathetic? In Jasmine, we have two characters, Darrel, a Native American and Professorji, an immigrant from India.
Darrel hangs himself when he finds it hard to cope with the changing situations of farms in America, but Professorji, who fails to accomplish his dream of becoming a great scientist, changes his life-style, discards his ego, re-starts his life, and stands as a hero taking care of his family.

Mukherjee claims that her immigrants are victims, “but they are resilient victims, unviolated in their core of need and imagination”

She remarks:

Rocky, being white, can pick himself off the canvas, land a few blows, and be a hero; Rakesh, however, a laid-off engineer with three kids and no American certification, opens a dingy spice store and Hindi video outlet and somehow is perceived as pathetic. This is the stereotyping that has to end. My Professorji, who used to be a doctor in his home country and is now having to sell human hair for making wigs or electronic equipment in some basement video store in Queens, is somehow seen, necessarily, as a pathetic character rather than as a resilient hero, who says “all right, this didn’t work, but something else will work”.  

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee presents the heroine’s wish to be taken as a part of America and not as an alien. While living with Taylor and Wylie as their adopted daughter Duffs care-giver, Jasmine feels:

I wanted to become the person they [Taylor and Wylie] thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful. In Flushing [with her husband Prakash’s professor’s family], I had lived defensively in the Midst of documented rectitude. I did not want to live legally if it also meant living like a refugee. (*Jasmine* 171)
Jasmine hates the way her adopted son Du’s teacher, Mr. Skola, commented on his rapid Americanization. She feels it is “humiliating” when he tells her, “I tried a little Vietnamese on him and he just froze up.” (Jasmine 29) Jasmine compares her transformation with that of Du’s and thinks “My transformation has been genetic; Du’s was hyphenated.” (Jasmine 222)

Desirable Daughters also presents the heroine Tara’s anger and frustration when a colleague, Beth Young, from her school calls her to find out about the mother of a Pakistani student, Nafisa. She feels irritated. I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien. (Desirable Daughters 87)

It is one of the reasons why she returns to her ex-husband. To her, he becomes the only person who can understand without explanation.

Dimple’s whole married life in Wife goes astray, for she fails to understand why this country, that promises freedom, falls short of providing a sense of security. The racial discrimination outside home and gender discrimination at home depresses her so much that she feels safe in the company of an American, Milt, and tries to seduce him.

In The Holder of the world 26 Hannah transports herself from place to place, city to city. It is interesting to follow her mental journey as her whole personality undergoes a change as she moves in and out of places physically. Finally Hannah success in burying her past as a native of Puritan England and emerges as a real fighter of life. Hannah Easton fitch legge (a.k.a the salem Bibi and precious as Pearls) thinks about the evolution of names and roles of her mother and her friend “A new name for a new incarnation” (The Holder of the World 222). Hannah witnesses the execution of a puritan settlement by the Indians, years later having travelled to India with her husband, an East India Company merchant and later a pirate. Hannah
becomes involved in the war between Hindu Raj and the Muslim Mughal becoming a murderer herself. She realized that she can find contentment nowhere but in India, and it was because of the rich culture, the diversity in religion, the plight of the civilians and the generous hospitality. She is ultimately shown to transform.

In *leave it to me* 27, Debby Di Martino, the abandoned daughter of a hippie tourist and a serial killer, changes her name into Devi in order to share out the violent justice in the world. Iris daughter becomes in turn, faustine, Debby and Devi. The transformation of Debby from a helpless infant rejected by her biological parents to young women is shown in order to search for reality.

Through the life of the female protagonists and their changing attitudes Mukherjee is presenting that these immigrants, who have left everything behind in a hope of starting anew, are disillusioned in America and America fails to fulfill its promise of providing ‘equality’ to all of its citizens. She shows that racial discrimination leaves these immigrants with only two choices. They can either live in America as refugees creating their own little country here, resisting all sorts of transformations or they can hold their past along with adopting the changes required to suit them. But both these forms of transformations are a great risk to American Democracy. She wants a natural transformation in which immigrants willingly adopt American culture, at the same time enriching American culture with the features of their own culture. Mukherjee tells Russell Schoch:

I want a sense of belonging. I want a sense of nationhood that makes it possible for both the newcomers and the old-timers to feel part of one community. I want an America in which individual Americans, no matter what their ancestral origin, skin color, economic background, or religion, think and feel they are a part of one community - because they
subscribe to the Bill of Rights and the subsequent amendments, which are the Constitutional sanctions under which we live. This means the “pursuit of happiness” is like jazz - each of us can improvise our own categories of personal happiness.  

According to Mukherjee, the way to achieve such transformation is the formation of new bonding between man and woman. Learning others culture is a slow process and transforming accordingly is slower. It can require more than one generation to get assimilated into the other culture. The transformation of Jasmine is absolute. Ina of Wife has also transformed though she still suffers from nostalgic fits. At the end of the novel Wife, the heroine Dimple is absolutely transformed. Tara in Desirable Daughters is still in the process of transforming, but her son has already transformed. He is tolerant and accepting all cultures.
Works Cited


5. Scoch, interview, “A conversation with Bharati Mukherjee.” Web


24. Ibid

25. Ibid
