CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Asian population in America has grown and diversified in recent decades as a result of changes in US immigration and naturalization laws. Four generations of Japanese Americans are now scattered in cities and suburbs, mostly in Hawaii and California, while new immigrants from Hongkong, Taiwan, South Korea, the Phillipines, and Southeast Asia particularly India are making their homes in new and already established communities, adding new dimensions to the needs and interests of the already existing populations. Contemporary Asian American writers and more particularly many women writers of Indian origin reflect increasingly diverse perspectives among the people of these changing groups in their writings. Increased social integration and new ethnic awareness among Asian Americans have helped encourage the publication of Asian American writing in recent years. Andre Maurois explains how the crosscultural exposure of displaced writers activates their creative writing:

In literature as in heredity, cross breeding is a source of health. The mind thus presented with standards of comparison is strengthened.... Gide has noticed that the best critics and the best artists are actually found amongst those who have inherited a mixed strain. In them, opposing strains co-exist, grow to maturity and neutralise each other. Those whom every impulse drives down the same road become men of fixed views.
Those who, on the other hand, carry with them a conflict of tendencies are endowed with an intellectual life which is to an unusual degree, rich and fluctuating.¹

From this point of view the literature about immigrants and by immigrant writers appears to be a by-product of cultural displacement and its traumatic effect on the displaced writers.

The problem of how Asians can find a place for themselves in a predominantly white society where discrimination against racial minorities exists, therefore continues to be addressed as a major concern in Asian American literature. Popular images of Asians as sinister villains, comical servants, loyal sidekicks, exotic aliens, or sex sirens can be found in radio and television programmes and films, in advertising, and in children's literature and comic books as well as in pornographic materials. Such stereotypes of Asians in American popular culture are a vivid reflection of the attitudes that have helped shape the Asian experience in the United States and as a legacy Asian American writers are obliged to contend with if they hope to be understood and appreciated.

Unfortunately, in Indian diasporic literature an awful lot of exilic writers, the expatriate writers, are continuing to provide the kind of portraits, moods, positions, and problems with which the readership, the publishing industry, and the scholars or critics are familiar and comfortable. The confrontation between the East and the West, the strange love-hate
relationship that exists between the two, the cultural alienation and the loss of identity faced by the expatriates are some of the aspects that are presented with a deep insight by Indian women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. These expatriate writers, some of them sharing the predicament of multiple (dis)locations, respond to the chaotic state of the New Man with bicultural exposure. The negation and aimlessness in their characters is due to the nostalgic preference for their native cultures and the failure to accommodate themselves to the new forms of culture to which they are exposed. All the expatriate characters with "affected psyche" face one major problem - that of an assertion of freedom and free will. Their companions in the new adopted countries are "pain" and "fear." The regressive tendencies in these expatriates are suggestive of the psychological tension they undergo owing to their choice to remain expatriates.

However, there are a few writers fortunately, who are obliterating this particular kind of discourse between Third World and First World, margin and centre, or minority and mainstream by creating triumphant women characters who survive and flourish as boundary breakers. These writers have a much harder time being understood or being recognized.

One such writer who avoids stereotyping and identifies herself as an immigrant writer and resists being classified as an exilic or expatriate writer is Bharati Mukherjee. In her epilogue to Days and Nights in Calcutta Mukherjee proclaims the spirit that motivates her writing:
Even more than other writers, I must learn to astonish, to shock.²

Mukherjee has indeed produced a body of work that sustains wonder and evokes surprise.

As a Calcutta-born writer who now calls the United States her home after having spent many bitter years in Canada, Bharati Mukherjee is part of a variety of rich literary traditions. Her works can be read in the national context of Indian Writing in English and in the international context of the literature of the Indian diaspora. Some of her short stories and works of non-fiction that relentlessly expose and challenge Canadian racism are powerful enough to make her an important figure in the literature of the multicultural Canada. Her major works of migration, of course, have earned her a significant place in the contemporary literature of the United States.

In spite of sharing the predicament of multiple displacements with other Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal, Mukherjee unlike them determinedly rejects the emotional paralysis of exile and enthusiastically affirms the immigrant condition - a condition that celebrates breaking away from one's ethnicity and absorbing the culture of the adopted country. If Mukherjee's works are different, refreshing and fascinating, her remarkable success lies in her forging a coherent vision out of the chaos of her multiple displacements, and the ability to articulate that vision in a voice that is as subtle as it is insistent, as graceful as it is provocative.
After more than a decade in Canada where she finally rejected the hardship that was the lot of "a dark-skinned non-European," Mukherjee came to the United States with a lot of faith in the American Dream and made it work for her. Rather than go through life with a chip on her shoulder about racial discrimination, as some academic expatriates to the United States do, Mukherjee chose to celebrate her new found identity and carved out a career as a brilliant contemporary American writer and a professor of creative English. In Days and Nights in Calcutta which she co-authored with her husband Clark Blaise, Mukherjee not only exposes the predicament of women in a decidedly patriarchal Indian society; on the other hand, she also attempts to define her own multiple (dis)locations, examine her increasing discomfort with a variety of Indian cultural practices, and come to terms with her growing realization that the "real" India is vastly different from the imagined "home" of her expatriate nostalgia. It systematically destroys, not without considerable anguish, the illusion of "home" in a bold attempt to forge a new home and a new identity in another country. The book, in fact, poses several personal questions of identity - who was I? where did I want to live? and as Mukherjee points out in an interview in The Times of India "made me aware that I was no longer an 'expatriate' but very much an 'immigrant' who needed to belong wherever I was, putting down emotional and psychic roots in new soil. It was an urgent painful process." Today she will not be labelled Asian-American. Not for her the half measures of hyphenation. Though some see this as race disloyalty and a denial of her roots, she is very vocal in her assertion - "I'm an American writer of Bengali Indian origin." The
statement underlies simultaneously the pioneer's capacity to be shocked and surprised by the new culture and the immigrant's willingness to de-form and re-form that culture.

India thus emerges as the narrator's midpoint between her position as an expatriate in Canada and her decision to establish herself as an American immigrant. These personal details assume great relevance because the transformation in Mukherjee's personal life closely parallels the radical transformation of her as an artist - from an aloof and alienated expatriate author in emotional and artistic alignment with exiled writers like V.S. Naipaul to a confident storyteller who has now enthusiastically redefined herself as an artist in the immigrant tradition of American writers such as Bernard Malamud. There is thus a discernible movement from the theme of expatriation to immigration, from alienation to integration, in Mukherjee's fiction.

The two early novels, The Tiger's Daughter and Wife are both narratives that are grounded on select autobiographical facts of Mukherjee as an expatriate. In The Tiger's Daughter Mukherjee voices her initial loneliness and how she grappled with problems especially in Canada as she negotiated the no-man's land between the country of her past and the continent of her present. The protagonist, Tara Banerjee Cartwright, is a young Bengali woman who returns to her native Calcutta after having lived and married in the United States. There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of Tara. She can neither take
refuge in her old Indian self nor does she find any sanctuary in the newly discovered American self. The outcome of this confrontation is her split up psyche. The attitude of her friends in Calcutta who approve of foreign manners, foreign etiquette, foreign fashions but not the foreign marriage makes a criticism of the conservative attitude of the Indians, who feel crazy for foreign things, dresses and items but do not approve of marriage with foreigners. Besides Tara expects to find the city she fondly remembers from childhood, but she is shocked by Calcutta's poverty and squalor and by violent political events. More and more it seems as if her liberal American husband, who has stayed home, is right in seeing Calcutta as "the collective future in which garbage, disease, and stagnation are man's estate" and in warning her that a bloody caste-and-class struggle is on the way. Tara's journey to India proves frustrating, leading to disillusion, alienation, depression, and finally her tragic end. The Tiger's Daughter is the conventional return of the expatriate fiction, structured on the familiar pattern of trembling expectation, shock of unrecognition, episodic disillusionment, and final sad acceptance of one's alien position between two worlds.

The terms "identity" or "self" can be interpreted in Erich Fromm's words:

The "self" in the interest of which modern man acts is the social self, a self which is essentially constituted by the role the individual is supposed to play and which in reality is
merely the subjective disguise for the objective social function

of man in society.

When the loss of this "self" is felt by the expatriate he is in danger of becoming insane, if he does not save himself by acquiring a "secondary sense of self" which fits into one of the current patterns accepted by the society he chooses to live in. This precisely is what happens to the protagonist in Mukherjee's next novel *Wife*. Dimple Dasgupta, the wife, is the most unstable of dreamers - she day dreams. She entertains movie stars, she walks through fire for love; and because she takes the myths of her culture for literal truths, life is always betraying her. Marriage, which should bring her freedom, cocktail parties, and love, brings her instead a marriage contract with Amit Basu, an engineer who lacks the wealth and inclination for high life and passion. Under the passive posture of Amit's wife, there is a considerable accretion of violence. Dimple lives with her fermenting frustrations and puts her faith in the New World.

Violence is Dimple's fundamental experience of New York. News papers, car radios, and casual conversations announce murders in alleys and ice cream parlours. When the fun of parties and new friends wears off, Dimple finds herself stranded in a fully furnished, fully applianced apartment in Greenwich village, terrified of the city outside. She kills time watching soap operas and Johnny Carson, gradually losing the ability to separate fantasy from event. Television introduces her to love, American
style, making her feel Amit had betrayed her. In Calcutta he had been an emblem of strength, now he seems weak and vulnerable. He has none of the features of TV heroes, and he prevents her from metamorphosing from an obedient wife into an independent Westener.

Television becomes the voice of conscience in her head. Dimple has a streak of subterranean violence in her which the novelist takes great pains to emphasize. She is uprooted from her family and her familiar world and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustrations and unhooks her further from reality. Unable to cope with the conflicting pressures of the New World, Dimple ends up eliminating the most obvious among them - her husband. Mukherjee sees the final act of murder as "self assertive," as a desperate bid to discover her "self." If Dimple had remained in Calcutta she would have ended up committing suicide. She commits murder instead.

The novelist paints America as a great seducer, tempting the ordinary men and women to acts of psychotic violence. Coming from a "Nothing place" Dimple resorts to a bold, ruthless murder because of her contact with the New World. The journey from a coy, docile, Indian housewife to a killer in Dimple's character offers a glimpse into the pressurized psyche of an expatriate. The focus is upon a sensitive protagonist who is displaced, who lacks a stable sense of personal and
cultural identity and who is a victim of racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression. A lacerated and anguished spirit, Dimple is the nowhere woman, trapped between two cultures questing for an identity.

Tara and Dimple are the protagonists of Mukherjee's early works, reflecting the rootlessness, pain, and anguish of expatriates that the novelist herself underwent during her years in Canada. Their lives are chaotic, unstable, and wretched as a result of isolation or loss of identity. In the words of Carlyle:

Isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness in man. To be cut off, to be left solitary, to have a world alien, not your world; all a hostile camp of you; not a home at all of hearts and faces who are yours, whose you are! It is the frightfullest enchantment: too truly a work of the Evil one.... Man knows no sadder destiny.... It was not a God that did this, no!8

To feel uprooted is against man's nature because as a physical being, a man needs to be located in space. Man's individuation is a process of socialization itself. Ashley Montagu emphasizes this when he states:

No living organism is either solitary in its origin or solitary in its life. Every organism from the lowest to the highest is normally engaged in some sort of social life. The solitary animal in any species is an abnormal creature.9
The feeling of being in limbo and the self imposed "leave me alone" sort of solitariness that the expatriates experience is rather abnormal then. It is the "impossibility of living" which proves very oppressive. It gives rise to a feeling within them of hanging between something which is ending and something which is yet to begin.

If this is true, then it is also an undeniable factor that the present age is characterized by mass migration. It is a well-established historical fact that empire creation and colonization have resulted in people journeying from one world into a new one. Another reason for migration is man's appetite for 'progress'. Either he wants to secure more knowledge or he wants more money, which in turn causes displacement. Such geographical dislocation introduces new conditions of living and new modes of thinking, helping the break-up of the settled ways of life with assured peace and sanity resulting in an atmosphere of strong denial in which the expatriates live.

This irremedial isolation need not be the condition of modern life. A formula of adaptation has to be discovered according to need and scale of survival. What then should a migrant do and how should he relate to his new surrounding? In the midst of the abundant literature of isolation produced in this century, Bharati Mukherjee after her initial works of expatriation, diagnoses the problem and offers the solution. She identifies nostalgia - the retreat into the family home; the concerted refusal to engage with a wider notion of the 'public,' and the mindless replication of
"timeless" traditions - as the most distressing characteristics of the expatriates abroad, particularly in the affluent West. The solution suggested is a farewell to one's past, one's culture, even one's parents - leaving home forever in exchange for a place in American society. The only choice seems to be to melt like raindrops in the ocean of white society. The loss of 'self' or 'identity' according to her, is therefore chiefly related to the expatriate's working very hard to artificially hang on to the past and remove himself from the present. Mukherjee finds this distressing and observes:

An expatriate works very hard to artificially hang on to the past. I say let the old self die, if it must, if the new self must be born.10

This realization corresponds with Mukherjee moving away from Canada in 1980 where she suffered "persistent hurt" as an expatriate and choosing to settle down in the United States with her husband Clark Blaise and her two sons because "America, with its melting pot theory of immigration, has a healthier attitude toward Indian immigrants than Canada."11

True to her conviction, one discovers that she gradually moves away from themes of expatriation and nostalgia for old homes to focus on changing identities and the formation of emotional ties to North America. For Mukherjee, her past identity as an Indian, from now on, is something she has left behind, although she has internalized it. In an interview with Ameena Meer she situates herself firmly within American culture and asserts:
I totally consider myself an American writer... now my roots are here and my emotions are here in North America.\textsuperscript{12}

Her later fictional works are a part of her process of becoming and creating a "new self."

Mukherjee's next novel \textit{Jasmine} written in the United States is no longer about an expatriate but about an immigrant who just doesn't believe that one should hang on to an old culture, an old life just out of fear, paranoia or cultural arrogance. Moving away from themes of expatriation to immigration, what is suggested here is that breaking away from ethnicity and absorbing the new culture is the only way of survival. The novel carries the same title as one of the best stories in \textit{The Middleman and Other Stories}. Mukherjee shifts the narrative into the first person and places her heroine's origin in the Punjab rather than Trinidad, where the added weight of tradition makes the love affair with the possibilities of America all the more exhilarating. The protagonist Jyoti / Jasmine is widowed in a violent confrontation she witnesses and then raped in her attempt to sneak into the United States. Despite these difficulties she survives with grace, holding on to her capacity to make a new life for herself and saying at one point, "For me, experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill."\textsuperscript{13} From Florida to the stifling old-world Indian community of Flushing, then work as an aupair on the Upper West side where she falls in love "with the pleasures of being unconsciously American,"\textsuperscript{14} and on to Iowa. From Jasmine Vijh to Jane Ripplemeyer - though remembering the astrologer's prediction of her
widowhood keeps her from marrying the middle aged Iowian banker whose name she takes and whose child she bears and whom she leaves at the end of the novel moving on to California "greedy with wants and reckless from hope,"\textsuperscript{15} in love with "adventure, risk, transformation"\textsuperscript{16} through which she has redefined herself as an American.

\textbf{Jasmine} stands as one of the most suggestive novels we have about what it is to become an American. It celebrates Mukherjee's emotions and projects her as a writer of the Indian diaspora who cherishes the "melting pot" of America. It is a story of dislocation and relocation as the protagonist continually sheds lives to move into other roles, moving further westward while constantly fleeing pieces of her past. Jasmine is not in the grip of nostalgia but eagerly involved in the process of finding her "new self." It is a process of assimilation which the novelist is celebrating.

An important aspect of Mukherjee's evolution as a writer in the immigrant tradition is a portrayal of the story of a changing America as well. Having defined the process of adaptation and assimilation she focuses her attention on the condition of not just the Indian immigrants but Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention to the changes taking place in South Asian women in the New World. The immigrants go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they in turn alter the shape of American society. In fact, along with their creator they become part of that long procession of people who have over the years redefined America. Mukherjee herself draws attention to the shift in focus:
I am in fact writing about America more than about dark-complexioned immigrants. My focus is on the country. On how its changing minute by minute. My stories explore the encounter between mainstream American culture and new one formed by the migrant stream. I'm really writing about the seams joining two cultures. Many expatriate writers are destroyed by their duality, I personally feel nourished by it.¹⁷

Mukherjee's collection of short stories, The Middleman and Other Stories justifies this claim of being an American literary mainstream writer. It has a tone of affirmation, of belonging. Immigration is seen now as a process of transformation and net gain. It is a fascinating collection that depicts the problems of the people emigrating to America and the dream of a new life which tempts them to go there. It presents a rich vision of the New World through a variety of characters who hail from different countries of the world - China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Iraq, Trinidad, Sri Lanka, Italy, Germany, and Phillipines. The stories in the collection are a kind of summing up of Mukherjee's beliefs and have a dual aspect - they present the experience of the migrants before and after their entry into the New World. The emigration to America is achieved at a heavy cost. This is followed by a process of adjustment and transformation of the personalities who in turn redefine America.

The book which won Mukherjee the coveted National Book Critics Circle Award, presents the new, changing America which is the result of the
influx of the migrants from the Third World countries. In an interview with Alison B. Carb, Mukherjee points out how even the American family has become very different, not just because of social influences and new sexual standards, but also because of the interaction between mainstream Americans and the new immigrants.¹⁹ In the story entitled "Fathering," for instance, the secure life of Jason living with his girlfriend in a small town in Upstate New York is disrupted when the half-Vietnamese child he had fathered in Saigon comes to visit him.

There also appears a generous sprinkling of sexual encounters which proves to be an ephemeral bond connecting most of the characters. In many of the stories the protagonists are women who have an inclination to form relationships which terminate in sexual misadventure. The emphasis is on casual sex, ruthlessness, and the struggle for survival which is a disintegrating characteristic of the American society right from its inception. The stories portray the anxieties and disappointments afflicting the American society, but the immigrant experience is not shown as trauma or pain. The immigrants are not Americans in the making but are presented as part of the mainstream culture.

From expatriation to immigration, and from here onwards Mukherjee's fictional world aims at exposing Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in the United States:
I am inventing an America for myself. I am writing on America that hasn't been written about. The "frontier" is up there, in front of me. I am pushing it back all the time. This is what makes the new stories so different. They are a natural outgrowth of where I am. I feel it's the writer's business to write about his or her environment, whatever that maybe.19

This sums up Mukherjee's convictions about a writer's obligation. We have here a novelist whose voice tells the tales of her own experience to demonstrate the changing shape of American society. An immigrant often has the clearest view of what is really happening on both sides of the divide and Mukherjee sets herself the task of writing about how these energetic and diverse immigrants are altering the face of the United States.

In the transition from expatriation to immigration one cannot help but notice the force of violence that pervades Mukherjee's fictional world. Violence is a key word, a leitmotif in her works and the "psychic violence" that she thinks is necessary for the transformation of character is often emphasized by an accompanying physical conflict of some sort. As Jasmine claims, in violent destruction may lie the seeds of creation.20 The level of violence escalates as one moves from Tara's horror in The Tiger's Daughter, where she is, in two climactic scenes, seduced by a middle-aged politician and stranded in the midst of a bloody political riot, to Dimple's frenzied killing of her husband in Wife, and finally to Jasmine's
reincarnation as an avenging Kali in her desperate bid to find a foothold in the American way of life.

Lewis A. Coser argues that violence plays an important threefold role in society - as a "road to achievement," as a danger signal, and as a catalyst for social change, all of which can be seen in Mukherjee's works. It is definitely a gross truism and simplification to suggest, as some have done, that it is a mere "reflection" of what is after all a violent world. In The Tiger's Daughter, violence is always just beyond the carefully maintained order of middle-class life. Individual actions are shaped by, and/or reactions to the Naxalite revolution in Calcutta, and the imminence of the establishment of a Marxist government in West Bengal state. Tara, tutored by nuns in Calcutta, having studied in America and married an American returns to a violence-ridden Calcutta to recognize the impossibility of repatriation: specifically, the difficulty of resuming the role of a wealthy patriarch's daughter - over protected and escorted, hemmed in by the privileges accorded to women of her class. The novel ends with the expatriate protagonist, unable to establish her identity, hanging between two worlds. The climax finds Tara locked inside a car while a violent revolutionary demonstration surges through the Calcutta streets. She is convinced by these violent happenings that she needs to discard her past and embrace her home away from home and to her this is a physical wrench.
Violence is intrinsic with Dimple in *Wife*. It is a constant lingering tendency in her which waits for an opportunity to be expressed. Very early in the novel she contemplates abortion:

...she would have used something flashy - a red hot poker from the kitchen or large sewing scissors.... Who would have thought you could skip your way to abortion?²²

In America she repeatedly imagines murdering her husband because Amit has been the cause of her disorientation and had thwarted the promises of a fanciful world. She plans to hide his body in the freezer - a scheme whose extravagance she "delights" in, making her "feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a T.V. series."²³ These ill concealed sadomasochistic compulsions are precipitated by the violence-ridden and individualistic American life and culminate in her killing Amit. Mukherjee considers it a necessary experience for the remaking of the self in terms of the new immigrant aesthetic. She sees it as progress and considers Dimple's act as "self assertive."²⁴ Caught in the gripping quest for a new female American identity, Dimple needs to murder in order to be reborn. She is frustrated at other people's inability to understand her changing needs and desires, now that she is no longer confined to the social and cultural patterns of her past. She finds herself a prisoner of the ghetto in Flushing, Queens, and being an educated and thinking woman, she is unable to accept the contradictions of this existence: hence her descent into
depression, madness, and murder. Violence here becomes essentially symbolic of Dimple's assertion of power at a critical juncture.

The functionality of violence in Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* is both complex and ambivalent as it is in her earlier novels and short stories. Violence is the central theme of *Jasmine* and the protagonist is drawn both as a victim and as an agent of violence. In rural Hasnapur, violence is almost a necessary element of a woman's life. Girls are regarded as "curses" and strangled at birth. Dowryless wives and barren women "fell into wells, they got run over by trains, they burned to death heating milk on kerosene stoves." The ongoing transformation of postcolonial India too is punctuated by sectarian violence. The violence associated with the militant Sikh factions agitating for a new Khalistan in Punjab refuses to disappear. The Khalsa Lions terrorize and dominate the area. Even Masterji, Jasmine's progressive teacher, meets a violent reward for his mild advocacy of peaceful change. Sukkhi and his fellow revolutionaries scoff at his rationality; they chop off his beard and pump bullets into him. Again, it is a Khalsa Lion bomb that kills Prakash on the eve of the young couple's scheduled departure for the West. Transformed into a bloodthirsty woman, Jasmine demands the assassin Sukkhi's death from the police. As already stated, the novel's association of violence with transformation is its leitmotif. It steels Jasmine for a heroic self-destruction as a feudal wife and for her making abroad. Violence thus becomes the matrix of Jasmine's emancipatory struggle.
Jasmine's journey of self-discovery, taking her from a feudal condition to her migrancy and exile in the West, is marked by violence. If in rural Hasnapur she was a victim of violence, in the West she becomes an agent of violence. The imperative to control her life, to establish stability and identity justifies, in Jasmine's mind, her pragmatic readiness to use violence. In fact, she views recourse to violence as an affirmation of the will to live. In killing her rapist, Half-Face, she experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life-affirming transformation.

Jasmine forsakes a root identity and thrills as she shuttles between differing identities of her new postcolonial self: Jyoti / Jasmine / Kali / Jase / Jane. The destruction of each of the momentary condensations of self into particular named identities follows violence. In New York, as Jase, her burgeoning family intimacy with Taylor and his daughter Duff is shattered by a chance encounter with Sukkhi who shows up blandly pushing a hot-dog cart. Jasmine/Jase escapes to Iowa where she believes miracles can still happen; but there too, she learns that violence is a constant wolf at the door. The usually placid Harlan, angered at having had a loan request turned down by Bud shoots him in the back before turning the gun upon himself, fatally. Living with Bud, Jasmine takes on the identity of Jane Ripplemeyer, certainly destroying Karin's marriage to Bud not out of malice or groping acquisitiveness but out of a desperate will to preserve a precarious and interminably mutable sense of self.
Violence is also the strongest bond between Jasmine and her adopted Vietnamese son Du. Du's tinkering is a projection of his violent past onto his repressed and outwardly calm present and is linked to his future. Even before becoming an immigrant in America, Du has had two other lives - a violent one in Vietnam and another in a refugee camp. Now he is on his way to study engineering at Iowa State University. As Jasmine states, while violence in her case brought in a "genetic" transformation, in the case of Du it was "hyphenated."26

There is something spectacular and sensational about the violence associated with Mukherjee's characters especially her women. In acknowledging or even embracing violence they seem to mockingly state that it is not only men who can wield power. This may account for the puzzling fact that women, normally less prone to violence than men, have often played leading roles in revolutionary movements. At least in Mukherjee's works, participation in a violent world or violence once assumed seems to offer opportunity to the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the lonely for affirming identity and for claiming full womanhood hitherto denied to them. The functionality of violence is therefore obvious and cannot be dismissed merely as a sensational element or as a reflection of the violence which is an integral part of the West.

It is perhaps inevitable that considering Mukherjee's fictional universe is steeped in violence, it should at times elicit a response of fear and loathing in the reader. This is particularly true of her short stories. In
a story called "A Father" for instance, Mr. Bhowmick, driven mad by his modern daughter's betrayal of his most cherished traditions, batters her artificially inseminated but nevertheless pregnant belly with a rolling pin.

If violence is integral to Mukherjee's women progressing from being expatriates to self-willed immigrants, so is sex. Desire for material advancement and a thirst for sexual fulfilment become the central motif in the South Asian immigrants' self-fashioning in the New World and is a recurring theme in Mukherjee's short fiction, particularly in The Middleman. Quite a few of the stories have some kind of a sexual conquest in them. Sucheta Mazumdar's observation provides an explanation to the immigrant's attitude towards sex:

For immigrant women arrival in America can be liberating. Societal norms of the majority community frequently provide greater personal freedom than permitted in Asian societies.27

This is corroborated by Mukherjee herself who states in an interview with Runar Vignisson that a number of Asian women characters in the West coming as they are from very traditional and over protective background discover for the first time their sexual power and for many of them sexuality becomes a way of rebelling and wielding power.28 The momentary ecstasy when Dimple Dasgupta in Wife indulges in an afternoon's extramarital digression with a "genuine" American is a case in point.
Jasmine, the illegal immigrant of a short story in *The Middleman* is an aupair in a professor's home who is seen making love at the end of the story on the rug in front of the fireplace in the room that she cleans during the day everyday. She has had many affairs before in Trinidad, but she is enjoying her sexuality, she is discovering her own power as a social creature and she really is in control of the whole situation. In the act of making love she thinks how she has "no visa, no papers, and no birth certificate. No nothing other than what she wanted to invent and tell." For the diasporic Asian, sex symbolizes the anarchy of the self and the birth of a "new self." By this process Mukherjee's immigrants confront their own concealed desires and discover the new identities that they have fashioned in the new country.

This brings us to the question whether Mukherjee sees herself as a feminist. Before drawing a conclusion one needs to understand the term. "Feminism" in the present day context has come a long way from Simone de Beauvoir's petulant complaint in 1948:

This humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being.... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other.
Over the decades the term has come to denote an entirely new concept. Alice Jardine defines feminism as "a movement from the point of view of, by, and for women." Chaman Nahal further elaborates:

I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.

Thus as "a philosophy of life, 'feminism' opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society, along with men's claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; thereby offering a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanisms." Going by this definition Dimple Dasgupta, the protagonist of Wife represents a new kind of feminism in a new kind of America. She is by no means a passive person. Simply to withhold eating which is what Dimple does is to rebel. She is neither docile nor submissive and is portrayed as a rebel throughout the novel. She shows, in fact, the makings of a feminist quite early on, when she aborts her child in the privacy of her bathroom before the couple leave for America. She arrives in America naive and untrained certainly, but psychologically prepared to broaden her perspectives. She learns to ask herself "self"-oriented questions. Am I
happy? Am I unhappy? Mukherjee views this as progress. In an interview with Runar Vignisson, Mukherjee clarifies her stand on this issue and answers a question on whether she views herself as a feminist:

I don’t call myself any ‘ist’ and I don’t follow any ‘isms’. I think that my women characters are strong, they’re durable, things don’t always work out for them but the ones that I like, the ones that do alright, like Jasmine, are doers and they shy away from too much self-analysis, too much verbalising about the state of being. They dislike rhetoric, indulging in feminist rhetoric too often, but they end up really changing their lives.... Jasmine... ends up changing continents, changing cultures, coming from a feudal village world in Northern India, handling global terrorism and hurtling into a twenty first century which more or less has forced her into violent acts such as murder, mayhem, blackmail, forgery and in the end she even sacrifices or abandons the crippled lover in Iowa ... people like me have no ready made role models to follow... (no) tradition of feminism... we have to make the rules up as events occur...34

In this sense Jasmine is a very real feminist perhaps more than the self-proclaimed feminist. She is intelligent, she knows what she wants and she is able to change her life. She rebels not only against age-old traditions and
superstitions, she also effects a proper balance between tradition and modernity. As she takes on the perilous adventures in the New World the archetypal image that Bharati Mukherjee uses to bring out the protagonist's feminist trait is that of Kali, the Goddess of Strength, the deity of avenging fury - 'Death incarnate.' As Jasmine walks away with Taylor and Duff towards the end of the novel leaving Bud whose child she is carrying she retorts:

Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me reposition the stars... 35

This is the final affirmation of a true feminist.

Mukherjee's Indian men by contrast are often unromantic, overwhelmingly acquisitive and slightly comic. Their rejection by their romantic, sensual, sensitive, and strongminded women especially in her short fiction emphasize the crumbling masculine power structure in the South Asian immigrant community in the United States. The present-day feminist thought seeks to destroy masculine hierarchy, is necessarily pro-woman but this does not mean that it has to be anti-man, and Mukherjee is definitely not one. Whatever be the character, both her women and men are survivors, hustlers, 'wheelers and dealers' like the title story in The Middleman. They are victims of New World exploitation but they are resilient victims.
Although they are often hurt or depressed by setbacks in their new lives and occupations they do not give up. Mukherjee quotes the example of the Professor in *Jasmine* who used to be a doctor in his home country and is forced to sell human hair for making wigs or electronic equipment in some basement video store in Queens. The novelist presents him not as a pathetic character but as a resilient hero who will face all odds to survive.

Thus to discover, create, and retrieve America's multicultural myths and histories, Mukherjee rejects the expatriate's nostalgia. Her immigrant characters are settlers, Americans — not sojourners, tourists, guest workers, foreigners. She rejects the hyphen and the acceptable stories it generates — stories about immigrants struggling between two incommensurable worlds. As Mukherjee observes:

> Wherever I travel in the (very) Old World, I find 'Americans' in the making, whether or not they ever make it to these shores ... dreamers and conquerors, not afraid of transforming themselves, not afraid of abandoning some of their principles along the way.36

Mukherjee's fiction does not simply promote American multiculture or celebrate assimilation. To confront "the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States" and "the complexities of diasporic subject formation,"37 she not only represents the violences and pleasures of cultural
exchange, she fabulizes America, and Hinduizes assimilation. America is held accountable for its promises and favourite myths about itself: the nation and its people are diverse dreamers, generous, heroic, hard working, democratic, lovers of truth and defenders of equal opportunity for all. This American Dream offers possible worlds, unleashes the imagination. Despite its actual failures as Mukherjee represents in some of her short stories, this is its transformative power, and Mukherjee's work engages this most generous aspect.

Assimilation or the radical transformation from "the Other" into a mainstream American, to Mukherjee, is essentially an act of the imagination. Arjun Appadurai terms imagination as "now central to all forms of agency... a social fact and the key component of the new global order." Mukherjee's protagonist Jasmine passionately argues,

I do believe that extraordinary events can jar the needle arm, jump tracks, rip across incarnations, and deposit a life into a groove that was not prepared to receive it.

And again,

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's aupair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the
University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms?40

Only imagination as social practice and social fact can explain how people become "individuals" living out complex collective histories. It can also explain how people live in the midst of everyday epochal violence, instantaneous change. Mukherjee's belief in this power of the imagination to change, to transform, to assimilate arises out of her cultural tradition and religious upbringing:

As a Hindu, I was brought up on oral tradition and epic literature in which animals can talk, birds can debate ethical questions, and monsters can change shapes. I believe in the existence of external realities and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction.41

In the concluding sections of her book Days and Nights in Calcutta this is further emphasized. Mukherjee delineates her personal aesthetics as an immigrant writer and claims that her aesthetic "must accommodate a decidedly Hindu imagination with an American craft of fiction." She states:

A Hindu writer who believes that God can be a jolly, potbellied creature with an elephant trunk, and who accepts the
Hindu elastic time scheme and reincarnation, must necessarily conceive of heroes, of plot and pacing and even paragraphing in ways distinct from those of the average American. 42

This would mean that her narrative structures influenced by the Hindu imagination are radically different from those of the Western writer. Though her past identity as an Indian is something she has left behind, because she must, she has internalized it and sees the loss of the old culture’s storytelling and rich imagination as an impoverishment. The story should entertain, instruct, and witness as her own fiction does. In the short story "The Imaginary Assassin" from her collection Darkness, the narrator, a young man born in California, to Sikh parents, worships his grandfather, who was the first to come to the valley, to work as a farmer. The narrator loves to listen to his grandfather, who tells tales of old India. He doesn’t want to take up the ordinary life as an engineer which his parents plan for him; instead he dreams of the Sikh warrior tradition. His grandfather’s tales have magic and miracles in them - "headless ghosts, eager to decapitate, could hide in trees along dark country lanes." 43 After his grandfather’s story he has hallucinations and nervous spells that keep him from an aerospace scholarship, as Mukherjee portrays the poverty of imagination in American culture faced by Indians from a tradition rich with magic. In fact, Mukherjee filters her insistently American stories through what she describes as "a Hindu imagination; everything is a causeless, endless middle." 44
As an immigrant writer Mukherjee's "transformation-not preservation" theory is located not only in the rich imaginary worlds of Hindu epics, it is also grounded in the visual logic of the Moghul miniature paintings that so inform her aesthetic. As she observes:

My image of artistic structure and artistic excellence is Moghul miniature painting, with its crazy foreshortening of vanishing point, its insistence that everything happens simultaneously, bound only by shape and color. In the miniature paintings of India, there are a dozen separate foci, the most complicated stories can be rendered on a grain of rice, the corners are as elaborated as the centers. There is a sense of the interpenetration of all things.

Historically, Moghul miniatures signify cultural clash and exchange. This painting tradition was brought to India by Islamic invaders and conquerors. Moghul miniature paintings gather stories of India and Moghul rule together to create a multifocal field of vision, even as the different tableaux within each painting compete with each other for the viewer's attention. In a similar way Mukherjee's writing feeds off the freedom that "America" allows her to imagine and the different perceptions of reality that "India" allows her to imagine. As she suggests, "I want many stories going on simultaneously to distract, to crowd the reader's consciousness." Mukherjee's stories are about "every" character and detail in them, no matter how small.
The short story "Orbiting" in The Middleman is perhaps the best example of this argument. The setting is the Thanksgiving dinner, the all-American ritual family gathering, and the description of each character tells many stories. Rindy deMarco is a Jersey girl, first generation Italian American on her mother’s side, third generation Italian American on her father’s side. Her parents’ stories illustrate the process of assimilation over time; her father is "very American, so Italy’s a safe source of pride for him... (He) had one big adventure in his life, besides fighting in the Pacific, and that was marrying a Calabrian peasant." Rindy’s mother took a while to "find herself," stayed in the house for years, but now she’s taking a class at Paterson, and has given up her stories about the wolves, unlit outdoor privies, and hard work of her mountain village. Content living in her studio apartment and selling funky jewellery she doesn’t design, Rindy resists her mother’s immigrant faith that children will do better than their parents. Rindy’s sister Cindi is married to Brent who "in spite of the obvious hairpiece and the gold chain is a rebel. He was born Schwartzendruber, but changed his name to Schwartz.... His father’s never taken their buggy out of the country." Rindy’s ex-boyfriend, Vic, a romantic, just left her to follow a hunger for places. And now Rindy has fallen in love with Ro (Roashan), whom the family will meet for the first time at Thanksgiving. Ro has fled from Kabul and has been in the States for three months. He wants to take classes at NJIT and become an electrical engineer. A friend of Ro’s father, a man called Mumtaz, runs a fried chicken restaurant in Brooklyn in a neighbourhood Ro calls "Little Kabul."
As this supposedly assimilated American family gathers for Thanksgiving dinner, they bring together several incarnations, many cultures and histories and names. The details that Mukherjee chooses to describe Rindy's family result in the creation of several new stories which, like Moghul miniature paintings, revel in detail and juxtaposition. Questions race through the reader's mind - What machinations of fate, or international violence twinned with international commerce, locate the deMarco family's stories in the same frame? How does a famed warrior from Khyber Pass who keeps halal get involved with a Catholic Italian American from New Jersey? Once again, in America, past selves and their stories don't disappear; they get assimilated and transformed into new stories and Mukherjee resorts to detail and juxtaposition to focus attention on lives that have become a little more complex than our abilities to describe them. Like the Moghul miniatures, Mukherjee's writing creates fullness in short takes, crams a world of detail into fragments of story, compresses constant motion, travel, discontinuous overload. This is how immigration feels; this is how America feels; and this is how Mukherjee's stories represent the density of contemporary American experience.

If Mukherjee resorts to this narrative structure to establish a vast sense of perspective, it is because as she explains, contemporary Anglo-American fictional works fail to provide forms, and vocabularies, that can do this detail-oriented, noncausal work.
I'm interested in finding the right form for me and my characters, who are the kinds of Americans who haven't been written about before. So the characters of, say, an Ann Beattie are significantly different from mine because they have not been dislocated in such severe and traumatic ways. An oceanic or social view rarely creeps into contemporary American fiction. It is simply - well, not simply, predominantly - fiction about personal relationships. Even someone like Raymond Carver, whose work I admire very, very much, and whose stories are obviously meant to be tragic, is talking about small disappointments. Whereas in talking about Jasmine's life, I'm really talking about the history of current America too.51

It would be apt to recall here the similarities between the writings of Bernard Malamud and Bharati Mukherjee. Though their stories are set in different times - the 1930's and 1940's in Malamud's, the 1970's and 1980's in Mukherjee's - each speaks about the diasporic experience of cultural alienation and addresses the remaking of oneself as an American. Malamud describes the lives of East European Jewish immigrants and Mukherjee writes about a minority community from the Third World which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture. Mukherjee's husband, Clark Blaise, studied with Malamud at a Harvard Summer School Writing Workshop. Mukherjee herself acknowledges the debt:
Immersing myself in his work gave me the self confidence to write about my own community.\textsuperscript{52}

Both speak about the post World War II immigration from the East to the United States and allow us to see the narrative of Americanization from both the male and female perspectives. Malamud’s fiction is essentially tragic and his male immigrant losers earn our empathy through their humanity. Mukherjee brings to her fiction, despite its often tragic tenor, a joy that has much to do with her open-ended plots. Every story ends on a new point of departure. People are last seen walking out through an open door, planning an escape, or suspended on the optimistic brink of a blissful sexual transport. America is a receding infinity of fresh beginnings; they keep aloft on luck and grace.

Adopting Malamud as a Western literary model is an important factor in Mukherjee’s development from an expatriate to an immigrant writer, for in doing so she distances herself from her former diasporic literary models, V.S. Naipaul in particular, to accelerate her assimilation into the American cultural centre. Her literary journey is from the East of her first two novels \textit{The Tiger’s Daughter} and \textit{Wife}, to the West of her two collections of short stories, \textit{Darkness} and \textit{The Middleman}. \textit{The Tiger’s Daughter} has rather a British feel to it. In this novel Mukherjee adopts the omniscient point of view and a great use of irony. This is because her concept of language and the notions of how a novel was constructed were based on British models. The education that she received was
essentially British and she felt fascinated by English writers like Jane Austen and E.M. Forster.

By the time Mukherjee wrote Darkness and The Middleman she had adopted "American English." In her first collection of stories, Darkness, which she dedicates to Bernard Malamud, Mukherjee says she writes "as an American writer in the tradition of other American authors whose parents or grandparents had passed through Ellis Island." 53 Not only does she move away from her exilic identity, as mentioned earlier, she separates herself from the postcolonial expatriate writer, V.S. Naipaul in whom she "imagined a model,"54 as well as other women writers of the Indian diaspora like Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya who also maintain a voice of ironic detachment in their novels about Indian immigrants in England. On the other hand, she admires Walt Whitman and states:

It's possible - with sharp ears and the right equipment - to hear America singing even in the seams of the dominant culture. In fact it may be the best listening post for the next generation of Whitmans.55

It is remarkable that Mukherjee should come to see herself so clearly as an immigrant American rather than an expatriated Indian. Even more remarkable that she should declare:
Language gives me my identity. I am the writer I am because I write in North American English about immigrants in the New World.\textsuperscript{56}

Mukherjee's immigration is not so much her move from the Calcutta of the East to the Calcutta of the West (as she affectionately calls New York) by way of Canada, as it is her move from the English of Jane Austen to the American of Walt Whitman and a desire to be mainstreamed, to be seen as "the next generation of Whitmans."

In her later fiction, not only has Mukherjee vastly enlarged her geographical and social range, she has generally sharpened her style too. Her writing gets quicker in tempo, and certainly more confident. The spoken language of the characters corresponds to their actual thinking process. Commenting on Mukherjee's skill in handling the American language especially in \textit{The Middleman}, Jonathan Raban states:

Most of the stories are monologues, spoken by compulsively fluent talkers whose lives are too urgent and mobile for them to indulge in the luxury of the retrospective past tense. They hit the page in full flight, and they move through the stories as they move through the world, at speed, with the reader straining to keep up with them. Throughout the book, the idiom of America in the 1980's is handled by Ms. Mukherjee.
with much the same rapturous affection and acuteness of ear that Nabokov, another immigrant, brought to the idiom of America in the 1950's in Lolita. On one level, The Middleman is a consummated romance with the American language.  

There is an obvious change in her style because of her Americanization or acculturation. Use of words such as *indies* or *gringles* which may be familiar to the American ear but which must appear as slang to non-American ear, have a significance only for readers acquainted with West American literature. Similarly, the profuse employment of abbreviations such as NJIT, BMW, Ren Cen, Sci-fi novel, MCI, MTV, JFK can often prove an obstruction to the reader. Often in her short fiction, the conversations between characters do not proceed logically, one takes time to locate the speaker because one short statement by the speaker is unexpectedly followed by another sentence from the same speaker which upsets expectation and jolts the reader. Alongside this linguistic variety is the diversity and multiplicity of groups and organizations which assert their presence in America. They make the United States a mini-world infested with contrasting shades of religious and political idealogues such as anti-Khomeini Iranians, Hare Krishnas, American Fascists and so on. One gets the impression that United States is bustling with life of all sorts.

In short, while writing from first-hand experience of what she calls "the process of immigration," she writes not only as one born naturally to
the language, but to the culture as well. Its more than a matter of tell-tale little phrases and images - the pick up, the Braves, Ted Turner, finished basements, Tab and Reeboks, and Corning casseroles - it is a certain casual, street-smart, tough guy inflection that derives its slangy tone from television, films, and other forms of popular culture. Elizabeth Ward, who describes herself as a fellow immigrant occasionally having trouble with Mukherjee's rapid colloquial patter observes:

"In changing gears," somebody in one of her stories observes of his aristocratic Filipino girl friend, "she's right up there with Mario Andrett." How long do you have to have lived here before being able to throw off a perfect, all-American sentence like that?58

As far as Mukherjee's characters are concerned most of them, not all, are both socially marginalized and an enormous, heterogeneous range of rural groups belonging mainly to the lower rungs of society in their countries of origin. The women, Jasmine and Dimple, for instance, grow up in a traditionally repressed society. An important factor and perhaps deliberate, for it helps to bring out Mukherjee's belief in the New World by suggesting the desire of her characters to eradicate past lives, assimilate themselves in the new country of their dreams and acquire a new "self" or identity. With this in view she frames "stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond oneself to a new community, against the
ever present fear of failure and betrayal." The expatriates of Mukherjee's stories arriving from Asian countries confront displacement, alienation, financial insecurity being in a strange land without friends or a speakable tongue. Mukherjee speaks for them; she creates their voice and makes them collectively and instantly adapt to American values as immigrants, especially in many of her short stories.

Some ethnic and gender stereotyping remains in Mukherjee's delineation of characters. Her sympathetic Indians are largely female. The Indian men are unromantic, overwhelmingly acquisitive, and slightly ridiculous. However, it is noteworthy that as a writer, Mukherjee exhibits no problem while using male protagonists and writing many of her short stories in a first person account through a male person. The novelist attributes it to her skill in taking on other genders, other races:

...I am a sort of mimic, an unconscious mimic. If I hear an Irishman in a room for fifteen minutes I am very likely, whether I want to or not, to end up talking like an Irishman. I have that ability. I have a very acute ear I guess. I'm nosy as a writer. If I have decided to write about a person from a particular region or class then I will make sure I have every detail of speech, mannerisms, clothing, of trivia, sociology at my finger tips in order that just the right detail comes out at the right time.
Despite Mukherjee's abilities as a writer and her conviction that "there are people born to be Americans," she has not had an easy time commercially and critically with just being accepted. The material is too new and she doesn't do what is expected of an hyphenated American, of an Asian American writer. She refuses to acknowledge ethnicity, refuses to write about ghettos and her minorities are not endowed with a victim-status.

This is also where Mukherjee differs from the post colonialists. In an essay entitled "In a Free State: Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction," Gail Ching-Lang Low describes a seminar she convened on "the creative ways in which women of colour countered racist and sexist erasure in mainstream white culture." The group emphasized the importance of "re-memory," the struggle of memory against forgetting," recovery of "lost ancestral and cultural lines." When the group turned to Mukherjee's work they found that they could not fit her writings into the model of post-colonial and diasporic texts which they had collectively chalked out as important. Mukherjee seemed not to be concerned with preserving cultural identities and did not want to be labelled an "Indian" writer. She seemed wholeheartedly unapologetic about her celebration of cultural dislocation. Instead of consolidating cultural specificities against a dominant white urban America, she seemed to positively reject the "mothering tyranny of nostalgia." Mukherjee upholds this distinction and defends her immigrant spirit rather vehemently:
Those who decide, "all right, I'm going to go on with my life, the past is going to color my present and the present is going to color my future, but here and now, I'm a different person," these people reflect the spirit of immigrant writing by keeping themselves open to new experiences and responding second by second. They're changing and being changed. You are a new person every second of your life depending on how you act and whether you are open to bruisings and dentings. This energy is completely opposed to the postcolonial, who, if he or she is not within the immediate post colonial context, is simply talking about the past and ignoring or obliterating the present because it's so much safer to talk about a dead debate.64

Unlike the post-colonials who see migration as a loss of communal memories, the erosion of an original culture, Mukherjee sees assimilation as progress, as an emancipation, and as gain.

In taking this stand, one may say that her fiction is not divorced from social and political considerations. Her fiction is "a meditation on whole peoples on the move and how America is or is not responding to the fact of de-Europeanisation."65 In this decade of continual large-scale diasporas, scapegoating of immigrants can always become the politicians' easy remedy for all that ails the nation, by pitting a phantom "us" against a demonized "them". Multiculturism, as it has been practised in the United States in the
past years implies the existence of one central culture, ringed by peripheral cultures that are treated as aberrations. Mukherjee feels this can lead to the proliferation of ethnic ghettos which can prove very dangerous because embittered by racism and alienation the Indo-American, African-American, Latin-American and Asian-American segments of the population can easily "become the seething hot bed of terrorism, trouble or potential violence." At the same time she is also aware of some first-generation Indo-Americans who construct a phantom-identity more-Indian-than-Indians-in-India, as a defence against marginalization. Mukherjee's fiction demands that these expatriates discourage the retention of cultural memory which must lead to cultural balkanization. In this age of diasporas, one's biological identity may not be one's only identity. Erosions and accretions come with the act of emigration. Mukherjee advocates cutting oneself off from the biological homeland and settling in the adopted homeland. The immigrant should invest his energy and resources in revitalizing America's disadvantaged residents and neighbourhoods by fighting discrimination. He must make his voice heard choosing the forum most appropriate to him. In the case of Mukherjee that is what made her the writer that she is today. The immigrant writer, she argues, must transfer allegiance to the contemporary scene exclusively. In her enthusiasm to consecrate the melting-pot theory of assimilation that America subscribes to, Mukherjee declares the demise of material from the Third World in an article:
And (Third World) material is dead.

Let it die. I want to shout. We're all here and now, and whatever we were raised with is in us already.... That's enough. Turn your attention to this scene, which has never been in greater need of new perspectives.67

With the growth and diversification of Asian population, America has come to include people of many races, ethnicities, languages, and religions. Transformation is a two way process. If America can transform an expatriate into an immigrant the immigrant as an American citizen is also transforming America minute by minute by acknowledging his constitutional rights, seeking redress when they are violated and by making his vote count. Herein lies the social and political considerations of the novelist as an immigrant writer.

To conclude, Mukherjee's inability to return to India and the sense of her difference from other women novelists of Indian diaspora find resolution in her art - the marriage of the American and the Hindu imagination. It is the blending of two disparate imaginations that vitalize Mukherjee's craft. As a writer living and writing on the cultural divide she does not write about a lost home like a writer in exile. Mukherjee feels that as an immigrant writer she needs to focus on her present surroundings.
Like her fictional characters, she looks forward, since to deal with her present reality, she feels that reinvention of self without taking recourse to nostalgia is her strength. Although India will be part of the life of her imagination, it will not be central to her writing for her literary agenda is to explore new epics in the country of immigrants she will be living in. This realization becomes a defiant announcement - "I am one of you now" to her American readers. In that one sentence she asserts herself as an American in the immigrant tradition and consents to be part of that long procession of people who have over the years redefined America.
WORKS CITED


5. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p.241.

16. Ibid., p.240.


18. Alison B.Carb, p.351.


23. Ibid., p.195.


26. Ibid., p.222.


34. Runar Vignisson, p.6.


209


40. Ibid.


46. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

210


49. Ibid., p.62.

50. Ibid., p.64.


52. Alson B.Carb, p.650.

53. Bharati Mukherjee, Darkness, p.3.

54. Ibid., p.2.

55. Ibid., p.3.


59. Bharati Mukherjee, Darkness, p.3.

60. Runar Vignisson, p.7.


66. Ibid., p.4.


68. Ibid., p.1.