CHAPTER-IV

DIASPORIC INDIVIDUALITY

(THE TIGER’S DAUGHTER)

The Tiger’s Daughter deals with an upper caste Bengali Girl named Tara Banerjee Cartwright, who goes to America for higher studies. This study throws light on the cross cultural conflict of the 22yrs old heroine when she revisits India after a seven year stay in United States. It highlights the cultural turmoil faced by Tara when she refuses to accept Calcutta as her home again. This study also analyses how Tara, caught in a gulf between the two contrasting worlds, leads to her illusion, depression, and finally her tragic end in a violent incident. The author also attempts to portray how the novelist herself intimately projects her own self through the heroine in this novel. The Tiger’s Daughter reflects the confrontation between illusion and reality. Tara, the protagoninst was packed off by her father at early age of fifteen at America, because he was prompted by suspicion and pain for his country. Tara is homesick in Poughkeepsie. Little things pained her. She sensed discriminaton if her room mate did not share her mango chutney. She defended her family and her country vehemently. She prayed to kali for strength, so that she would not break down, before the Americans. It was fate that she fell in
love with an American. This novel begins with a reference to fate and astrology. It seems a device adopted by the writer around which she can weave her plots. Tara’s husband David was painfully Western; she was dutifully devious in her marriage. She could not communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta. Her husband asked naïve questions about Indian Customs and Traditions. She felt completely insecure in an alien atmosphere. Madisson Square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner. After a gap of seven years Tara planned a trip to India, for years she had dreamed of this return. She believed that all hesitations and all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could return home to Calcutta. With the precision of a newspaper reporter, Bharati Mukherjee leads her heroine through a series of adventures and dis-adventures to a final self-realisation and reconciliation. Tara’s homesick eyes noticed may changes in the city of Calcutta. She was outraged, and could not respond to these changes. She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Rao, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty places. What confronted her was a restive city which forced weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty. The writer interlinks the events-like Tara’s visit to funeral pyre at the river bank, her meeting with a small beggar girl affected with leprosy, the vision of beggar children eating off the street, the superficialities in the lives of her friends, the riots and demonstrations and her claustrophobic rape by the politician Tuntunwala to bring out the trauma of Tara’s visit to India. Tara’s visit to Darjelling is also marred by ugly and violent incidents. Many of Tara’s
doubts and conflicts are resolved by the strength, determination and quite dignity of her parents. Antonia Whitehead, an American lends Tara a fresher and clearer perspective about her country. Tara realized that her earlier responses to Calcutta had also been similarly impatient, menacing and equally innocent. The visit to the ashram of Mata Kananbala Devi makes her share of love for her mother as well as the worshippers. The Indian dream is shattered but the writer leads the heroine to a final reconciliation. At the end of the novel, Tara is involved in a violent demonstration, in which Joyob Roy Chaudhary, a symbol of the old world is brutally beaten to death. Pronob the youth tries to save him, but is himself injured in the process. This was a course of history, which could not be stopped. She felt she had made peace with the city, nothing more was demanded.” The Tiger's Daughter is a fictionalized story drawing from Mukherjee's own first years of marriage and her return home. This first novel addresses Mukherjee's personal difficulties of being caught between two worlds, home and exile. Displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity. Yet, a peculiar but a potent point to note is that writers in their displaced existence generally tend to excel in their work, as if the changed atmosphere acts as a stimulant for them. The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness.’ Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world
literature. The novel is divided into four parts to present the dangling personality of Tara. The first part deals with the family background and the past of Tara and interferences of native soil of Calcutta in the process of her settlement in New York. The second part deals with Tara's visit to India, her journey from Bombay to Calcutta and her reactions to India. The third one narrates Tara's life at Calcutta with her Catelli-Continental friends. The last part deals with Tara's visit to Darjeeling, her boredom and alienation at coming back to Calcutta and her victimization in a mob and her tragic end which remains mysterious.

When a person visits the unknown land by force or intentionally he or she has to struggle a lot for his or her survival with the feelings of nostalgia. He needs to transform himself into a new personality with emotional ties with the place he lives or lived in. This discovery of a new self slowly makes him forget his own native culture to some extent. There is split between two cultures the left one and accepted one. The novel reflects Mukherjee’s own experience of coming back to India with her American husband in 1973, when she was deeply affected by the chaos and poverty of India. The novel is full of conflict between eastern and western worlds. Tara was born in Calcutta, schooled in the States, and married to an American gentleman. After spending seven years abroad, beautiful, luminous Tara leaves her American husband behind and comes back to India. But the place she finds on her return - full of strikes, riots and unrest - is vastly different from the place she remembers. Yet Tara seeks to reconcile the old world - that of her
father, the ‘Bengal Tiger’ - with the new one of her husband David. Mukherjee sketched an Indian society from the perspective of Tara. Here she describes the struggle of diasporian for reconciliation between ‘exile’ and ‘home.’ The concept of ‘home’ is very important in human life. It is deeply attached with our existence in this world. 'Home' gives us the sense of belonging our own existence and identity. It tells us about our roots. The word 'home' ensures shelter, security, stability and comfort. 'Home' is an idea of a place where all is ours and we are also belong the surrounding society. For a migrant, the role of 'home' is equally important and delicate. Tara, the protagonist in *The Tiger's Daughter* comes across a kind of shock in her visit to India after seven years. The major character Tara Banerjee is an autobiographical presentation of the author herself who is also married to an American. In her Canadian Fiction Magazine interview, Mukherjee mentions that 'The Tiger's Daughter' has written in response to a request from an editor from Houghton Mifflin. *The Tiger's Daughter* is Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin of Calcutta and daughter of an industrialist known as Bengal Tiger, schooled at New York and married to an American writer, David. After her marriage Tara becomes Tara Banerjee Cartwright. Tara’s habit of using her maiden surname after marriage symbolically reflects her subconscious mind, at the threshold of attachment and detachment. She is still deeply rooted in her native land and has not been able to forget it still though she accepted identity of a European. There is a strange fusion and synthesis and confrontation as well in her Americanness and Indianness in the psyche. When she visits India, the alien
accepted western culture is constantly in clash with the culture of the native soil. Tara finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India, and sometimes with the traditions and way of thinking of her own family. She feels alienation in her own native land. Tara expected that her return to India would may offer her pleasant and secure. She says: "For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggar in the Railway station, and now the inexorable rain ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reverse. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offence"(25).

At the very arrival on the land of India at Bombay fills her with disappointment. Her arrival in India without her husband makes her to think: "Perhaps I was stupid to come without him, she thought, even with him rewriting his novel during the vacation. Perhaps I was too impulsive, confusing my fear of Newyork with homesickness. Or perhaps I was going mad"(21). Tara's journey from Bombay to Calcutta brings an equally disgusting experience to her. She experiences the change and deterioration of Calcutta in particular and India in general. She finds Calcutta in the grip of violence due to riots, caused by the confrontation between different classes of society. Her
changed personality makes her misfit in the company of her friends and relatives and makes her unable to participate in the ritual functions of home. Tara also feels that her mother's attitude towards her has changed and she too appears to be unhappy at her marriage. "Perhaps her mother, sitting severely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow" (50).

She is distorted mostly because of her marriage, which is unaccepted by her family socially and culturally in India. "In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac Street, her friends were curious only about the adjustments she has made" (62). Tara is confused and distorted by two personalities one of an Indian and the other of an American. In India she started to think to go back to her husband David so that she may able to feel comfortable and secure. Tara is unable to involve in ceremonies and family functions fully because she is unable to recall Hindu rituals and the ways of its performing. The novelist remarkably delineates the condition of Tara: "When the sandal wood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss. Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed
actions, it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center. But her mother came quickly with the relief of words” (51). Tara becomes alienated and Diasporic in her own mother land. The phrase 'cracking of axis and center' symbolically points out the psyche of Tara which has come in her due to the loss of her own cultural heritage. The novelist remarkably delineated the past cheerful days in ignorance. "And sad, Tara thought in spite of the promised ‘bhajan’. As a child, Tara remembered, she had sung ‘bhajans’……sRaghupati Raghava Rajaram. But that had been a long time ago, before some invisible spirit on darkness had covered Tara like skin" (54). Her friend Reena comments about her that she has ‘become too self-centered and European’. Tara tries to convince Reena that the life of Calcutta in spite of all the dark spots and drawbacks has its own life which is found nowhere else and which her husband David would not be able to realize in spite of his vision and knowledge of India. "She thought about Calcutta. Not of the poor sleeping on main streets dying on obscure thoroughfares. But of the consolation Calcutta offers. Life can be very pleasant here, thought Tara”(132). Tara compares New York and Calcutta: ".. much easier she thought it was to live in Calcutta. How much simpler to trust the city's police inspection and play tennis with him on Saturdays. How humane to accompany a friendly editor to watch the riots in town. New York, she confined, was a gruesome nightmare. It wasn't muggings she feared so much as rude little invasions" (69). Tara also feels that the Indians, who feel crazy for foreign things, dress and items but they do not approve marriage with foreign people. "They were racial purists, thought Tara
desperately. They liked foreigners in movie magazines-Nat Wood and Bob Wagner in faded Photoplays. They loved English like Worthington at the British Council. But they did not approve the foreign marriage patterns and the glamour of her marriage. She had expected admiration from these friends. She had wanted them to consider her marriage an emancipated gesture. But emancipation was suspicious it pre-supported bondage (86). Tara feels herself as misfit everywhere she goes. She is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are two worlds wide apart. Realizing that the reconciliation is impossible, Tara feels to go back to David. Her father, Bengal Tiger in order takes effort to entertain her and make her mind to accept the native land as her own by sending her to picnic to Darjeeling. But she goes to Air India office and reserves a seat on a flight to New York. Her journey is decided but after a short time of this reservation Tara becomes a victim of violence. The end of Tara remains mysterious and there is a suggestion that Tara does not survive in the violence of the mob which does not even spare the old man Joyonto Roy Choudhury. In this way Tara's journey to India proves as a quest for self and quest for immigrant psyche which prove frustrating slowly leading to her illusion, alienation, depression and finally her tragic end. Through the episodes Tara gets took place in India, Mukherjee remarkably shows the changed scenario of ‘home’. The dear native land cannot give her the minimum assurance of fulfillment of hope. The home is now no more heaven but hell with the presence of violent revolutionaries and deceptive politicians. Result is economic stagnation, class
conflicts, political chaos and insecurity in every sphere of life. After describing various dilemmas and experiences of exile and home of a diasporic individual, Mukherjee shows Tara a new routes and new modes of thinking for the ‘new world’ of changing political, social and cultural global scenario. The novelist has delineated wonderful projection of mental state of the diasporic individual in the novel. Tara is really at a loss and in frustration. She is unable to console and think and does not know what to do. She finds in confusion regarding how and what she may write the letter to her husband: “It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much when she was surrounded by the Bengal Tiger’s chairs, tables, flowers and portraits. She made several beginnings, seizing the specific questions he had asked as anchors against her helplessness” (63). The uncertainty of time, space, culture and identity are representative of Tara's chaotic experience in formulating her identity, but it may become the "new American consciousness," a consciousness comprised of many and with many more to come. America at early age of fifteen because he was afraid of situations at his mother land. Tara felt homesick in the school at Poughkeepsie, New York. She sensed discrimination when her roommate shared not her mango chutney. Even in discussions she defended her family and country very strongly. She always prayed Goddesses for power that she should not break down in front of the Americans. Whenever she felt despair and nostalgic, she used to create an India around herself. Once she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more Indian. It was only fate that she fell in love with David, an American,
painfully Western man. Like true Indian wife she was very dutiful, but devious in her marriage, she always failed to communicate the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta at her husband's na"\adic questions about Indian customs and traditions. Due to her split personality she doubts understanding of her country through her by her husband. Her Indianness is found in her use of typical Bengali terms and her habit of retaining her maiden surname after marriage. Her husband was after all a foreigner and she was feeling completely insecure in an alien country. Her doubts and conflicts are resolved by the strength, determination and quite dignity of her parents. Tara's perspectives about India were refreshed and cleared by Antonia Whitehead's decision to make India a home as she believed that India needs help. She thought that all her hesitations, fears at abroad will be magically erased if she visits her home at Calcutta and comes to India.

In India, through a series of adventures and misadventures she reaches to a final self-realization and reconciliation. Depressed and disgusted with deteriorating situation of India finally she determines to leave for USA to her husband. Actually, the fusion of Americanness and Indianness in Tara's personality results in inability to take refuge either in her old Indian self or in newly discovered American self. She comes with changed outlook to India and her very first landing at Bombay fills her with disappointment. Once admirer of Marine Drive, Tara now feels it as shabby: “Tara, lagging behind with several
nephews, thought the station was more like a hospital; there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks.” (TTD-19) Because of her supercilious attitude in air-conditioned compartments in America she ironically observes the Marwari as a circus animal and the Nepali as a fidgety older man with hair, both ruining her journey. At this situation she missed her husband David. This missing is symbolizing the demand of her American self, which leads her to repentance on her tour to India. She frets about David and thinks: “Perhaps I was stupid to come without him,…..even with him rewriting his novel during vacation. Perhaps I was impulsive, confusing my fear of New York with homesickness. Or perhaps I was going mad.” (TTD-21)

At the end of the novel, Tara finds that the past that she has uncovered is very much a part of her present, a situation that she has always feared. The experience of the South Asian diasporic woman is always delves "in between" worlds, where time and space have created a sense of psychological uncertainty. The state of uncertainty often disorients the individual, making one subject to an indeterminate identity, it also allows her to exist as many, expressing the voices of the multitudes that lie within her, and promising to sound the voices of those selves that have yet to be discovered.

After describing various dilemmas and experiences of exile and home of a diasporic individual, Mukherjee leads Tara to new routes and new modes of thinking for the ‘new world’ in connection with the fast changing political, social
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and cultural global scenario. The novel problematizes and thematizes Tars’s split self caught between her inner and outer worlds. The theme of acculturisation and adjustment to an alien culture, the trails, tribulations, the tremors and traumas that afflict immigrants in a foreign-soil have been very deftly delinedaed by Bharati Mukherjee. Tara’s harrowing experiences, her predicament as a marginalized self, pushed to the edge of her native world, her Old World of India, her failure to adjust to the New World of her choice have been graphically portrayed by the novelist. Tara endeavours to reconcile these two diametrically opposite worlds in her mind and heart but fails. Like Bharati Mukherjee’s other female protagonists, she is torn between her two socio-cultural milieus, between her rootlessness in an alien soil and her nostalgic longing for India, her homeland. As her first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972) is a story about a young girl named Tara who comes back to India after seven long years of being away, and on her return finds only poverty and turmoil.

The novel moves on with the independent story of Tara Banerjee, the great-grand-daughter of Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal Tiger (named so for his temperament), the owner of famous Banerjee and Thomas (Tobacco) Co. Ltd. At a tender age of fifteen she is sent to America for higher studies. Homesick and scared, she tries to adjust to the demands of a different world. Her adjustment travails are described in detail, often using the flashback technique. Tara’s early experiences in America—her sense of discrimination if her roommate
did not share her mango chutney, her loneliness resulting in her vehemently taking out all her silk scarves and hanging them around to give the apartment a more Indian look, her attempt to stick to Indian ways by praying to Kali for strength so that she would not break down before the Americans— all portray the cultural resistance put forward by an innocent immigrant who refused to be completely sucked into the alien land. As Kumar says, “an immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it and so does Tara in America” (31). Tara’s habit of retaining her maiden surname after her marriage symbolically reflects her subconscious need to be rooted in her native land. Circumstances so contrive incidentally that she falls in love with an American, David Cartwright. Tara’s marriage with David is reported in a summary manner, “Within fifteen minutes of her arrival at the Greyhound bus station there (at Madison), in her anxiety to find a cab, she almost knocked down a young man. She did not know then that she eventually would marry that young man” (Mukherjee 14). David Cartwright is wholly Western and she is always apprehensive of this fact. She could not communicate with him the finer nuances of her family background and life in Calcutta while he asked naïve questions about Indian customs and traditions. Her split self also raised doubt about her husband not understanding her country through her and in turn her concluding that he may not have understood her either. Thus she felt completely insecure in an alien atmosphere.
The new immigrant has to deal with people essentially different from him; he has to learn and understand alien ways, language; he has to face unaccustomed problems; in short he has to survive in a grossly foreign environment. After a gap of seven years she plans a trip to India. These intervening years though have changed her perception about her surrounding; she has not been able to override gender stereotypes and clings to past memories for sustenance. On her return to India her initial reaction is that of shock and disgust. At the airport she is received by her Bombay relatives and is introduced as the American auntie to the children and she responds to her relatives in a cold and dispassionate manner. When her relatives call her “Tultul” (nick name) it sounds strange to her Americanized ears. The railway station looks like a hospital with so many sick and deformed men sitting on the bundles and trunks. In the compartment she finds it difficult to travel with a Marwari and a Nepali. Now she considers America a dream land. When surrounded by her relatives and vendors at the Howrah railway station Tara feels uncomfortable. It is likely that she hates everyone and everything in India where she was born, brought up and taught many values, all because of her acculturation in America.

Mukherjee here shows that nostalgia and cultural memory are integral parts of an expatriate’s mental state but as one spends some years in the adopted country, the effectiveness of these things gradually wear out. One, then, finds it difficult to adjust to the ways of life and habits in the home country one has left years ago, particularly when the country goes through a serious socio-political crisis.
Similarly Tara Banerjee Cartwright is in an intermediate stage when she is unable to negotiate the cultural terrain of Calcutta she has left behind seven years ago and is looking forward to overcome the loneliness she feels in the alien space and to be part of the nation. As “each atom of newness bombarded her” at Vassar, she longed for her usual life in Calcutta (Mukherjee 13). Her attempts to communicate with fellow students were largely futile. There was an invisible wall between Tara and the White students. As the narrative claims, her privileged Bengali upper class background and an effective training by the nuns at St. Blaise School in Calcutta helped her survive initial problems of cultural adjustments. She clung to the religious icons and old cultural habits which comforted her in small ways.

Later, socializing with fellow Indians through gatherings in Indian Students’ Association helped her to ward off loneliness to a certain extent. She kept contact with her parents, relatives and friends through correspondences, which at the initial stage was of great emotional help. Her visit to Calcutta is designed to highlight her expatriate sensibility and to show the extant of psychological distance created as a result of physical separation from her home country and its culture. As the novel demonstrates, she no longer feels at ease with the Indian way of life, not even when she is in the midst of friends and relatives. This sets the stage ready for her eventual acceptance of the socio-cultural values of the new nation. As Rani says, “Assimilation and acceptance in the new culture appear impossible if the past is not forgotten” (83). Tara has no more an Indian identity and is always in clash with the culture of her native soil. The clash is deeply felt in
the psyche of Tara who finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India; and sometimes with the traditions of her own family.

Tara’s psyche is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. She feels both trapped and abandoned at the same time. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. This difficulty of choosing lies in her refusal to totally condemn any one world. It might have been easier for Tara to leave her past untouched if she could find her old home contemptible, but she does not. She does not fit in any longer. The outcome of this confrontation is her split personality:

The heroine finds it difficult to relate, since her marriage to an American and her Western education brand her as an alienated woman. Since Tara is exposed to the West and has absorbed its values, she must be necessarily alienated and, therefore, even if she tries to voice her continued attachment for, and identity with India, the voice does not carry conviction because it is at variance with the usual stance of indifference and arrogance as these are associated with the Westernized Indian. (Tandon 32)

Tara’s relatives attribute her arrogance to her American attitude to life and think that her seven years stay in America has transformed her thoroughly into a strutting peacock. But the fact of the matter was that she was not happy in America either:
New York, she thought now, had been exotic. Not because it had Laundromats and subways. But because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair. (Qtd. in Sunitha 264)

Tara’s mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities— one of an Indian and the other of an American. Caught in the gulf between these two contrasting worlds, Tara feels that she has forgotten many of her Hindu rituals of worshipping icons she had seen her mother performing since her childhood. She is convinced of her alienation when she forgets the next steps of the ritual after the sandalwood paste had been grounded “It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and centre” (51). The phrase “cracking of axis and center” symbolically points out, “the psyche of Tara which has come in her due to the loss of her own cultural heritage” (69).  

She even grows nervous and feels the changed attitude of her mother towards her: “Perhaps her mother sitting severely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow” (50). It is the American culture that has covered Tara like an invisible spirit or darkness. In the deepest core of her heart, Tara has an intense desire to behave like an
ordinary Indian but her re-rooted self in America made such common rituals alien to her. She realises that she has become rootless now. She has become an outsider looking at her own life, from outside. She sees everything with an American eye and comments on everything from the point of view of an Americanized Indian. She finds herself marginalized on the psychological level and suffers from a split self: Tara was literally, neither here nor there. She was a misfit with her Calcutta milieu and she was always under stress in America– trying to be correct, trying not to be a gauche immigrant, trying to be American. Tara is intelligent, highly educated and capable of self-analysis. She is conscious of her instability, insecurity and unhappiness. The conclusion of the novel duplicates the confusion of Tara’s character. The riotous and destructive mob outside Catelli-Continental hotel is merciless. Jittery, shivery and encased within a car surrounded by ruthless humanity, Tara feels the vulnerability of mortals. The turmoil outside is an external manifestation of Tara’s inner state of mind and by leaving her amidst that turmoil, Mukherjee hints at the irreconcilability of such conflicts. Tara feels herself, as misfit everywhere she goes. She is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are two worlds apart. Realizing that the reconciliation is impossible, Tara feels to go back to David. The novel ends with a chaotic scene and unable to present any transcendental vision. Tara’s stasis of imagination and general inability to do anything is also a reflection of the manner gender norms are internalized by girls. It is in India that Tara feels dislocated and displaced. In this way, Tara’s journey to
India proves as a quest for self and her immigrant psyche which proves frustrating, slowly leads her to illusion, alienation, depression and finally to tragic end.

*The Tiger’s Daughter* is an immigrant novel about returning home. An immigrant novel by definition is a prose fiction of some length that deals with the protagonist leaving his or her homeland and settling down in a foreign country to start a new life. In the process, the protagonist goes through trials and tribulations while settling down in the adopted land: fighting discrimination, getting married, finding work in short, and integrating into the county of adoption. Typically, the protagonist of an immigrant novel goes through the phases of desire, control, displacement, and integration. Although *The Tiger's Daughter* evinces all these characteristics, the primary event in the novel is the protagonist returning home after seven years of living abroad.

Seven years before the story begins, Tara Banerjee, the only daughter of a wealthy industrialist in Calcutta, on the East coast of India, was sent to Poughkeepsie, New York, to study at Vassar, a famous women’s college. After graduating, she went to New York to study for a doctorate in English. Meanwhile, she met, fell in love, and married David Cartwright, an aspiring American writer, while working on her doctoral dissertation on Katherine Mansfield.

The novel begins by Tara Banerjee returning home to her parents in order to reconnect with them, as well as with her other relatives, and her school and college friends she had left behind. Hence, the purpose of her visit is to rediscover
her roots and to understand more about her Bengali Indian culture. What begins as an innocent home-coming ends up as a sensational and frightening experience in which Tara is immersed in a proletariat uprising. Tara herself is caught in a riot that takes the life of a loyal family friend. Throughout the novel, Bharati Mukherjee expertly, and subtly, builds the tension between the aristocratic upper classes and between the factory workers, the proletariat and the poor. The last few decades have witnessed a remarkable change in the perspective of women in Indian English fiction. One of the reasons for this altered point of view has been the mass exodus of Indians to the West which posed before them narratives of broken identities and discarded languages amidst the basic difference between the culture of the West and the East. The expatriate writers or their writings have been able to transform the stereotypical sufferings of a woman to an aggressive or independent person trying to seek an identity of her own through her various relationships within the family and society. As a natural consequence their writings, reflect what we consider an expatriate sensibility generated due to cultural disparity and emotional disintegration. In this process it is the woman who suffers the most because of her multiple dislocations. She gets involved in an act of sustained self-removal from her native culture, balanced by a conscious resistance to total inclusion in the new host society. She carries the burden of cultural values of her native land with her to her new country, thus making it more difficult and problematic for her to adjust. She is caught between cultures and this feeling of in-betweenness or being juxtaposed poses before her the problem of
trying to maintain a balance between her dual affiliations. Nevertheless, along
with the trauma of displacement she is fired by the will to bound herself to a new
community, to a new narrative of identity. As Chowdhury asserts, “For a critical
evaluation of Bharati Mukherjee’s female characters, one must understand that all
her women characters are people on the periphery of all society in which they have
chosen to spend their lives; they are all immigrants and new ones at that” (93). In
this context we may review the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, whose writings are
largely honed by her personal experience as a woman caught in-between, which
itself has been described as a text in a kind of perennial immigration.

The ‘Self’ in the female protagonists of feminine writers like Bharati Mukherjee
occupies a crucial position in their psyche. The ordeal and odyssey of the self in
the novels of these writers is a mirror of their own transforming self. The
delineation of the self for these writers serves as a symbol of self-realisation and
self-actualisation. She relies on her past experiences of her protagonist, Tara
Banerjee Cartwright. The self of the novelist is projected through the harrowing
life of the protagonist Tara, who serves as her alter ego. Fakhrul Alam has rightly
observed, “A literary work is capable of providing role models, instill a positive
sense of feminine identity by portraying women who are self-actualising, whose
identities are not dependent on men” (22). Tara has a sense of her own identity. She
is a woman who is conscious of her feminity and is determined to vindicate it.
Tara grows up in the same environs as the novelist herself. Like her creator, she
goes to the US for higher education but fails to chime in with the changed milieu.
Her culture shock in a foreign land is a manifestation of the novelist's own sense of alienation and identity crises. At the outset of the novel, the novelist portrays Calcutta, a city which bewitches, absorbs and devours all. It is a veritable ogress. It horrifies and mystifies the individual self. In the words of the novelist, “There is, of course, no escape from Calcutta. Even an angel concedes that when pressed. Family after family moves from the provinces to its brutish centre, and the centre quivers a little, absorbs the bodies, digests them and waits”(4). For Mukherjee, change is a natural phenomenon in the cycle of existence. The self encounters the pangs and inconveniences of this change. It starts to submit, to acclimatize to the neo socio-cultural milieu with the passage of time. The novelist observes, “Changes in the anatomies of nations or continents as easy to perceive. However, changes wrought by gods or titans are too subtle for measurement. At first the human mind suffers premonitions, then it learns to submit”(7). Tara encounters a double culture shock - the first in the US and then in India. On her return journey to Calcutta, “the gestures, the tones of voice, the deportment and dismissals that she had forgotten in the States suddenly came back with dizzying assurance”(25). It is because the experiences in that alien soil were gradually fading away from her memory. She had never thought that they could be easily blotted out. Bharati Mukherjee projects Tara’s analytical and anguished self through reminiscential excursions. The darkness outside the window deepened, giving Tara time for unhappy self-analysis. For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had
bekieved that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta.

The novelist probes the feminine mind of Tara, one that is characterized by lacerated feelings cutting deep into her psyche and making her moody and depressed since she felt deeply the absence of her husband in Calcutta. Tara put away her pen and aerogrammes. She wished she had not come to India without her husband. With such abrasive feelings stemming from her affectionate longing for David, Tara gradually gets alienated from the metropolis of Calcutta which is too damned and confusing. She falls prey to its fast-changing milieu. “But except for Cama-Street, Calcutta had changed greatly; and even Camac-street had felt the first stirrings of death. With new dreams like Nayapur. Tara’s Calcutta was disappearing. New dramas occurred with each new bulldozer incision in the green and romantic hills. Slow learners like Tara were merely victims”(199).

More than thoughts, Tara lives in a world of feelings, which regulate her anguish and alienation. Husband and wife alienation figures conspicuously in the novel. There were frequent pen-services between David and Tara. David wrote regularly. However, the David of these aerogrammes, as the novelist avers, was unfamiliar to Tara. He seemed like a figure standing in shadows, or a foreigner with an accent on television. The alienation of David occurs only at the intellectual plane. Emotionally, Tara is one with David. When we look at her letter to David it is clear “I miss you very much… tell your parents to cable me if you get sick” (62). Muhkhrjee has elucidated the note of estrangement in Tara through her
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inability to visualize and reckon David in India. In fact, it is her journey back to Calcutta which has created a shadow picture of David in her mind which in turn makes her ill-at ease in her native place, “Tara could visualize his face in its eterninity, only bits and pieces in precise detail, and this terrifiefd her. Each aerogramme caused her momentary panic, a sense of trust betrayed, of mistakes never admitted. It was hard to visualize him because she was in India” (62). Thus, it was evident that change of laocal brings about a change of identity due to the loss of self. Exile and expatriation leads to the loss of identity. Tara had relinquished her American Self in America and now she ahs put on the grab of an India Self. Hence, David now appears to her as an outlandish and eerie being, an alien. In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foregner, and this foreginess was a burden. Now she was more concerned about acclimatization ands adjustment. She had made as an expatriate in America. That was what she talked about in Camac-Street. She hardly uttered anything about marital obligations and responisibilities. Sitting in an uncomfortable chair, she tried to compose a letter to her husband but could she? Though David was ger husband, she still floundered for words with which she could aptly ventilate her deep-seated emotional attachment to him. This is because both were alien to each other and the foreigness of spirit lay within them. It is this, which impeded emotional rapport between them. Mukherjee views, “under a framed photograph of her great grandfather, she was trying to compose a letter to her husband. It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much”(63). Infact, Tara still thinks Davis is a
foreigner. So how could she find emotionally satisfying words for her to David? Her estrangement is reflected in these letters where her voice was insipid or shrill and she tore them up, twining at the waste of seventy-five naye paise for each mistake. New York was a gruesome nightmare and Calcutta was a veritable hell. Then where could Tara find the perfect place? In both the West and East, she is the oddman out, a misfit. In both the worlds, she finds the note of estrangement. Tara is a victim of the social forces. Social happenings in the riot-torn Calcutta strifle and suppress her thoughts. She strts imagining David as an alien but ironically, she too becomes a stranger to her true and authentic self. Individualism and socialization subvert her identity. She loses her self and becomes depersonalized. She is nowhere and at the same time, she is everywhere. Though she drifts from place to place in Calcutta, yet in her imagination, America is still alive. Her husaband is called the ‘American Jamai’a nd she is called the ‘American Auntie’. In Calcutta, she is just a fragment of her real self. Alienation from her real self leads leads to her alienation from the society. Fragmentation of her self is one of the manifestations of her alienation from society. However, Tara is also self-alienated. She is internally split into two parts, which have become alien to each other -The Indian and American. Mukherjee looses herself in the character of her protagonists, be she Dimple or Tara. Therefore, a strange solidarity between her and her protagonists seem to exist in her novels, even in the short stories she has penned till date. Loss of her identity, her connected transformation into another personality, that is to say her protagonists, serves as
apre-requisite condition for her creative act of writing. Dante has rightly pointed out that every body who wanted to represent a figure must be that figure. The noted German romantic, Novalis, believes that the artist becomes everything he sees and wants to be. Flaubert too advocates and pleads for this creative loss of self. Displacement, defined here as the inverse relationship between the self and place, is a major theme of *The Tiger’s Daughter*. It is not to be understood as being displaced from one’s home because of a natural disaster like an earthquake or a hurricane. In immigrant novels, a displaced person undergoes a gradual process of settling down in the new place. Tara’s displacement is happening to her in her own birth country where she returns after seven years. In the context of this novel, displacement is as much of a mental state of being as it is a physical state. From the moment she arrives back in Bombay, Tara begins noticing various mannerisms, diction and accent, and exaggerations among her relatives that she finds alternately amusing and irritating. She is a person of a taciturn disposition, not given to expression of emotion. As such, Tara describes their exaggerated gestures of hospitality, combined with aggressive profession of their love for her, with irony and subtle sarcasm. Unable to fit in with the society she has left behind, Tara Banerjee is also unable to appreciate the fierce, raw tribal love that her relatives seem to feel for her, expressed innocently and freely. In the West, people need to be in contact to have a relationship, regardless of how closely they are related. In India, by contrast, contact is not a necessary condition for family ties; the fact that one is related by kinship is enough for people to show affection to
each other, even if they have literally never met before. Tara is not accustomed to this and feels very alienated from her relatives and friends. A second theme in this novel is actually a consequence of the first: alienation. In the context of immigrant novels, alienation is a part of displacement during which the alienated individual goes through a period of very uncomfortable adjustment, especially in relationships. Tara seems to be unable to establish a relationship with anyone, not even her husband, David. Only her parents seem to be exempt from caustic criticism, although she seems unable to talk to them. The second form of her alienation seems to come from her adverse relationship with Calcutta society at large, the working poor, those whom her father, employs and gives them pitifully low wages and exploits them in every way. Alienation is a form of displacement.

Tiger Banerjee, Tara's father, is a wealthy industrialist and head of the Banerjee household. He sees himself as not only the master of his household, but also of everybody and everything in the entire factory that he owns. Consequently, his personality is imposing and his style imperious. Surrounded by money, power and sycophants, Mr. Banerjee never takes no for an answer. Because of his position and influence, Tiger has to do nothing. But with Tara, who has been living in America and is therefore not under his control, Tiger’s approach is silence. He would rather say nothing when things did not go his way where Tara is concerned. But the real shock to him occurs when his workers rise up against him. Joyonto Roy Choudhuri represents the aristocracy of the past. He is loyal to the Banerjee family, and ultimately gives his life for them.
However, he is completely out of touch with the reality of the world outside his immediate parameters, which are mostly the Catelli Hotel. He is snobbish and snooty. Most importantly, now that he is old and no longer working, he has become simply a parasite, living off the labor of working class. His last and only redeeming act is when he gets killed while trying to save Tara in the riot. When Tara first meets Mr. Tuntunwala during her long train journey from Bombay to Calcutta, he hardly makes any impression on her with his diminutive body and nondescript personality. Once off the train, Tara does not give another thought to this man. It is only when he reappears at the industrial fare, where Tara is in attendance with her friends, that the reader realizes that the author is perhaps not quite done with Mr. Tuntunwala. In the second phase Tara realizes his social importance which is similar to her father both in terms of wealth and power which is akin to her father's position in terms of wealth and power. Having realized that, she seems to be more amenable to him. When Tutunwala manipulates events in such a way that Tara ends up in bed with him, there is no indication that she resists money and power talk, even for Tara. The women portraits are the spokesperson of her own experiences; through them she extricates trials and tribulations. Instead of limiting to the constricted paradigm of deliberation, alienation also refers to the concept of transnationalism, multiculturalism and the theory of Diaspora. The idea and usage of transnationalism came into vogue with the term “transnational nation” by Randolph Bourne in 1916. The spotlight is on both transnational communities represented by Bharati Mukherjee as well as
transnational interpretations represented by the characters in her novels and short stories and their experiences. Transnationalism in Bharati Mukherjee is a broader expression. The intrinsic train-gular relationship exists between her as a migrant, and the “place of belonging” that is, India and destination countries—first Canada, and finally America, which in due course became the “place of belief”. While it is difficult for an Asian person to assimilate into American culture, it is similarly difficult for an Asian-American to assimilate back to his native country. In a paradoxical situation, Tara Banerjee in *The Tiger’s Daughter* is alienated in her American set of connections and then alienated from her roots of pedigree. She suffers the spasm of estrangement which is awfully unfortunate. Her pain of alienation is evident not only in Canada and America but even in her indigenous terrain of Bengal and wonders “how does the foreignness of spirit begin?”, when she returns to India after seven years. It is at that moment she excruciatingly realizes that she is neither an Indian nor an American. With the advent of globalization, Diaspora, in particular, has attained new connotations, significance associated with design such as global deterritorialisation, trans-national migration and cultural hybridity. The novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a materialization of the diasporic community and hence alienated. Tara Banerjee, the main protagonist, is the ‘other’ disjointed community who struggles to hook-on to the nationalized community by entering into the wedlock Shukla and Banerji with an American, David Cartwright. According to Milton Gordon, the eminent sociologist, inter-marriage leads to marital assimilation which is an “intermixture of the two ‘gene
pools’ which the two populations represent, regardless of how similar or divergent these two gene pools may be”. David Cartwright is wholly Western. The more Tarn becomes cognizant of this point of divergence between the Indian wife and the American husband, the more she is apprehensive of the verity that she is a detachable entity from the nationalized community. Her first manifestation of alienation in a territory of immigration is through *The Tiger’s Daughter*. Tara Banerjee, the key protagonist, is a Brahmin girl who travels to America for advanced studies. In order to assimilate herself to her new surroundings, she marries an American like Mukherjee did. A sociological theory, proposed by Glazer and Moynihan (1970) arose in the sixties. They proposed a ‘melting pot paradigm’, which takes a closer look at the process of migrants’ integration in the case of New York City. The authors argue that migrants like Tara Banerjee are more prone to assimilate to a common (American) model but at the same time they increasingly retain their ethnicity more than ever. Tara Banerjee evaluates her life and ethics with that of her husband’s. Contrary to the cultural belief; her ethnicity comes to direct blows when her conjugal life which was supposed to be based on the standard code of ‘union’ identified by her right from her childhood, was actually based on the principle of ‘contract’ as identified by her husband. The wistful, passionate sensitivity of an immigrant for her mother country is dashed to pieces when it comes into direct blows with reality. The “Americanization” of her finer sensibilities; her unruffled and frosty response to her nickname ‘Tultul’; her response to her relatives’ house which seemed elegant and chic to her previously
looked shabbier afterwards startle her. The character of Tara is aghast and horror-struck at this swing in response. Tara is an immigrant ‘sandwiched between personality’ woman and suffers the ‘duality and conflict’ very divergent to her American life. The moral fiber of Tara’s character, like the novelist, suffers from the cultural dichotomy “surrendering those thousands of years of ‘pure culture’”. The ‘epidemics, collision, fatal accidents, and starvation” of Calcutta, the omnipresence of her husband David in the midst of rioting rabble and her own westernization over the period of seven years add to her anguish and misery. Not only “alienation” but also the “transcendence of alienation” is an inherently histol concept. Bharati Mukherjee learnt to overcome the traumatic experiences of the ‘other’ from her mentor Malamud but at the same time she realized the different sense of self, of existence and of mortality that differentiated her from Malamud. Tara unveils many aspects of the immigrant experience of the novelist in America. The experiences of her characters in their homeland and abroad echo her own concerns, her beliefs and faith. Simultaneously they also reflect her growing and transforming identity as an American. Through her literary works, Mukherjee apparently loses a part of her ‘self’ which to Falubert is a creative loss of self. The duality of existence has been to her, especially as a writer, a blessing in disguise. It is a boon because it creates an enriching sense of accomplishment. The circumstances however forced her to fall in love with David, an American. Mukherjee’s description of Tara’s chance of meeting with David betrays her faith in the inevitable. To quote the novelist: “Within fifteen minutes of her arrival at
greyhound bus station there (at Madison), in her anxiety to find a cab, she almost knocked down a young man. She did not know then that she eventually would marry that young man” (14). She married David Cartwright, a westerner. Tara could not communicate to him about her family, her background and of life in Calcutta. This failure of communication is rooted in their cultural differences. In India a marriage is not simply a union of two individuals, it is a coming together of two families as well. But in western countries like America, a marriage is simply a contract between two individuals. He asked credulous questions about Indian customs and traditions while she felt completely insecure in an alien atmosphere because after all her husband was a foreigner. After a gap of seven years Tara plans a trip to India. For years she had dreamed of this return and she thinks that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of her stay abroad would be erased quite magically when she returns home to Calcutta, but this never happened. It was so because she was no more Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, but now she is Tara David Cartwright an Americanized lady who fails to bring back her old sense of Indianness. Her entire outlook has changed. Shobha Shinde, a critic, refers to this expatriate weakness thus: “An immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it. So does Tara in America but when she sees her own changed outlook, she feels broken. She realizes that she has lost her childhood memories in the crowd of America. Her landing at Bombay airport made her realize: “had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite
magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine drive, then the deformed beggar in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offence” (5). To her Bombay railway station was like a hospital where so many sick and deformed men were sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks. Even her nick name sounds strange to her Americanized ears. Her seven years stay at Vassar had changed her outlook on life, though America did not fascinate her. Staying at her paternal house in a peaceful mind she recalls the images of New York. New York, she thought now, had been exotic. Not because it had Laundromats and subways. But because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. It is because students were rioting about campus recruiters and far away wars rather than the prices of rice or the stiffness of final exams. People were agitated over pollution. The only pollution, she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair. In America Tara was always under stress being conscious of her foreignness. She felt rootless but things do not appear better in India also. Tara herself wonders at the foreignness of her spirit which never permits her to develop any kind of emotional bonding with her friends and relatives. At one place, the novelist writes: “How does the foreignness of spirit
begin?........does it begin right in the centre of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white head-dresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun?”(37). She meets her friends but even their company can not soothe her. She recalls: “Seven years ago she had played with these friends, done her homework with Nilima, briefly fancied herself in love with Pronob, debated with Reena at the British Council. But now she feared their tone, their omissions, and their aristocratic oneness” (43). Tara forgets the next step of ritual while preparing for worship with her mother and she realizes that it was not a simple loss. At once she becomes aware of what America has done to her because religion plays a central role in any culture and the forgetting of the ritual upsets her. This gradually leads her to develop a split personality: When the sandalwood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the shiny stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions, it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and centre. But her mother came quickly with the relief of words. She begins to rethink over the validity of her identity. The only place she would find pleasure was The Catelli-Continental Hotel on Chowringhee Avenues and she spends much of her time in that hotel with her friends. Many parties, many teas and many dinners were hosted in the honour of Tara’s return by her friends. At first Tara looks forward to these parties but later the conversations of her friends aggravated her discomfort and unease in her marriage burdening her heart.
It seemed to her that by marrying a foreigner she had committed all the seven deadly sins: “In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac Street; her friends were curious only about the adjustments she made” (62). Tara notices a lot of change in her surroundings and feels agitated at the lack of seriousness in the group of her friends. Everybody wants to hear about her experiences in America. In this scenario, she misses David excessively. Though she writes to David regularly, she fails to communicate her feelings to him because: “It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much when she was surrounded by the Bengal Tiger’s chairs, tables, flowers and portraits. How can she describe in an aerogramme the endless conversations at the Catelli-Continental, or the strange old man (Joyonto Roy Choudhury) in a blazer who tries to catch her eye in the cafe, or the hatred of aunt Jharna or the bitterness of slogans scrawled on walls of stores and hotels. Tara visits a funeral with Joyonto Roy Choudhury the owner of a tea estate in Assam. There she had an encounter with a Tantric who asks her hand for forecasting but she misunderstands his intentions and thinks that the man needs bakshees. This misunderstanding again shakes her belief in her identity. Joyonto Roy shows her the vast compound of Tollygunge which is now occupied by the refugees. Tara was bewildered by her first view of the large and dusty compound. She thought if she had been David she would have taken out notebook and pen and entered important little observations. All she saw was the obvious goats and cows grazing in the dust, dogs chasing the
friskier children, men sleeping on string beds under a banyan tree. Children playing with mud beside a cracked tube well. Tara loses her balance of mind when she sees a little girl suffering from leprosy and she almost screams out of fear of touching her. Tara had never been a part of the crowd. She had always been protected as a child and later as a woman. Disease, suffering and poverty are part of Indian existence and a common Indian ignores it or rather accepts it as an integral part of life. Once Tara also used to ignore all these, but her stay in the United States created a gulf between the lives of poor and those of rich in her own country. Like the people of the West now she had started looking at India as a land of poor people living in hostile, unhygienic conditions, quite accustomed to sufferings, starvation, decay and disease. Tara also testifies to the fact that she has not been able to understand the complications of American culture. In this way her mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities -- one of an Indian and the other of an American. During such moments she feels like going back to David, her husband because she would be more at ease there. Tara moves to Darjeeling with her family and friends for a brief holiday where she enjoys the evergreen beauty of hills, but some ugly and violent incidents destroy her trip. Like while accompanying Pronob and an American Lady Antonia on a horse ride, she is teased by some hooligans. Again she is insulted by one of the judges of the beauty contest, while giving some suggestion. All these incidents disturbed and troubled Tara’s heart. Everything appears frustrating and horrible to her on finding that conciliation is impossible and she frets to go back to David. She reserves a seat on
a flight to New York. After a short while she becomes a victim of violence caused by the marchers who were proceeding towards the Catelli- Continental in a mob. The old man Joyonto Roy Choudhury is unfortunately killed by the mob. The end of Tara remains mysterious but it is predicted that she does not survive in the violence of the mob. Locked in the car she only thinks about her husband David, and the novel ends with these lines: “And Tara, still locked in the car across the street from the Catelli – Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she did not, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely”(210). Thus Tara’s journey to India, her own native land ironically proves frustrating gradually leading to illusion, alienation, depression and finally her tragic end. The greatest irony hidden in the story of Tara is that she survived the racial hardships in a foreign country where nothing unbecoming happens to her but she becomes a victim of her tragic end in her native soil, which she has longed to see since her stay in New York. Her desire to find a place of love and security which she missed in New York ends ironically in frustration, and the irony is that this Indian born woman feels greater love and security in the arms of her American husband and thinks only about him at the time when her end is approaching. In this way the immigrant’s return to her own country proves frustrating both physically and metaphorically. The gulf of western liberation and Indianness cannot be bridged and Tara’s psyche remains split like other immigrants. In The Tiger’s Daughter Mukherjee sets about exposing how it feels for a fifteen year old girl to leave a sheltered home hedged by class privilege and
wealth and settle in an alien land. In her phase of womanhood she breaks all the social taboos by marrying a foreigner and then coming back to her homeland to see whether she can find her place at home again. Tara Banerjee the main protagonist of the story, an upper class Indian Bengali Brahmin, finds herself sandwiched between two cultures. Her America, far from being a land of promise, is a land of violence and aristocracy. It is a land of strangers and all her attempts of assimilation proved to be a failure due to her otherness with the culture. She breaks her family tradition by marrying David who is an American. This action of Tara is an attempt to get security in an alien land. But again her marriage proves to be a failure because it was an emotional marriage, a decision taken impulsively. Inspite of trying hard she is not able to develop a compatibility with David while he and his society always remained different to her. Being in India she always wanted to communicate with her husband about her experience, but she could not. She was unable to write a letter to David because of the lack of suitable words and in an appropriate voice. Her voice in these letters was insipid or shrill, and she tore them up, twinging at the waste of seventy five naya paise for each mistake. This strangeness from David’s side as well the non acceptance of her marriage by her friends and family made her feel that her marriage was a wrong decision of her life. Even when there is an encounter with the tantric, Tara does not want to show her palms to the tantric because she is conscious of her sin of marrying an American without matching her horoscope. Tara’s situation becomes miserable oscillating between the two identities one of an Indian Bengali woman, and other
of an American wife. In an attempt to Americanize herself she loses her Indian identity miserably. Tara Banerjee is not only an immigrant but also a woman. This creates a difference in the Indian context. In India a woman’s fate is decided very early in her life because the parents start discriminating between their male and female child from the very beginning. It is constantly hammered on the girl’s consciousness that she has to move somewhere else so she must be submissive and assimilative in every situation. Thus a woman starts a life of duality and conflict since her childhood. After marriage she is in the hands of new people that belong to an entirely new set up. This in itself is a kind of migration – a migration from one’s own former self to an imposed one. This conflict and duality gets multiplied with migration to another country, and Tara’s situation should be looked at from this angle. Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrant life in America. Mukherjee’s women are brought up in a culture that presents them with such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich culture and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the new learning imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other. These different influences involve them in tortured processes of self recognition and self assimilation right from the start; the confusion is doubled upon coming to America. Roshni Rustomji Kerns, however, describes her failure to her constant haunt regarding her role as a Bengali wife of an American or an American wife of an American: “Tara’s petulance and constant nervousness regarding her role as a Bengali wife of an American, visiting
her family in Calcutta; overshadows her well intentioned efforts to understand her worlds of diverse cultures” (Massachusetts Review, winter 1988-89, 657). There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and the Indianness in the psyche of Tara and they are always confronting each other. She makes efforts to establish her American self but it always disturbed the Indianness within her. In her visit to Calcutta, her American self could not take the sight of the refugees in her own country. She behaves like western tourists. The uneven road to Tollygunge troubles her a lot. She cannot bear the dust and foul smell of squalor. This outcome is because of her split self. Finally she becomes depressed and disgusted with the deteriorating situation of India finding it difficult to adjust with the situation, desiring to go back to the USA to her husband. Tara realizes that America has transformed her completely. She is not able to give an Indian outlook to her own country. Now she finds only disease, despair, riot and poverty in India and it is the ugly aspect that borders her consciousness. In her mind there is always an ongoing conflict between her old sense of perception for country and her changed outlook. To quote Jasbir Jain, a critic, in this context: “Tara’s consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the states and when she looks at India anew it is not through her childhood associations or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David. Her reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner” (Journal of Indian Writing in English, 13).
To conclude, Bharati Mukherjee has very deftly handled the inner psyche of the culturally uprooted expatriates. Their trials of adjusting themselves to a new culture and the traumas of their torn individuality are very well reflected in the character of Tara. Tara is shocked to find herself unable to sing the particular bhajan, an Indian devotional song, which she used to sing in her childhood. She has an intense desire to behave like an ordinary Indian but her rerooted self in America has made such common rituals alien to her. She is haunted by the question of her identity, as to who she is and which place she belongs to. Tara is really astonished and wonders how this foreignness of spirit begins in her heart. Bharti Mukherjee writes: “How does the foreignness of spirit begin? Tara wondered, does it begin right in the centre of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white head dresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun? The nuns had taught her to inject the right degree of venom into word like. Common and vulgar... Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls, Protestants Matrons and Johnny Mathis?” (37). What the critic actually finally arrives at is that the distance Tara has traversed cannot be retraced as there is no way out, for the immigration is not only of the place but of the mind too. It is impossible for the immigrants to again relate themselves with their own country, and this is what Bharati Mukherjee has presented in The Tiger’s Daughter.
Mukherjee’s fictions are centric to the question of nostalgia for a lost home, disillusionment of expatriation, fragmentation of the self, exuberance of immigration, assimilation, cultural translation and negotiation. She selects to explore a fluid society in her novels -- a society in flux. Mukherjee’s sixth novel Desirable Daughters (2002) marks a new trend in her writings. She holds the view that “The authentic Strategy for this book was also using the width of the field of history, geography, Diaspora gender, ethnicity, language - rather than the old fashioned, long clean throw”(1). In her earlier novels, diasporic transmigration destined new opening and emancipation from the clutches of convention bound society. In the same manner, attachment to one’s own native culture and homeland, while living in an alien space was presented as something to be spurned and total assimilation into the host culture was hailed. It is to create a location of the presence that reduces the diasporic individual to delink the past and (de)construct the future. It is a society of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of machines, flow of criminals, flow of exterritorial power structure, even we have the crossing of geographical boundaries when Tara in an assay to search her roots remembers her ancestral ties with Tara-Lata, the ‘Tree-Bride’ of Mishtigunj.
She was attempting to redefine the importance of her cultures through space and time. Sense of home plays a significant role in Tara’s construction of her identity: “We have to stop living in a place that’s changed on us while we’ve been away. I don’t want to be a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber, Didi, I can’t deal with modern India, it’s changed too much and too fast, and I don’t want to live in a half-India kept on life-support” (19). Mukherjee confesses in one of her interviews that Tara, the protagonist of her novel Desirable Daughters (2002), speaks about the American quest to discover who is she? Where does she come from? Tara's search for roots takes her to India, and the land of her origins, and the impacts of which are mostly on her identity in the migrated country. It helps her to form transnational identity, yet she is caught into another predicament and raises the question whether she is Indian Bengali Brahmin or immigrant American or somebody else. He expresses sly response to the doctrinaire multiculturalists who demand that she writes about their own kind. She’s done just that, with precision and mockery and strong reminders of dangers inherent in narrow cultural self-definition. She begins the novel by telling the story “The Tree Bride” which has influence on the rest of the book. Jai Krishna Gangooly was a pleader at Dhaka High Court. A Bengali Brahmin, he was a staunch believer in Hindu culture. He had three daughters, Tara Lata, Parvati and Padma. The youngest named Tara Lata was five years old and he arranged her marriage. “The youngest dressed in her bridal sari, her little hands painted with red lac dye, her hair oiled and set. Her arms are heavy with dowry
gold; bangles ring tiny arms from wrist to shoulder. Childish voices chant a song, hands clap, gold bracelets tinkle. I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her” (4). Just before the wedding, however, the bridegroom’s father increased his demands for the dowry. Refusing to be cowed into submission, Jai Krishna took his daughter into a deep forest and married her to a tree, and thus Tara became known as Tree Bride. “Tara Lata is five year old and headed deep into the forest to marry a tree.- And so may history begins with a family wedding on the coldest, darkest night in Bengali month of Paush-December/January-in a district of the Bengal Presidency that lies east of Calcutta- now Kolkata-and South of Dacca-now Dhaka-as the English year of 1879 is about to shed its final two digits, although the Hindu years of 1285 still has four months to run, the Muslim year of 1297 has barely begun”(5).

Mukherjee’s description of characters is exiles caught between two cultures, Indian and American, as well as between tradition and the pull of modern life. There is no better example of this than Tara Chatterjee, the central character in Mukherjee’s novel, Desirable Daughters. In this spellbinding and suspenseful tale, Tara is one of the three sisters who came of age in Kolkata, the daughters of a well-off tea merchant. The only sister to succumb to an arranged marriage, she moved her husband, Bish, to California, where he became the boy wonder of
Silicon Valley and the head of a powerful technology company. Tara smoothly assimilated into American culture, but constantly cast glances over her shoulder at her deeply rooted family history in India. Tired of Bish’s constant absence, she filed for divorce and eventually moved to San Francisco with her son Rabi, where she is just another single working mom albeit one with an exotic history. What unfolded in *Desirable Daughters* was the beginning of a riveting mystery tied to Tara’s family’s past and the vast history and turmoil of India’s fight for freedom. In the final pages of *Desirable Daughters*, Tara stands in San Francisco Street watching her house go up in flames. Along with her teenage son, Rabi and ex-husband, Bish, she was lucky to be alive after barely escaping what turned out to be a bomb set to kill.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee uses these marginal plot-lines to propel Tara into a re-examination of her life. She may be as comfortable in jeans as in a Silk Sari, but she cannot discard the demands of her deeply ingrained Indian upbringing. She is also a believer in ghosts, visions, rituals, Hindu cosmology and above all, coincidence. By way of Tara’s discoveries, the author creates a palpable and personal history of British colonial rule in India. Smart and unstoppable, Tara, who’s 36 but feels older, had been researching the Tree Bridge of Mishtigunj when the bomb blast left her own life in shambles. Reunited with Bish, who was severely injured saving her from the fire, she is scarred and pregnant. Mukherjee, moving back and forth between cultures and across continents, weaves an enchanting and disturbing story that is as much a mystery as it is a history lesson.
The Tree Bride delves deep into the complex story of India’s fight for freedom from the British Raj. As Charles Dickens did with Victorian England, Mukherjee unfolds her story with a beguiling use of humour, detail and colour. She grasps the complex points of history and whittles them into a compelling, if sometimes confusing story. Mukherjee is a master at creating magical, mysterious characters that resound with spiritual healing for both the dead and the living.

Mukherjee examines “the stubborn potency of myth in the face of overwhelming change” in the lives of the three desirable daughters. Tara struggles to unravel the secrecy surrounding her past, to discover the truth behind her sisters’ prevarications and fragmented stories. Plot recapitulation would only spoil the novel’s many surprises. Desirable Daughters confirms Mukherjee’s place as a complex writer with a keen eye for the subtleties of Indo-American life and superb gift for characterization. The novel focuses on the life of three Brahmin daughters - Tara, Padma and Parvati - all of whom are eager to form their own identity in their own way. They belong to the wealthy Brahmin family of Bhadra loko to a fond father and a traditional-bound orthodox mother. Since their childhood, they are aware about their marginal position in the conventional society which has little regard for women. As all of them are well educated, they try to cast away the traditional identity denoting system by rebelling against the constraining socio-cultural set up and crave to form their own identity. In Desirable Daughters Mukherjee considers different pattern of belonging in the Global perspectives from
in-between temporality to assimilative permanence and further, hyphenated and unmixed nationness.

Jai Krishna turned his back on the avaricious man who would have been Tara Lata’s father-in-law if fate hadn’t intervened. Jai Krishna would see his daughter married to a tree, but Tara Lata’s father-in-law would not get a single piece. Jai Krishna gave dowry only to a person who did not demand it. The novel *Desirable Daughters* is both lyrical and insightful, sharing observations about family that apply to almost all cultures. While that first twenty pages can seem somewhat plodding as the author relates the legend of Tara Lata, the ‘Tree Bride’ who became ‘the least known martyr to Indian freedom, ‘the tale’s meaning is integral to the journey that Tara, and all women, must make. Tara Lata, s self-possessed and curious woman, exhibits a fervent quest for identity and space of her own. In fact, central to the theme of the novel is this quest of her, She has done what is quite unimaginable; she has divorced her brilliant, extremely rich and famous husband. Moreover, she frees her artistic son from school and chooses to live with her lover, without marrying him and thus proving herself to be her own guide. As an individual, she enforces her identity as a self-propelled woman by exerting her won will on decisions about her life. “The only person I’d checked up on was Andy, and that was because Bish had bullied me into doing it. Bish, infact, had offered to “take care’- his phrase- of the background check himself. We’d started the process of negotiation by e-mail with a terse, “I’m free to make a mess
of my own life!” from me, then got stuck for a while on Bish’s rejoinder, “You’re not free to wreck our son’s and finally compromised with Bish” (48).

So she prefers to make her own tradition, to choose her own home and place rather than those given to her by her father or husband. She is one of those kinds of diasporic women who gladly renounce the security within the confines of the four walls to walk the path of freedom, to explore their own method, and devise their own plans to go on in life. Tara, the heroine of the novel, is a bit of an Indian princess. When a strange young man shows up at her San Francisco house claiming to be a long lost nephew, she’s suspicious of the way he carries his cigarettes, loose in his pockets, like the “Uppity Servants” in her Kolkata neighbourhood ‘who liked to smoke the same brand as their employers’. Visiting her sister in New Jersey, she averts her eyes self-protectively from “the hideous mall scarred landscape.” She dismisses the street crowds of Jackson Heights, thriving commercial centre of Indian life in New York City, as the hungering classes. They look to her like a bunch of documented felons. But give her a break—she’s 36, divorced, a single mom, and drop by drop, to paraphrase Chekhov, she’s wringing the snob out of herself. “When I left Bish (let us be clear on this) after a decade of marriage, it was because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go? I wanted to work, but would people think that Bish Chatterjee couldn’t support his wife?” (82). This novel hyper-alertly charts the making of a consciousness, the ebbs and eddies of
the elusive mental processes by which a daughter of privilege learns to observe without flinching the world she lives in and the world she came from. “It’s good to rediscover my roots, but not if they rise up and strangle me. I wanted to be persuaded by cool logic. My sister couldn’t be both a child denying monster and an angel; Chris shouldn’t be a victim and a villain; my father our protector and destroyer” (138). Tara being the youngest of three beautiful sisters in an affluent family of Bengali Hindu Brahmins, raised in 1960s Kolkata. Like fairytale princesses, all three girls share the same birthday. At nineteen Tara dutifully entered an arranged marriage, wholly innocent of the facts of sexual anatomy. Within a few years her brilliant husband, Bishwapriya Chatterjee, Ph.D from Stanford, has parlayed his inventions into a global telecommunications empire. Tara becomes a billionaire’s wife, living in a gated community in Silicon Valley. “I reached for his hand. “Bish” I said, “it doesn’t have to be.” You are a blind but blameless man. I wanted to know, but could not ask, where are you getting all this stuff? Up in San Francisco we get rumours of domestic discord in Silicon Valley” (266). Bish (his American nickname means poison in Bengali, another cross-cultural misunderstanding) is so busy expanding his Mughal like empire that his humanity suffers. Working fifteen hours a day, at home he relapses into the role of a traditionally demanding Indian husband, threatening his dreamy, artistic son Rabi. To save her son from his father’s crushing contempt, Tara flees the gated community and moves to San Francisco, where she takes a volunteer job at a local public school and a live-in lover, ex-member of biker gang turned peaceful Zen
adept. He’s a nice enough guy but she likes him for the wrong reasons: the thought of his violent past gives her a thrill.

She has never bothered to turn back and examine her life but has just been talking all good things with her sisters and parents over telephone. It is only after that incident that she reconsiders her assumptions about her family and begins her quest for reality. It is through this quest only that she finds her true identity. When she realizes how things were covered up in her family, how her sister still denied the fact of her having a child outside wedlock, “I couldn’t distinguish Muslims from Hindus any more. I wasn’t even one hundred percent sure of Bengalis. I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a one-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and re-emerging as something wondrous, or grotesque” (195). She realizes the pernicious intention of somebody behind Chris Day’s arrival at her new home, but finds nobody to support her in her search to know the truth. Her lover deserts her for her going to the police, her son gets irritated; but despite all this, she takes it upon herself to find out the reality. Till now, there was a conflict going on in her mind between her need to adhere to her family’s old traditions and desires to be an active part of the contemporary American culture. However, she realizes at last that she does not have the traditions that she thought supported her, but she goes on in her efforts.

Parvati, the middle sister, marries and remains in Mumbai, the wife of a wealthy, traditional Bengali businessman. Her life revolves around her two sons, visiting in-laws and her aging parents devout Hindus who are in ill health. The
oldest sister, Padma, is the elusive sibling who left for the bright lights of New York in her early 20s. Padma, whose beauty and intelligence are matched only by her ambition, puts on a happy face for sisterly phone calls and occasional visits, but she keeps the truth of what has happened to her since leaving India a secret. Family secrets, of course, are never kept, and when a young man drops into Tara’s life and claims to be an acknowledged relative, the family Tara though she knew begins to unravel before her frightened eyes. “Love “is slippery word when both partners bring their own definition. Love to Bish, is the residence of providing for parents and family,-Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than with anyone else, over a longer haul,-“Love” is my childhood and adolescence (although we didn’t have an “adolescence” and were never” teenagers”) was indistinguishable from duty and obedience” (27).

The marriage that takes Tara to America gives her an undreamed-of independence and longing for more than just trips to the shopping mall. Her search for identity leads her back through childhood memories against the backdrop of scenes from India’s history, which gives a rich portrait of what it means to grow up female in a society that has little regard for women. Moreover, the things Tara discovers about her family’s past assist her in opening up to a wider world, and in this process, her personal evolution comes about from dealing with something thrust upon her from the outside in the form of the false Chris Day, as much as her own decisions and actions. The point is though she is not completely free of her long ingrained prejudices regarding cast or religion, she is trying gradually to
break out of these mindsets and come to terms with the reality with an American mind. That is why some of her actions seem apparently contradictory. She is appalled at her sister’s doubtful adultery, finds herself unable to slap her son; calls her husband by his name only after divorce, yet she is quite comfortable while mentioning her lovers and knowing her son being a gat, preferring western clothes and food.

In *Desirable Daughters*, three Lear-like sisters born in a wealthy Kolkata family are faced with the realities of living in modern-day India and American Societies. Although Padma, Parvtai and Tara have obeyed their ancestral teachings and adhered to the laws of arranged marriage, their everyday rebellions are tenderly charted. The grand themes of secrets and lies in families are explored with subtlety and humour. Mukherjee does not shy away from portraying her characters as three-dimensional human beings with frailties, needs and desires. Tara, the youngest and the rebel of the family, is divorced. In San Francisco, a mysterious stranger enters her life, claiming to be the son of her older sister Padma. Tara, the sophisticated valley denizen, is suddenly caught in a mysterious web of deceit; she is faced with the fact that she really does not know her sisters. Could her sister have had a child out of wedlock? Were her parents instrumental in keeping the entire affair secret? Is she the only one who does not know? At this point, Mukherjee changes gears. Obsessed with finding the truth, Tara relies on memory to piece together the past. Suddenly, innocent events take on mysterious hues. The thoroughly modern Tara explores the nature of familial relationships
and learns that, even in the closest of relationships, humans are often true only to themselves. Even in our tell-all society, where the spilling of guts is commonplace. One really never knows the entire truth. Truth, like everything else, has nuances and layers, and is inevitably cliché ridden. In researching her personal past, Tara discovers connections to history. She finds there are no coincidences, only convergences. Tara is searching for the pattern that connects “human memory and mathematical certainty.” She seeks information about her heritage. She’s trying to figure out what a 5 year old child, married to a tree in the late 19th century, could have to do to become a vibrant, independent woman of the 21st century. The novel tells three stories as it moves back and forth in time and over several continents. There’s the story of Tara and her ex-husband as they try to reconcile; the story of Tara and her newly conceived child and the relationship with her new ob-gyn, Dr. Victoria Treadwell Khanna, and the history of the title character. It appears to be merely a coincidence that the doctor’s husband taught computer engineering to Tara’s husband at Stanford University. Tara soon learns, however, that she bears a telling historical relationship to her gynecologist who, in turn, passes on a cache of “moldering papers” that detail the history of the Treadwell family and its connection to Tara Lata Gangooly, the tree bride. The bulk of the novel slowly uncovers the modern day Tara’s connection to the woman who was a freedom fighter in India. “The Tree Bride, the aged virgin who did not leave her father’s house until the British dragged her off to jail, the least known martyr to Indian freedom, is the quiet center of every story. Each generation of
women in my family has discovered in her something new. Even in far flung California, the Tree Bride speaks again. I’ve come back to India this time for something more than rest and shopping and these gin and lime-filled evenings with my mirror self. I’m like a pilgrim following the course of the Ganges all the way to its source” (289). This includes a swashbuckling tale of piracy and mutiny on the high seas, mute orphan and a colonialist with a hidden past. The years of world was second detail Britain’s involvement with India and the Tree Bride’s clashes with established regime. “The desk is littered with placards. QUIT India, JAI HIND, JAI MA KALI, JAI BHARAT MATA, SHAME1 BRITISH DEVIL, GO HOME. BANDE MATARAM INDIA FOR INDIANS. Some of the placards are blood splattered. In the hall outside this room and in the inner courtyard, rows of the wounded are being tended by housewives, schoolgirls, and widows….

There are two surgeons in town, one Hindu, one Muslim, but both happen to be in the British jail, awaiting exile to the Andaman Islands (307). As Bharati Mukherjee was born in 1940, she was a bear witness to colonial brutality. They lived on a large street along which there were regular funeral processions of teenage martyrs. They were carried in rope cots, all strewn with flowers, everyone shouting “Quit India!” There was constant domestic brutality all around-extreme verbal, physical abuse of women, which Mukherjee witnessed, and a lot of it ritualized.

The general tendency of women in the diasporic space is to be centric to primary identities religious, ethnic, territorial and national. Most of Mukherjee’s
novels deal with the question of such primary identities and the crisis of such identities along with transmission of ethnic traits. She takes in account the borderline condition of cultural translation of the uprooted \textit{women} in the postcolonial space extensively in the location of past present and future. In Mukherjee’s fictions the two geographical entities, the home and location thus support, and to an extent reflect each other. In her narratives she takes in account of the spatial and locational subjectivity related to their homeland. Her characters experience the cultural inanity and the social displacement which they express through mixed \textit{existential} code. Such concept of diasporic space as theoretical construct evolving out of the practical journey from alienation to acceptance seeks to project and map out the space of different culture and postcolonial heterogeneity. This space of diasporic experience is potent to become the pulsating contemporary parameter, offering various other new scopes of negotiations on the programmed location of culture. The story of the novel is not just about the immigrants and the attitude of three sisters but deals deeper into their ways of negotiating the multiple \textit{dislocations} in three different perspectives. The three sisters, who are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharjee and the great-grand daughters of Jaikrishna Gangooly, belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. They part ways taking their own course of voyage towards their destiny. They are a blend of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvati have their own trajectories of choices, the former an immigrant of ethnic origin New Jersey, and the latter married to a boy of her own choice and settled in the posh locality of
Bombay with an entourage of servants to cater her. Tara, the narrator of the novel, takes the readers deep into the intricacies of the New World and seems to float rootless with time. The fluidity of her identity testifies not only her own but also the fluidity of the immigrants. She values her traditional upbringing but takes pride in moving forward in life. Her image of her family values forms a wall of security around her that camouflage the fragile vulnerable self. “Tuberculosis is everywhere. The air, the water, the soil are septic. Thirty-five years is a long life. Smog obscures the moon and dims the man-made light to faintness deeper than the stars. In such darkness perspective disappears. It is a two-dimensional world impossible to penetrate”(2). Mukherjee has the affinity with the native soil, but discourages the vapidity and pollutants of the soil yet declining to pay short shrift to its vitality. While writing about the two invariables of the transnational conditions- exile and homeland, Mukherjee in her novels captures the temporal and spatial dynamics of immigrant sensibility lost in the space between home and location. The estranging consciousness of relocation is haunted by some sense of loss, an urge to reclaim or to look back at the transgressive precinct of the past. To quote Maya Manju Sharma: In her fiction Mukherjee handles western themes and settings as well as characters who are westernized or bicultural. Yet she is forced to admit that the very structure of her imagination is essentially Hindu and essentially moral. But in Desirable Daughters Mukherjee focuses on the alternative ways to belong, cultural hybridity simultaneity and the ‘third space of enunciation’ which are markers of the post-colonial condition of existence.
Clifford says ‘Diaspora women are caught between Patriarchies ambiguous pasts and futures. They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways.’ Likewise, Tara in the novel finds herself caught between Patriarchal histories of her past home and legends created by her husband in the acquired home. She cuts short the legend by walking out and, in turn, gets stagnant in a relationship of retrofitting with a man who leaves her alone in her time of need. The identity of diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. As such, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even though they are implicated in the construction of a common we. In other words, diasporic experiences and double identification constitute hybrid forms of identity. Such forms of identity differ from the essential notion of national and ethnic identity. It also explores multiple belongings that enable people to inhabit more than one space at the same time. Under such condition in the absence of a dominant code, culture is becoming an individualistic enterprise, in which people create their own super structure and super culture, becoming in a way their own ‘cultural programmers.’ Tara is a fictional rendering of such cultural hybridity. Tara’s assertion that she is both, being simultaneously an Indian and an American, helps her gaining the same ‘third space of enunciation.’ Tara says “The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes me invisible. I am not “Asian,”[…] I am all things[…]yet I’m still too timid to feed my Ballygunge Park Road identity in to the Kitchen garburetor.That dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist’s glass case[…]I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I
stand out, I am convinced, I don’t belong here, despite my political leaning; worse, I don’t want to belong” (9). Mukherjee fuses near and far, traditional and modern which transform and recreates the meaning of cultural space. In the novel Tara attempts to reconfigure her meaning as a trans-national and trans-cultural subject and attempts to center the narrative upon her individual experiences as a diasporic shuttle. She is a frustrated woman dwindling menacingly in the alternative models of survival between territories, migrations and mediations. Tara, like Mukherjee’s diasporic characters struggle hard to occupy the translational space, after multiple dislocations and ruptures. Most of her fictions stems from the dichotomy of growing up in two cultures as it is woven in Tara’s trajectory from one location to another. The diasporic subjects like Tara experience the recurrence of this dichotomy and constitute the epicenter of the most important demographic dislocations of the modern times. It now represents an important compelling force in world culture. Salman Rushdie points out, “Our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will in short create fictions, not actual cities villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands India of the mind”(10).

The novel also concentrates on complex ideologies revolving round the life of three sisters and their multiple alienations - Padma, Parvati and Tara. All of them maintain distinctive individuality in their attitude and approach to life. The novel begins with the description of bridal procession of Tara Lata, an ancestor whose life history becomes a focal point of Tara Chatterjee’s, family chronicle.
Tara Chatterjee, the narrator had always treated the story with a distant dread and it is after divorce from her husband Bishwapriya Chatterjee she became curious to know about the trauma of ‘Tree bride.’ Drawing a thematic parallel with Spivak’s phenomenal article, *Three women’s texts and a critique of imperialism* Mukherjee has written three different texts in the novel that unfold and also entangle the politics of diasporic consciousness of three women. Though the three sisters had different opportunities to assimilate America with their Indianness, each sister’s reactions to the confrontation are distinct. While Tara undertakes this root searching mission as an attempt to come to terms with her fragmented and at times confused notion of self, Padma takes the world at her stride according to her own cultural poetics.

Tara’s positioning is different from Padma in the sense, Padma is a hyphenated immigrant. Mukherjee vociferously talks against the status of a hyphenated immigrant because the hyphen marginalizes the Asians as minorities. Parvati the middle sister, with an American education and an America trained Indian husband, lives the life of a privileged rich wife in India. She symbolizes the traditional life of an Indian woman with a western orientation. Each one traverses her own path of immigrant life quite happily. Tara, through the life of her other two sisters, Parvati and Padma her husband Bish her illegitimate nephew Mr. Christopher Dey, introspects on her own crisis of identity as an immigrant and she continually expresses her desire to seek a consolation in her native traditions. In Tara’s realization the novel reveals the spaces of tradition, personal memories
places and life styles tradition and modernity, locales, nostalgic romanticism of the past, and the inverted story of mobility, existential suffering, hybrid-subjectivity and plurality in her physical and psychic dividedness between rejection to the nativity and incapacity to deal with the new situation that makes the theme of identity more powerful and poignant in the mainstream of American life. In its opening epigraph of Desirable Daughters, Mukherjee evokes tradition—both as impossible to follow, and as a felt necessity. The epigraph to the novel, a Sanskrit verse adopted by Octavio Paz that provides an insight in an immigrant’s quest for identity and authenticity of oneself:

“No one behind, no one ahead
The path the ancients cleared has closed.
And the other path, everyone’s path,
Easy and wide, goes nowhere.
I am alone and find my way” [12].

The result of globalization is that it has created a ‘Third space’ to spread beyond the known ‘location’ and ‘space.’ It is now a situation of ‘enunciatively split’ to take from each other’s heritage and sew it together into one’s own heritage in the location of one’s culture. Tara fails to generate the sense of belonging that she so desperately seeks in America. She fails to be absorbed beyond ‘base-superstructure division’ and remains unrepresented in the ‘transnational totality.’ Her Americanization remains elusive, despite all her attempts at assimilation. Tara at the end of the novel seems to believe that there is no simplistic answer to her quest. Tara’s own stories is that of an entirely untraditional Bengali—American who has rebelled against the life of an Indian wife, and set up home with a lover in
a multi-ethnic neighborhood almost synonymous with revolt unlike Tara Lata of *Tree Bride*. Hers is emphatically a modern world, a ‘new global unconscious.’ As a student her husband Bish discovered a process for allowing computers to create their own time, instantaneously routing information to the least congested lines. Bish, on the other hand is a part of the process of globalization, the process by which people become increasingly interconnected across natural borders and continents. Despite Parvati’s exposure to the West, she always criticizes both Tara and Rabi for their American ways. To Auro and Parvati, Rabi looks like ‘a savage, a trust-fund American savage.’ Auro and Parvati plead with Tara to return to India with Rabi before it is too late. They fear that at a later stage, Rabi may not be either Indian or American. But she does not understand that Tara and Rabi can be both at the same time. Parvati thinks that Tara’s American adventure is over with her divorce, whereas to Tara it is just beginning. Parvati and Tara are closer to each other than they are to Didi, but they do not share a common language. As Tara says: “As sisters we were close, certainly closer than either of us was to Didi, but we didn’t have a language for divorce and depression, which meant we couldn’t fit in concepts like powerlessness and disappointment. We couldn’t talk about why a young woman with everything she could ever want would decide to leave her protector and provider” (21).

Parvati’s traditional life-style is more predictable. In this sense, there are no sudden shocks and surprises. So there are times when Tara envies Parvati’s clarity and confidence as she thinks that Parvati seems to be in control of things
that are happening around her. She does not tolerate anything that questions the tradition of the family or the community. When Tara asks Parvati about the liaison between Padma and Ron Dey, she reacts: “I cannot fathom what is going on in your life to force you to make such a bizarre request. Do you have any idea how mad you sound? Maybe you have lost touch with the way things work here, in which case, I think you need a good long Indian vacation away from all those crazy soap operas that keep putting bad ideas into susceptible minds. [...] Have you become so American that you don’t realize how absurd your request is?” (22).

Mukherjee asserts that in the process of splitting and cultural dislocation man seems to lose his meaning and purpose in life. In the process of migration, the immigrants can neither adopt alien culture nor can leave their culture of ‘home’ and finally a new hybrid culture comes to flourish. To quote Bill Ashcroft: “Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybrid phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European culture systems and an indigenous ontology with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity. Such construction or reconstruction occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic and ‘peripheral’ subversion of them” (23). In America Tara could imagine any number of Atherton families, Bish’s friends coming here for weekend, flooding the courts and riding paths but Tara could never imagine Bish enjoying these situations. Tara always feels herself guilty of lavish spending and conspicuous luxury, “I’m feeling just a little alien and uncomfortable, a tinge of not belonging, in the midst of such welcoming comfort and I think it must be the
way Bish feels” (24). Love, to Bish, is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect, and being recognized for hard work and honesty. Love is indistinguishable from status and honors. “I can’t imagine my carpenter, Andy, bringing anything more complicated to it than, say, ‘fun.’ Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than anyone else, over a longer haul” (25). Tara however enjoys her love-life with Andy because she feels that there is something exotic, something that defies the set norms and structures. Old rules of the game are gone. It is exciting to formulate new rules. Tara swerves away from Indian traditionalism and allows herself to be physically involved with Andy. Her dislocation from cultural codes fragments her once again. Tara defines her relationship with Andy: “We were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on. He interpreted my fear as shyness. He was not my first American lover, but he was twice the mass of any man I’d ever known, a bear-man” (26).

Thus, loneliness brings a greater isolation in the life of Tara and she feels alienated in American society. She seeks solace outside the traditional world of austerity and self-preservation. In India the details of religion, caste, sub-caste, mother tongue, place of birth are all integral part of man’s personality and one cannot dare to go beyond them. Tara further confesses: “Nobody pays attention to me other than to ask for spare change or press a handbill into my closed fist. I am not the only blue-jeaned woman with a Pashmina shawl around my shoulders and
broken-down running shoes on my feet. I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I’m convinced. I don’t belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don’t want to belong” (27). She terribly suffers for her separation from Bish because the concept of divorce is not acceptable, according to Indian code of matrimony. She left Bish because the promise of life as an American wife had not been fulfilled. When the relationship between Bish and Tara becomes intolerable, she comes to a bitter realization. ‘In America, it seemed to us, every woman was expected to create her own scandal, be the centre of her own tangled love nest.’

As in a usual divorce-settlement Tara sends her son with his father, Bish on holidays and weekends to resorts in Australia. Though Tara does not belong to India or to America or to the Silicon Valley Wives Group, yet she is comfortable in all these cultures. She is a claimant of all legacies. She breaks out of the over-determined notions of identity; culture and homeland. There are many instances in the novel in which she deliberately flaunts her Brahmin heritage. ‘We are Bengali Brahmins from Calcutta and nothing can touch us,’ are Tara’s resounding words in honor of her Brahmin heredity. But these facets of her personality do not hinder her strategies of survival in the adopted land. For six long years, she defies the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and lives with a Hungarian refugee. The reconciliation of the broken family also symbolizes the reconciliation of cultures.

Padma on the other hand, in spite of her immigration and dynamic attitude to life, devotes herself to the popularity of Bengali life and culture. Padma, after
excavating her past, concludes that a true Bengali family cannot even be fully Westernized- ‘our family westernization was superficial, confined to convent school, metro cinema and movie magazines, which overlaid a profound and orthodox Hinduism.’ Mukherjee here resolutely deals with the margins of national culture and also reflects on dislocations due to cultural cohesion between longing and disgust for Indian cultural tradition. Mukherjee, in her endeavor to explain the diasporic condition in the unstable temporality, is conscious of the mechanics of splits and doubles in the making of the third location of culture. She is particularly emphatic on the question of cultural inheritance and the total assimilation in the culture of adoption. Mukherjee thus not only highlights the longing of immigrants for Indian cultural heritage but also expresses her disgust at the changing scenario within India itself and the shifting dynamics of American culture. In both the situation the sense of loss is intense. Tara during her conversation with Padma expresses her sense of loss at westernized India and all pervasive cultural pollution. If she is disgusted with materialism of the west, equally disgusting is the scene in India. Padma’s diasporic self-fashioning has encouraged her to salvage her Indianness with retribution, adopting the discourse of authenticity to defend her space. Her career as an Indian American performer also dictates that she foregrounds her ethnicity, so as to appear more ‘authentic ‘to her audience. Despite the outwardly stable identity, Padma projects the ambivalences and ploy that govern her life and that becomes visible: “Didi was sitting just inches away, a firm identity resisting all change […] but under scrutiny, fractured, like cracks
under old glaze. Up close, I didn’t recognize her. I didn’t know who she was. I was following the cracks, fascinated by their complexity, not the simple shining face. “Puffles and Piffles”, Andy once called them, but I never thought that previously unidentified fault lines could refer to my sister or to me” (32). Tara’s diasporic torment however, is relational, she is unable to affirm an authentic Indian self or assimilate totally in to American culture. It is these fault lines that disclose themselves just underneath her polished front. In an ironic turnaround of their actions during their youth, Tara had become more bohemian living in the Upper Height area of San Francisco, the epicenter of the hippie movement of the 1970s. She had divorced her wealthy, handsome husband as she felt stifled in her marriage. Tara, in direct contrast to Padma had embraced the American notions of freedom and self-fulfillment as being of primary significance in her life, seeking refuge in this discourse as a reprieve from the orthodoxies of the Bengali Brahmin culture: “The gap between the youngest and oldest, the disparity of our marriages and the paths our immigration have made us strangers. Her reaction to my divorce (that I had brought shame to the Bhattacharjee family had been her refrain) had hurt” (33).

The middle sister Parvati had also rebelled in her youth. Her rebelliousness however, was not subversive, as she had chosen for her husband a Bengali Brahmin, Aurobino Banerji. Parvati and her husband had relocated to India and had established a typical upper class milieu to raise their two sons. In many ways Parvati was the most conventional of the sisters plying the role of the Bengali wife
to completeness. Bharati Mukherjee seems to establish that India is a land of spiritual values, stability, variety of languages and tradition that American society would never be able to appreciate. She says: ‘I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien.’ Mukherjee, through the nostalgia of Tara, significantly exposes the loss of spiritual values in the materialistic glamour of the west. Tara is anxious regarding the proper education of her son Rabi that may be close to typical Bengali tradition. The concept of American education was all illusion to her. She has a firm conviction: “Existence was too easy in Atherton, they agreed, America made children soft in the brain as well as the body; it weakened the moral fiber. They grew up without respect for family and tradition” (36).

The novel Desirable Daughters testifies a kind of perturbed coexistence of double consciousness and a leaning to ethicize and problematize other aspects of their lives, and all other relationships among the Indian community. In the novel, Tara expresses the same contradiction: “It’s one of those San Francisco things I can’t begin to explain in India, just like I can’t explain my Indian life to the women I know in California” (37). Thus it is their ethnicity which gives the Asian American a locational status among the Americans. Tara is sternly shielding about her own territory, Calcutta, which gives her ethnic identity among American friends. In an intolerant tone she critiques the way in which they reduce Calcutta to a few tempting images. Her lived experience of Calcutta challenges these stereotypes: “The city was Calcutta in late fifties and early sixties. My American
friends in California say God, Tara, Calcutta! as though to suggest I have returned to earth after a journey to one of the outer planets. It’s one of those cities in the world with negative cachet, a city to escape, one of those hellholes made famous by Mother Teresa and mindless comparisons in the American press; dirtier than Calcutta. Crueler than Calcutta. Poorer than Calcutta. I grew up in city that never pitied itself, a city that deflected all these abuse. Insults were the badge of our superiority, proof of others’ ignorance” (38). Mukherjee facilitates a cross-cultural understanding of problem like caste, exile and identity by persistently shuttling her setting between Calcutta and Jackson Heights. In Jackson Heights the Asian migrants are forced to consider themselves as a monolithic ethnic group. In this perspective, caste is only a part of one’s memory. More than the caste, nationality becomes the marker of one’s ethnicity. In Calcutta, in contrast, caste is still an issue. Tara moves between these two cultural locations and her mobility ultimately proves that caste and nationality have to be contested on the basis of personal experiences of living in and moving through different cultural spaces.

Mukherjee also reveals survival strategies at multiple levels ranging from physical, social, psychological and to spiritual levels. Mukherjee’s protagonist in the *Desirable Daughters* stands at the transgressive rim of history and with a peculiar conviction surges ahead for a root search. Here one can see the survival strategy to retain her identity in a pluralistic society by not assimilating but by devising her own ways to articulate her immigrant conditions. In this new cultural and diasporic endeavor one feels tempted to locate autobiographical hue and to
question, whether the novel is an ethnographic project. In *Desirable Daughters* one also gets to understand the dynamics of shifting personal and ethnic implications in adherence to the author’s own ethnic transformation. Mukherjee combines autobiography with ethnography. Her personal story is relevant only insofar as it relates to the outer set of events and the collective identity of Calcutta women. The world outside the self takes on an importance as it would to a novelist or a journalist, such that it provides an area for the narrator to either participate in or observe from the fringes. Her alienation or involvement is contextual; therefore, the centre of the narrative constantly shifts according to the context, from the collective to the individual, from the socio-historical reconstruction of women to individual and personal revelation.

Mira and Bharati Mukherjee, like Padma and Tara differ in the way they negotiate with the host culture. Mira is happy to live in America as an ‘expatriate’ rather than as an ‘immigrant-Indian.’ But Bharati Mukherjee has the need to feel like a part of the community she has adopted. She, like Tara wants to put her roots down, and make a difference. It is quite evident that Mukherjee writes out of her lived experience and that the characters Padma, Parvati and Tara are modeled on Mira, Bharati and Ranu respectively. All the three are desirable in their own ways. With all her experience and exposure to the West, Parvati reconciles for a conventional, disciplined and domesticated role of an Indian woman. On the other hand, Didi represents the way of life of hundreds of immigrants in the United States. To feed the nostalgia of Indian settlers in the U.S. is her cultural mission
and also her survival strategy. In contrast, Tara’s way to belong is a complex one. In the United States, she internalizes the progressive views of the host country, culture, and homeland. Being played out with abundant superfluity in her life of the New World magnificence, Tara in *Desirable Daughters* breaks all shackles of tradition and walks out of the wedlock with her son Rabi choosing a live-in relationship with a Hungarian Buddhist retrofitter, and doing volunteer work in a pre-school in San Francisco, all for her self-fulfillment. Her divorce is not known to her parents in India who like every parent desire their three daughters desirable for all time to them. She has an entrenched ethnicity implanted in her cultural heritage. She has the native cultural classiness, contrapuntal to American cosmopolitan glitziness and paranoid fantasy. As a diasporic subject she is caught in the cross cultural complication and treads on a thin line between isolation and oneness.

This cosmopolitan consciousness has deeper impact in her daily affairs. She cannot be her own, as she is unable to get rid of her ‘foreignness’. She is at the same time, cannot quite negotiate her cultural nativity and rootedness. In California’s High Street she has already a refined rearing. Her early affairs with Ronald Dey, a Christian boy, the brilliant brother of her friend Poppy was not liked by her parents as they advised her ‘if you sow the wrong kind of soil, you are bound to end up with an unhealthy sapling. It means there will be no inter-caste alliance.’ Tara neither is able to accept Bish as a sanctuary nor is she completely ready to become a traditional breast giver and a pure Indian house wife. In her
subaltern and Third World marginality she comes into sight like Mukherjee’s alterable and mutable heroine in just braving the New World. In the peculiar global dynamics Tara has hyphenated herself with her native land though she undergoes anxiety in the inertia of being incapable to return home and also finding a new home in the adopted land. She imbibes the best of Indian and Western cultures through her struggle as a practitioner of feminist principles in which the social and legal aspects of formal procedural marriage are not essential and central to one’s survival in personal and social acceptance. She however, finds family to be an indispensable social institution to feel attached and get nostalgic to. In India a wife’s identity is part and parcel of her husband’s identity but in San Francisco she finds ‘maintaining a healthy home life and respect for culture and tradition’ is the identity of a wife. Tara thinks herself as a typical immigrant and locates compulsively in a strange obsession of anxiety between her feelings and response deep in her insulated and cocooned Indian self with an American garb. In her authorial voice and narrative method Mukherjee has presented splendidly, realized moments like the Brahminic culture and childhood memories in the texture of Desirable Daughters with an enthralled nostalgia. In her oriental glitziness, socialite text, hybrid dialogue and multicultural literary mechanics she has create a new discourse on immigrant identity. In Desirable Daughters, Bharati Mukherjee has struck a balance between the past and the present through a deft blending of tradition and modernity. This she achieves through the character of Tara who has outwardly severed her links with tradition but still remains tied to her native
country. She is influenced by ancient customs and traditions, but is also very much in to the glitziness and modernism of the multicultural America. She is caringly conscious of her existential predicament. Tara’s tentative steps towards seeking her true self requires her to carefully navigate between prescriptive Hindu traditions and American notions of individuality and freedom.

Tara is thus an estranged self, languishing in the anxiety and uncertainties of the diasporic experience, which to Susheila Nasta is ‘not only an unrequited desire for a lost homeland but also a homing desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it.’ Tara’s predicament as a diasporic subject is problematic as it is difficult to frame her character in Mukherjee’s celebratory Americanism. Tara, after multiple fragmentations and displacements seems to decline Mukherjee’s fascinating Americanism; instead her character takes the route to the root, in the shrine of Indianness and Tara Lata’s mystical world. Through her critical reconstruction of the Tree-Bride’s history, Tara is able to arrive at an awareness of her identity as a construct that is largely shaped by her consciousness. Tara arrives at the realizations that if Tara-Lata, aged virgin and a ‘Tree-Bride,’ could attain the status of a saint and freedom fighter in a society where it was unthinkable for a woman to be without a man, it was essential that she, Tara-Lata’s descendent must forge her own path towards self-assertion.

The death of Tara Lata’s husband had imposed virginity throughout her life which got converted into selfless sainthood. But her namesake, Tara Bhattacharjee
leaves her life on her own terms. Bish’s preoccupation with his software leaves her bereft in the new world. After living up to the instilled values of patriarchal Bengali society, she divorces her multimillionaire, Silicon valley entrepreneur husband to drift along rootless, having many affairs and finally finding solace in the arms of her live-in partner, Andy, a Hungarian immigrant who believes in Buddhism and its philosophies, comforts her through her travails with back rubs and sayings of the Zen. At this context of the traditional phallic past Tara Bhattacharjee’s move to divorce her husband and her defiance look like a revolt against a patriarchal mindset, which is a part of immigrant life style in the New World of America. Tara Bhattacharjee, unlike Dimple in *Wife* believes in staying afloat like Jasmine. She frees herself from the shackles of marriage and the symbolic phallic power.

In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee has juxtaposed the Indian culture with American culture and describes the ambivalence of this mirror self. Tara Lata the tree bride is juxtaposed to her great granddaughter Tara Bhattacharjee. While, the former in essence is the symbol of Indian feminism, a virtuous lady with inculcated qualities of tolerance, a freedom fighter of yesteryears, a widow and a virgin she is a goddess who has not brought defame to herself whereas the latter, Tara Bhattarchjee a divorcee, tagging along a live-in partner, a Hungarian immigrant, a believer in Buddhist ideology, mother to a son who is a gay also tagged as a slut, she feels out of place in her immigrant existence, especially when she visits her sister and finds the same attitude in people around. Mukherjee’s
construction of a diasporic female subjectivity in *Desirable Daughters* appears to be in consonance with Rahakrishnan’s views regarding the critical and dialectic negotiation between the politics of proximity and the politics of distance required of the diasporic individual, seeking to redefine his or her identity.[47] Tara’s tentative steps towards seeking her true self require her to carefully navigate between prescriptive Hindu traditions and American notions of individuality and freedom. Therefore physical dislocation is emphasized in its historical and existential conjecture which is dealt with in the profane, immoral and impure multi-religious and multicultural context. Now Tara’s refuge is her ancestral world that is rooted in tradition away from Western adventure mechanisms. She has to seek shelter under the pristine halo of Hindu religion, be truthful, honest and kind. Tara’s quest for tradition in the form of her namesake Tara (Lata) the ‘tree bride’ is symptomatic to this phenomenon of root search despite Mukherjee’s strong assertion to her own Americanization and self-provoked assimilation in to the host culture. Here the immigrant suffers in postcolonial displacement but desires to return to the lost origin refusing to remain as wandering nomad. Thus, From Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter* to *Desirable Daughters* one can observe a steady metamorphosis from acculturation to self-actualization as a counter-narrative against the atrocities of dominant and central ethos.

In her Americanized status Tara has a philosophical quest in the web of dualism. This disentangles her complex in an indifferent city where she neither able to surrender her personality nor is able to accept a new giant identity in the
crisis of her life. She lives physically in immense advantages but enjoys a nomadic life in the cultural desert of America in her psychological invalidity. Mukherjee identifies the UK and Canada with imperialism and describes her choice to emigrate to the US as a choice for freedom from imperialism. Her mythologizing of herself as a writer is aimed at constructing herself as an American and at re-reading her own experience as national or, more precisely, neo-national. Mukherjee’s neo nationalism, figured in the fantasy of the land of opportunity and the romance of the immigrant is, therefore, the counter narrative to her own diasporic condition and the dilemma of postcoloniality. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut them off. Another interesting feature of the cultural representation of space in India has always been constituted as much by the notion of the periphery as it has by the notion of the centre. This notion of the periphery has now expanded to include the diaspora. In post-modern climate of the West among the diasporic population and emigrants there is a relentless pursuit for identity negotiating displacement, dislocation and diverse experiences of the beyond. Homi Bhabha says: “The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past[...]we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’” (53). This simultaneous dwelling in here and there contributes to the formation of double consciousness. In such non stereotypical progression of mutative and multiple
transitions Diasporic identity is in flux, always changing like a nostalgic refrain. The protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* constructs a new narrative of fragmented identities of a woman who, through the moods of disruptions and dislocations, dismantling, and assimilation yearns for the truth about the unattainable identity of a diasporic woman. In the process of writing her namesake’s story, Tara redefines her identity in terms of dislocation while trying to establish a connection with the imagine community of woman of her culture and heritage by historically looking back through story of her sisters, mother, and grandmothers.

As Mandal has noted in her reading of *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee does not practice what she preaches. Mukherjee’s focus on the rituals and customs of the Bengali gentlefolk in *Desirable Daughters* belies her assertion that she has extended the American mainstream. She underscores the heroism of the Tree Bride and uses it as a yardstick for her protagonist Tara, to measure her own evolving identity against it. Tara reaches the conclusion that a critical renegotiation of her Indian ‘roots’ and American proclivities is required for her to forge an autonomous subjectivity. Bharati Mukherjee employs the exotic narrative of the Tree Bride as a counter - hegemonic strategy to assert that a hybrid diasporic Indian American identity can only be constructed through a nuanced, critically informed dialectic with both ethnic sensitivities and American cultural imperatives.
The title of the novel *Desirable Daughters* is significant and ironical. It suggests that daughters are the object of family prestige, so their behaviour should be desirable that is to say, in tune with the norms laid by the society and not deviant. Only such daughters who do not cross the ‘Laxman rekha’ of etiquettes would be liked and appreciated but in the novel two daughters including the protagonist cross the borders. The three daughter of Bhattacharjee family namely Padma, Parvati and Tara are desirable in their girlhood in the sense that they fulfil the requirements of daughterhood - beauty, intelligence, politeness, obedience -- and they remain confined within four walls for the sake of family status and respect. “Our father could not let either of my sisters out on the street, our car was equipped with window shades” (29). Tara reports about her early life in Calcutta, “Our bodies changed, but our behaviour never did. Rebellion sounded like a lot of fun….My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage”(27-28). Mukherjee depicts the atrocities inflicted on ‘gendered subaltern’, that is, women in the forms of child marriage, imposed arranged marriage, and limited prospects of career for talented girls like Padma and Tara in the novel. Bharati Mukherjee seems to generalize the pitiable plight of women when she comments about the Tree Bride in the first chapter of the novel: “A Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrows of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her.”(4). The image used for marriage indicates the oppressive confined life. The novelist exposes her disapproval of child marriage and consequent widowhood through intervention of
the story of Tree Bride TaraLata. The story of TaraLata who is cursed and disgraced for the death of her would-be husband and ultimately married to a tree symbolically brings out the backwardness of conservative society of India. It is totally inhuman on the part of society to deprive a girl of her inborn right to survive and fulfill her needs. The exploitation of women in the name of religion and social prestige is denounced by the novelist. Mukherjee writes about the girl in these words: “The poor child had no idea that already she had been transferred from envied bride…into the second worst-thing in her society… the most cursed state….” (12). The Tree Bride is symbol of self-sacrifice. The story serves as antithesis to the life of Tara, the heroine who transgresses the boundaries laid for her. At one place, Tara says that the Tree Bride has become the"model of selfless saintliness" while "My story was different, perhaps an inversion"(280). This statement consolidates Padma's address to Tara as American, self-engrossed being. The novelist shows the contrast between the traditional woman and the modern woman; one lives for the society and sacrifices her life while the other lives a selish life. The Tree Bride also serves as a symbol to celebrate the liberation and independence of woman from the male domination and male support because the Tree Bride proves that a woman need not be safeguarded and supported by man; she can live even without man. Through this novel the novelist depicts the curses of patriarchy and different forms of exploitation upon women. The novelist depicts marriage as the medium of exploitation rather than a desirable heavenly bliss. In Indian patriarchy, marriages are imposed on girls. Girls are not allowed to make
love or marry a man of their choice especially of other caste. This issue is raised in case of Padma who establishes laison with Ronald Dey, but could not marry him. Tara’s unsuccessful marriage is outcome of imposed marriage. She married a man she had never met. She married Bish because her father told her to get married. She says; "I married a man I had never met, whose picture and biography and bloodlines I approved of, because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market" (26). She began to address her husband as Bishu while in India, she could not utter his name. She also enjoys sexual freedom with Andy. She gives divorce to her husband because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled while she knew that divorce was a stigma for woman in Indian society. She wanted to drive and to work, to be economically independent. Husband in Indian conservative society is treated as god, "sheltering tree", provider and protector, but Tara breaks this myth and chooses another man who suits her temperament and who satisfies her sexual desires. She rejects to be an object of sacrifice, a showpiece and a silent and subservient creature to her husband. She aspires to be loved and respected and does not want only to be provided and protected by her husband as is desired in the case of other women. So she differs from other women. She is the protagonist of the novel because she has the indomitable courage to transcend the boundaries, to take initiations on an unknown path which may lead her to ruin. While her other sisters Padma and Parvati lead a complacent and passive life, adopt a middle path, remain suspicious about their new identity, do not feel the need to widen their
horizons and are less assertive, Tara emerges as a powerful figure to meet every adverse situation; to march ahead with all her limitations to an unknown and unfathomed path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being. Padma lives in America, but she clings to Indian ways, friends, clothes and food. Padma calls Tara "American" meaning self engrossed. She reminds Tara to follow the models of Sita and Savitri "…things are never perfect in marriage, a woman must be prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime-and to model herself on Sita, Savitri and Behula, the virtuous wives of Hindu myths"(134), but Tara chooses her own way. The instruction of Padma represents the perspective of male chauvinism and by defying it Tara establishes the feminist perspective over phallocentrism. The revelation of her son's different sexual orientation leaves her shell shocked for a moment, but the maturity and readiness with which she accepts the above relation speaks of her modern consciousness and modernity. In spite of moving towards complete freedom from traditional roles, Tara cannot be separated from her roots. She nurtures Indian family norms and feels isolated and incomplete after being divorced. Presence of Bish gives her inner solace which she lacks in Andy's company. She feels emptiness after separation from Bish because in her mind Bish is still her husband, 'the sheltering tree'. The need for a husband in form of Bish shows that it is not easy for an Indian woman to be completely free from 'dependence syndrome'. She can also not avoid her motherly duties towards Rabi, her son. Like Virmati of Difficult Daughters Tara, too, is unable to realize complete emancipation.
The novel is all about the psychological journey of the protagonist Tara from America to her cultural roots, that is, India. We visualize America and India from her perspective. The most avoided topic, that is, sex and Tara's desire for the size of organ and sexual experience with Andy, her lover and Bish have been frankly expressed. The primary issues discussed in the novel are marriage, love, sex, dowry and woman subjugation. The three Bengali sisters represent the three different aspects of female experiences. Parvati lives a complacent confined domestic life with her husband Auro, while Tara lives an ultramodern free life as a divorcée where she is provided with every opportunity to enjoy progress and liberty. Both the sisters exist on two extremes whereas Padma seeks a fine balance between the two; she lives an independent life with her husband Harish Mehta and does not altogether discard her cultural values. Through the three female characters the novelist provides the three choices for an Indian woman to follow. Padma and Parvati stick to the safer zones, but Tara moves to risky and challenging role of life, so she is given more importance than other two sisters.

Bharati Mukherjee's heroines are bold and assertive. They have the strong potentiality for adaptability; they live in the firm ground of reality and accept the bitter truth of their life. Prof Anita Myles opines the same when she writes that Bharati's heroines endure hardships stoically and 'emerge stronger providing sustenance and equilibrium to the entire community'. In Desirable Daughters, all
the three sisters, Padma Parvati and Tara, break with the tradition and clichéd roles in one way or the other to live life in their own way. They try to adjust with the changed scenario. The real quest for identity in the life of its protagonist Tara begins after her marriage to Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a wealthy Indian settled in America. It is interesting to note here that though Tara rejects traditional structure of Indian society, she marries to a man of her father's choice. Bishwapriya, usually called as Bhish, works as an electrical engineer in California, where afterwards Tara settled with him for almost ten years. Being a good Hindu wife, she never calls her husband by his name whenever she is in India, but in America she calls him Bish. He is a generous, protective provider, to whom love “is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities earning professional respect and being recognized for hard work and honesty” (27). Tara expects a different identity abroad by working somewhere rather than a housewife, but Bish never allowed her to do so.

After a decade of marriage, she understands that the promise of life as an American wife is not being fulfilled. She wants to work somewhere, but is not allowed as Bish is a traditional Indian Husband. His 15 hours' office, and his public functions in Boston, New York, Tokyo, Taiwan, Malaysia, Manila make Tara alienated. She finds her world limited only to her husband and son, and beyond that her world is alienating that has no identity in American society. She is tired of explaining India to Americans. She is ‘sick of feeling an alien’. She says
“I don't belong here . . . I don't want to belong” (79). She never wanted to be a part of American society and always tries to maintain her Indian identity. But she also enjoys the American life, an independent life, as she likes and wants. Vandana Singh rightly observes about Mukherjee's protagonists when she writes: “Though the female protagonist is comfortable with her American identity still she identifies with her Indian roots” (189). Tara is looking for respect, for an independent life apart from her husband's identity, while he is expecting her to be a good cook, an attentive wife, and raise a good boy. She wants to join the community college but cannot as it would not fit to her husband's values. Hence Tara left Bish after a decade of marriage. She begins to live in a part of San Francisco called Cole valley with her son Rabi. She separates herself from husband for her own identity -- immigrant American, American wife, and develops live-in relations with Andy, a balding, red--bearded, former biker, former bad-boy. He is a Hungarian Buddhist contractor, Zen retrofitter, Yoga instructor, and carpenter. The feeling at home provides a sense of satisfaction to her. She feels as if her dream of separate identity as an individual were fulfilled. Now she can live her life in her own terms - being an immigrant American, ‘self–appointed Joan of Arc’. America has provided the opportunity of modernity to her. She shows her individuality which gives license to act out her desires. Her divorce is an attempt to develop her own individuality. She needs the liberating promise of marriage and the wider world. She doesn’t want ‘to be preserved but trapped in ambe’. However, Tara's American adventure is a great shock for Indian readers.
Padma condemns and considers Tara's divorce as shame to the Bhattacharjee family. Though Tara and Padma reside in USA, they are strangers to each other. Tara has become American, self-engrossed, for whom the past is now darkest cave. Tara's American life is shattered with the sudden arrival of her so called nephew Chris Dey who calls Padma as his mother. She could not believe in Dey and calls her both sisters to discuss the matter. Parvati, who lives in Bombay, India, warns her to do not believe anybody as the gangsters are activated in the country. Padma also rejects Chris Dey as her son. Yet, Tara is not satisfied with all that comes to her and decides to go back into the past to find out the secrets of her family. Her investigation leads her to the life of her great-great grandfather, Jaikrishna Gangooly and his three daughters, especially his youngest daughter Tara Lata, the tree bride and lifetime virgin. Mukherjee highlights here cultural restraints for women in India. But, at the same time, she also points out how women can change the people around them and the total social set up. Tara Lata, the victim of tradition, transforms herself into freedom fighter and a spiritual healer. She is a good example of a woman who creates her own identity by following all conventions of the traditional Indian society. Tara feels connected to Tara Lata and wants to know more of her. She is proud of her origin - Bhattachrjee family, Bengali Brahmin. But she also criticizes Indian practices of polygamy, child marriage, dowry system, and virginity. She remembers how in India every word relating to family carries special meaning. The elders are not called by their names, family friends are called as 'mashi' and 'mesho' for mother's
side and “Pishi and 'Pishemashai' or Kaki and Kaku for the father's side” (36). Similarly, Tara mentions that ‘No middle – class Bengali man would smoke in front of his elders’ (38). Such a kind of social set up leads her to think that Indian identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case, confidently labelled by father's religion (Hindu), Caste (Brahmin), sub caste (Kulin), mothertongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta), formative region of ancestral origin (Mishtigunj, East Bengal), education (postgraduate and professional), and social attitudes (conservative). She is the follower of both Indian and American culture in her life that creates her dual identity. She keeps double consciousness - partly Indian (Bengali) and partly American. However, she is afraid to use her Ballygunge Park Road identity in USA. The observations of Edwards Bradley regarding Tara's affinity to India and her Indian identity are quite revealing when he writes that “highly Americanized [Tara] . . . is not really far from her Indian roots in terms of consciousness” (122). But, Tara is also aware that the Indian identity is fixed, static formed by an individual's religion, caste, sub-caste, birth place, origins and social attitudes. After realizing the truth of her family, Tara complains to the police regarding fake Chris Dey. The police investigation ends at the fact that Chris Dey is already killed and, in the guise of Chris Dey, Abbas Sattar Hai, a member of Dawood gang, wants to kill the techno-guru Bish and his family. An Indian origin Americanized policeman Jasbir Singh warns Tara about the dangers of her family life. Meanwhile, an unknown person bombed Tara's house, aiming to kill Bish, Tara and Rabi. Bish rescues Tara from the explosion
but, in his attempt, he is badly injured. Thus, the novel ends happily, but the problem of identity remains major issue throughout the narrative. The characters in the novel develop multiple identities due to their position -- being Diaspora. The transnational identity, immigrant identity and expatriate identity are mixed in Tara Bhattacharjee -- Chatterjee. Her communication in Bengali and English, the food she cooks is Indian and American, the clothes she wears are Indian and American, even her sexual life indicates that she sustains both the Indian and American identities. Mukherjee uses the flash back technique and makes Tara to recollect the past events to form her present identity. Thus, the novel ends happily, but the problem of identity remains major issue throughout the narrative. The characters in the novel develop multiple identities due to their position – being Diaspora. The transnational identity, immigrant identity and expatriate identity are mixed in Tara Bhattacharjee -- Chatterjee. Her communication in Bengali and English, the food she cooks is Indian and American, the clothes she wears are Indian and American, even her sexual life indicates that she sustains both the Indian and American identities. Mukherjee uses the flash back technique and makes Tara to recollect the past events to form her present identity. Thus, in the novel Bharati Mukherjee highlights the identity crisis of desirable daughters who face both traditional as well as modern worlds and their changing values. Indian migrated Tara's search for identity remains major issue throughout the narrative.