CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

An Indian American is a resident or citizen of the United States with origins in India. They either are born in India and immigrated to the United States or are born in the United States and have Indian ancestry. They account for 0.6% of the total population of the United States. Unlike the Chinese and other East Asian subgroups with significant concentration in the West Coast, Indian population is more evenly spread across the US mainly in the urban areas in general and the large metropolitan areas in particular. They are considered a very affluent community. Indeed, according to the U.S census Indian Americans have the highest median income of any ethnic group in the US ($60,093). Like the terms ‘Asian American’ or ‘South Asian American,’ the term ‘Indian American’ is an umbrella term that applies to people of widely varying socio-economic status, education, places of residence, generations, views, values, lifestyles and appearances. They are known to assimilate barriers and come from a similar society.

Indians are among the largest ethnic groups migrating to the USA legally. Immigration of Indian Americans has taken a place in many waves, since the first Indian came to the United States in the 1790s followed by a few hundred Indian Immigrants through the 19th century. However significant emigration from India to the United States has occurred in two distinct phases, from 1904 to 1924, and after
1965. The first wave is part of a larger Indian Diaspora created by British colonial oppression in India. The immigrants were mostly Sikh farmers, labourers, and veterans of the British army from the Punjab province, along with political refugees and activists, middle-upper-class students from various groups, who came to gain political support against British rule. The immigrant farmers and labourers on the West Coast, from Canada to California, met with the same kind of resistance that Euro-Americas and Canadians reserved for the Chinese and Japanese immigrants before them. Anti-Asian sentiment grew steadily after the turn of the century, leading to acts of virulent racism against a visibly foreign labour force threatening white jobs in lumber factories, sawmills railroads and farms. Riots, evictions and expulsions were accompanied by discriminating laws ensuring the subordinate status of these workers.

The anti-Asian legislation directly affecting these early Indian immigrants until 1946 were, laws preventing them from owning land beyond three years called the *California Alien Land Law Act, 1913*: the *Barren Zone Act, 1917*, whereby labourers from certain zones were barred from emigrating; and *the Asian Exclusion Act, 1924*. The *United States v. Thind* ruling created the official stance to classify Indians as non-white and retroactively stripped Indians of citizenship and land rights. Those living in the United States were prevented from marrying white women or from sponsoring wives and kin in India, with the result that, for years, families remained divided across continents, and many Sikh men turned to Mexican women for a family life in California. Some recent anthologies include
brief glimpses into this world. Since there was little migration from India to the United States between 1917 and 1965, those who came after 1965 are not much connected to the early Indian immigrants. Also, the experience of the post-1965 (second wave) migrants has been radically different. Enabled by the 1965 Immigration Act providing quotas for professionals, that is, those with occupational skills desirable in the United States, the second wave comprised mostly students and professionals from the educated middle and upper classes in search of a better standard of living. After independence, India underwent rapid industrialization, developing technologically and becoming among the world’s largest “exporters” of Anglophone scientists, who immigrated to countries like the United States, where their expertise was readily absorbed. However those who came in the late 1980s are a different lot. Economic recession in the early 1970s “forced the federal government to revise the 1965 Immigration Act in 1976, severely curtailing the entry of occupational immigrants” (12). The majority who came after the subsequent Immigration and Reform Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 were ‘family reunification immigrants’ and also those less proficient in English, hence unqualified for white-collar jobs. These scenes today are again different.

A fundamental reality of most first-generation Indian American is that they have grown up bilingual. Those who have had the privilege of being educated in English-medium schools have grown up with English as another ‘native’ language. Unlike Chinese language was no barrier. Their cultural traits, exceptional knowledge, good work habits have earned them the tag ‘model
minority’. For a language segment of the Indian Immigrant community, the ties to India endure. Their consciousness includes strong and highly differentiated regional consciousness, having to do with language, food, religious affiliation, dress, and degree of historical interaction with, or isolation from, the rulers. Given the present day technology of communications and the increasingly transnational flow of capital, geographical distances are not what they were for earlier American immigrants. For most first-generation immigrants, political conflict in the nation origin is felt swiftly and in many ways. Such was the case with every major upheaval in India of recent memory, whether the earthquake in Maharashtra, the sacrilegious entry of Indira Gandhi’s troops into the Sikhs sacred temple in Amritsar, Punjab, and her consequent assassination, the 1992 razing of the mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu fundamentalists, and the consequent Hindu-Muslim rioting in Bombay, or the current violence in Kashmir. These catastrophes have reverberated in the lives of many Indian Immigrants. Indian American literature is among the very ‘young’ literatures in the United States, barely forty years old. Its writing traditions are still young, and are often found in journals which collect and anthologize disparate writings from otherwise unpublished new writers of Indian background. In her recent Introduction to an edition of The Literary Review dedicated to writing from the Indian Diaspora, Bharati Muhherjee explains that Indo-American literature is a new phenomenon and as yet only in the process of becoming a tradition. “The literary commonwealth of Indian-origin authors are a comparatively recent phenomenon, still largely unremarked in this country. …In
Canada, where the East Indian population is proportionally greater than in the U.S., more names leap readily to mind…Since I’m a frequent visitor to writing classes in both the U.S. and Canada. I can’t help noticing the number of young Americans and Canadians of my own general background who seem to be writing seriously and professionally….I’m moved and a little daunted; I know the immigrant world well enough to know that each young writer is a doctor, accountant, or engineer lost; a bright hope, a bitter disappointment. I left India for the freedom to write and make my own life; I can imagine people somewhat like myself, but…. It will take another ten years for the Indo-American writers to start making their mark” (400).

One of the abiding concerns for most first-generation immigrants, poised between living ‘back home and in the present’ is how to balance their dual affiliations in a country with the myth of the melting pot. On one of the spectrum is that “need to claim one cultural identity, singular and immovable”, a position critiqued by Meena Alexander; on the other end is ‘the shedding of Indianness’ as in Bharati Mukherjee’s positioning of her characters in the introduction to Darkness. “Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world. Though the characters in these stories are, or were, ‘Indian’, I see most of these as stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond oneself to a new community against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal”(3). Between these two positions, Indianness as
‘singular and immovable’ and as ‘metaphor’ lies a range of identities and affiliations, worked out in the genres of poetry, memoir, short story and novel.

Writing by immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent is concerned with personal and communal identity, recollection of the homeland, and the active response to this ‘new’ world. Writers foreground and articulate their personal, familial identities and socio-political contexts, explaining how and why they came to where they are and to write what they do. Ved Mehta’s autobiographical enquiry locates what may be the foundations of an Indo-American writing tradition. In form and breath of vision, Daddyji, Mamaji, and Vedi are almost conventional. They locate the transformations that placed the family there, and detail in a surprisingly sensual form the geographical and climatic details of that landscape. The Ledge between the streams shifts ground. Having explained his parent’s independent and then mutual lives and family lines, and having chronicled his own childhood and schooling. Mehta departs from idyllic representation halfway through. The world of religious fanaticism, ethnic separatism, politics, and communal violence erupts. Now, Mehta explains his consternation, the family’s unpreparedness for social and public confrontations with dogmatism and bigotry, and the intrusion of such assaults into the sitting rooms and kitchens of a formerly becalmed middle-class household. Mehta links the bloodletting and trauma of partition to the emigration of a generation of trained professionals. For Mehta, however, the new place of settlement and career is not the subject. India-what it was what it became, and what it might have become or
remains the subject of his autobiographical explorations. The United States enters his writing only through acknowledgements pages and the unacknowledged presence of a calm study.

Bharati Mukherjee extends the autobiographical tradition of Methta in quite different ways. Society is the subject of her memoir, Days and Nights in Calcutta, co-authored with her husband. It is a work in which Mukherjee, sheds her nostalgia for her home city. Truth, presence, and verifiably witnessed history are all called into question variously by these would be confessionalists. By the end of her year in India, when Mukherjee finally prepares to leave, she realizes she does not need to discard her western education in order to retrieve the dim shape of an Indian one. In the future, she would return to India but would see it as ‘Just another Asian country,’ and she would be just another knowledgeable but desolate tourist’, believing that if she stayed on, “the true country would fail her more than she had by settling abroad” (284). Even though she acknowledges a sense of loss at not ever having a desh, she celebrates the possibilities of the writer’s ability to ‘demolish and reinvent’ a homeland: “It was hard to give up my family Chekhovian image of India. But if that was about to disappear, could I not invent a more exciting perhaps a more psychologically accurate- a more precisely metaphoric India: many more Indias?” (285)

Meena Alexander turned to writing for strength, catharsis, and alternate possibilities. The title of memoir Fault Lines offers insight into one of the writer’s main preoccupations: self creation and identity formation in the contest of
migration. “I have in me these worlds that need to be brought together - very crudely, India and America – and sometimes I feel that I keep treading the edge of the fault line in between,” states Alexander in Yellow Light : The Flowering of Asian American arts (“Meena Alexander” 84). This central metaphor of Alexander’s work *Fault Line* draws upon her history of travel inorder to showcase the connection between movement identities. The term highlights the difficulty of maintaining a cohesive self that does not betray the fragile ties of identity and place. Although her identity remained anchored in India, particularly Kerala, the constant movement through different cultures and continents affected Alexander. As she ponders in Fault Lines, her autobiographical memoir: “and what of all the cities and small towns and villages I have lived in since birth: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozecheri, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, all the within the boders of India; Khartoum in the Sudan; Nottingham in Britain; and now this island of Manhattan? How should I spell out these fragments of a broken geography?” (2). She continues to explore this notion of creating a life in her writing. She asked what is the surely the most recurring and poignant question in immigrant literatures: “can I become just what I want? So is this the land of opportunity, the America of dreams?”(202). Importantly, Fault Lines marks the narrator’s evolution from a consciousness of exile and it’s carefully assembled picture of the past, to the immigrant awareness of the claims of the present. Noting the inevitable process of change, Alexander acknowledges the hyphenated ethnic American identity: “But as my shiny past fractures, never, to be resembled, ethnicity enters. And with it a
different sort of priority”(201). She speaks of an ethnicity that breeds in the perpetual present that will never be wholly spelt out, a past that will never be wholly cast out.

Abraham Verghese’s *My own Country* is a moving memoir of how human involvement and engagement with a community make any place a home, how for the author “this parcel of land that I stand on” (347) becomes “my own country.” This autobiography of a doctor specializing in infectious disease, battling with AIDS patients in a small town in tennesse, speaks of the satisfaction that many professional Indian Americans feel about their specialized work. After five years of living “In a culture of disease, a small island in the sea of fear,” where “life speeds up and heightens in climates of extreme pain and emotion,” the narrator is exhausted but feels “connected: legs to earth, shoulders to sky” (346-47).

Poetry is not as popular as the novel or the short story partly due to the many difficulties associated with reading and interpreting text written in verse. As Jeet Thayil, a poet and editor puts it, “There are excellent Indian poets and at work today, and though the Indian poetry diaspora is vast, it is also vastly underrated, particularly when compared to fiction” (56). In the case of Indo-American poetry, the emphasis on the ethnographical concerns also impeded its popularization. American universities have been pioneering in introducing special literature courses on Indian literatures and languages and also supporting journals dedicated to these genres. The journal of South Asian literature of Michigan State University
established in 1963, and The South Asian Review founded in 1977 actively promoted creative work.

Agha Shahid Ali is a Kashmiri exile. The themes of homeland, loss and exile are central to Ali’s work. *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, an exquisite collection of poems, portrays in four sections the various spaces opened up in exile. Aesthetic verbal forms present emotions in their raw vulnerability, affirming gently and powerfully as well as the experience of displacement shared by countless nomads of the Indian subcontinent. The first group of poems re-created elegant ‘heirlooms’ of the poet’s native Kashmiri Muslim lineage of ancestral “Snowmen, Cracked Portraits, Prayer Rug, and Dacca Gauzes”. The second section has poems that return us to a lost or distanced geography and heritage, paradoxically ensuring that what is lost or distanced geographically and heritage, paradoxically ensuring that what is lost also survives, proclaiming that what is far is also near. The third group of poems describing the shifting occupancy of American apartments and American cities in the present gives way to the concluding section, in which the pot’s psychic life remains bound to India. However, in these final moving poems, such as ‘Survivor’ and *In the Mountains*, a part of the self remains estranged and never found. But, as in the poem “*The Tiger at 4:00 A.M,*” the poet-survivor continues at his table ‘to print on this blankness,’ bearing witness to that which stirs and stalks through the night spaces of the Himalayan heart and dawns onto the page.
A Nostalgist’s Map of America is a volume announcing a poet whose voice continues to occupy the alien spaces of a hyphenated identity. In this collection, the poet turns toward the American landscape, appropriating it with his own imagination. The past resonates in the present, as “[w]hen on Route in Ohilo”,(41) the poet passes an exit to Calcutta or when a European legend merges with a Persian one, as the Arizona desert recalls ‘another desert’, that of Arabia and its lover Manjoo, whose longing for Laila is rivaled only by Orpheus’s for Eurydice. The collection ends with “Snow on the Desert”, a poem that sings itself to the muse of loss. Katrak comments that Ali’s poem present “simultaneities of geography, namely, the possibilities of living here, in body, and elsewhere in mind and imagination”(Katrak, South Asian American Writers”:125).

Sharat Chansra’s April in Nanjangud, views and remembers India through an expatriate’s heightened awareness, a lonely awareness that ‘separates him from his own country and people’. The conclusion of Matrudezh espouses a similar despair. The Doorman metaphorically questions the cost to the immigrant of American cultural entry or the cost of readmission to the motherland. Once or Twice also contains some of his earliest emphatic indictments of America’s stance toward its immigrants. In Second Journey, the speaker asks the addressee who has come home, ‘to the door of what?’ Family of Mirrors is an expansion of earlier ‘immigrant themes’. It depicts life as a region of loneliness and self-doubt, where inclusion can intensify one’s sense of alienation. In fact, Chandra seems to say that a kind of immigrant status is synonymous with the human condition, especially in
a frenetic, fluid and shrinking world. The universality of displacement and loss and the sharp divisive nature of American social hierarchies are central themes of *Immigrants of Loss*. While *Family of Mirrors* received the lion’s share of popular attention, being nominated for the Editor’s choice Pushcart Award (9190) and the Pulitzer Prize in poetry (1993), it was Immigrants that won the poet the most prestigious awards.

There has been a tremendous quantitative and qualitative change in the phenomenon of diaspora owing to the great demographic upheavals, especially in the last decades, and also due to the unprecedented growth of technologies of communication. Even though the word ‘exile’ continues to be used and is not entirely devoid of significance, the new speed, reach and dimension of communication networks increased the possibilities of forming a little real-not imagined-community of one’s own people who are from the same place and speak the same language. This has definitely changed the experience of exile. A Post-1965 migrating generation imagines India very differently than apost-1980s generation and a post-2000 generation. Class and gender play crucial roles in the fashioning of not just the diaspora but also the diaspora’s interaction with and investment in cultures. A major theme in diasporic writing is their occupation of luminal space. In fact Diasporic writing is doubly luminal. Often Diaspora writers are outsiders looking at the new culture, but they are also outsiders to the homeland, looking in at a past of a space that has changed their absence. Another important theme is the dual identity—the conflict between a person’s ethnic heritage
and individual identity. This is at the base of the conflict between generations, between the mothers and fathers who want to maintain cultural ethnicity and the children who want freedom to be more ‘American’. The oppressed live of women are also portrayed in much of Indo-American writing.

Bharti Mukherjee’s oeuvre highlights some of the transitions made on the journey from expatriate or exile to immigrant citizen. In Mukherjee’s texts, we see her rejection of the tradition-bound society of the East as she reaches out for the more empowering, individualistic society of the West. Mukherjee’s works follow a visibly autobiographical trajectory right from *The Tiger’s Daughter*, a novel about a young woman’s unsettling return home to Calcutta after years abroad. *Wife* is about the despair of an immigrant woman of middle-class Bengali origin shorn of her support structure in an alien country. The violence unleashed in the novel seems excessive but underscores the upheaval and trauma of displacement. *Darkness*, perhaps an allusion to the racism in Canada, is a collection of short stories that register the despair produced by the encounter with Canadian racism. Mukherjee’s bitter experience of the latter makes her a particularly grateful American immigrant; her declaration ‘I’m one of you (American) now’, now carries a note of defiance but also relief. *Middleman and Other Stories*, drawing upon immigrant experience in Canada and the United State, reveals Mukherjee’s confidence in being the detached and ironic purveyor of the immigrant’s experience, not just of Indians but of the various newcomers from the developing world. In her later novel, *Jasmine*, she shows the possibilities of remaking oneself
in the New World. She portrays the immigrant experience of a protagonist who finds the West exciting and full of possibilities; Jasmine, an illegal immigrant, a young widow, transforms herself from Jyoti, to Jasmine, to Jassy, to Jase, and to Jane in the United States, moving rapidly from one locale to another: starting from rural India (Hasnapur), proceeding to a city in Punjab (Jullundhar), arriving in Florida, moving to Queens, then to Manhattan, and ultimately settling for some time in Iowa. Jasmine does not transform herself gradually; she reinvents herself by killing her old selves. “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams” (29). This novel best reveals the pressure felt by an immigrant in American society—the pressure to assimilate—and describes without apology the necessity of doing so “To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward” (165).

In coming to terms with ethnicity and femaleness in America, Alexander feels the need to create a wholeness of being that resists the numerous fractures of migration but is left wondering as she does in Fault Lines: “What parts of my past can I hold onto when I enter this life? Must I dump it all? Can I bear to?” (198). As if in answer to this question, Rashid in Manhattan Music tells the protagonist Sandhya that “the Past is a rough instrument we have to play. People like us have to make up the past from little bits and pieces, play it” (78), Problematizing the notion of the past by terming it a ‘rough instrument’. Rashid points to underlining elements of memory not as nostalgia or documentation but as a transformative
exploration that provides the knowledge through which location is articulated and made to fit the present, multiple, subjective positions. Through her characters who espouse this notion of memory, Alexander puts forth a concept of self that is inclusive of memory. Thus memory figures in her work in an important way, bridging the past and the present.

For the expatriate writer, the sense of alienation is literalized by the sense of time and space lying between his current experience and the moment of emigration. This distance becomes necessary for productive effort. Amitav Ghosh says, “This then is the peculiar paradox of the novel: those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a ‘sense of place’. Yet the truth is that it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible” (Kunapipi, Vol.Xix, No.3, 1998). In a world increasingly inhabited by people without countries, it is perhaps not new stories that are needed but new ways of telling and hearing them and a new willingness to listen to unfamiliar voices. Ghosh narrates these old stories; Ghosh’s fiction meshes time, space and storytelling style to chart the vast spectrum of human experience and its various pathways of survival and self-preservation. Ghosh’s most ambitious novel *The Glass Palace* is about the history of the Indian Diaspora in the South-East Asia. It represents an enormous multiplicity of experience and history. Ghosh says “For me at some point it became very important that this book encapsulate in it the ways in which people cope with defeat, because this has really been our history for a long time: the
absolute fact of defeat and the absolute fact of trying to articulate defeat to yourself and trying to build a culture around the centrality of defeat. This is not just a fact for us; it’s a fact for the indigenous peoples in the Americas, in Australia, and wherever you go. But around defeat there’s love, there’s laughter, ther’s happiness, you know? There are children. There are relationships. There’s betrayal. There’s faithfulness. This is what life is, and I want my book to be true to that” (W L T Interview, Aldama 89).

With its focus on immigration to the United States and development of American identity, Bharati Mukherjee’s fiction eludes literary categorization. It engages with the various contexts of multiculturalism, postcolonialism, and globalization, yet Mukherjee adamantly positions herself as an American author writing American literature. In this essay, I investigate the intersections between Mukherjee’s focus on the American character, culture, and people and developing theories and critical debates on globalization. Through Mukherjee’s works, we can see American identity in a state of flux, made possible by the immigrant and the relationships established between the transnational individual and America. Mukherjee’s immigrant characters challenge and expose American mythology from the American Dream of individual achievement to the canonical literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, rewriting them to show how foundational the immigrant is to American culture. I trace Mukherjee’s redefinition of the American character in and through three successive novels *Wife*, *Jasmine*, and *The Holder of the World*. In *Wife*, Mukherjee challenges
America’s adoption of multiculturalism because she considers it a means of essentializing ethnicity and both maintaining and enhancing difference. This multiculturalism, as part of America’s assumed principles of acceptance, alienates the protagonist Dimple from her immigrant community and the larger American culture, resulting in her violent attempts to force her Americanization. *Jasmine* continues to work against multiculturalism by explicitly inserting the immigrant into the American mythos, reshaping the Western literary canon to include the transnational individual and to assert the immigrant foundations of American ideology. Mukherjee expands her focus in *Holder of the World* as her protagonist Hannah travels to England, India, and the bourgeoning United States, rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* to suggest that globalizing forces have been present throughout American cultural history, not just at the end of the 20th century when critical debates began to flourish. Through analysis of these novels, I argue that Mukherjee’s reformulation of American character reasserts American ideals by including and developing with the rise of globalization theory. The Indian born writer Bharathi Mukherjee being one of the most widely known immigrant writers of America can be divided into two categories. The First category was, the ‘Willing Immigrant Writers’ who settled in America from Europe and Asia and had made it their home. The Second category consists of the ‘Unwilling Immigrant Writers’ with American origin whose forefathers were brought to America in some slave trips. But Bharati Mukherjee considers herself different from other European writers for a variety of reasons. Bharathi Mukherjee’s female
protagonists are immigrants and suffer cultural shock but they are potential women and are anxious to establish their identity by undertaking their heroic journeys. That is why; Bharathi Mukherjee has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of just twenty five years. Even though she has been acknowledged as a ‘voice of expatriate-immigrants’ sensibility, a close observation of her novels reveals that she has written all the novels with predominantly feminist views. Since Bharathi Mukherjee’s women characters are the victims of immigration, all the critics focus her novels as problems and consequences due to immigration but actually the problems are not because they are immigrants but because the women characters fight for their rights as a woman and then as an individual. Bharathi Mukherjee has tried to create a new relationship between man and woman based on equality, non-oppression, non-exploitation so that the creative potentials of both are maximized as individuals and not gender dichotomies. The male, as a representative of the patriarchal society has, at last, being jerked off the center of woman’s gravitation. The woman is preparing now to be her own gravitational force, beyond the fullness of patriarchy. Let examine, the novels of Bharathi Mukherjee basing on their concept.

In Bharathi Mukherjee’s first novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter*, the protagonist Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years stay in America. The story is drawn on Mukherjee’s own experience and those of her sisters who had gone to study in America. When Tara lands at Bombay airport, she is not comfortable with
her relatives. Here, Tara’s Bombay relatives cannot accept a woman who not accompanied by her husband, David. According to Indian tradition, a man should lead the woman. He plays a protective role. Travelling alone, living alone and moving alone are part of unfamiliarity in many parts of India. In Indian tradition, one should marry in his own caste. If anyone marries from another caste, he will be treated as an outcast or a sinner. But the protagonist Tara violating these rules and marries a foreign man who is a Jew. She totally forgets her caste and religion through her marriages. Ironically, Mukherjee makes a criticism of the conservative attitude of the Indians who are crazy of foreign things and clothes but they do not appear of marriage with foreign people. In the presence of her mother, Tara feels alienated. Within herself, Tara becomes mentally turbulent and makes her return to the USA. Thus, in the first novel one finds the feeling of alienation of Tara.

In her second novel Wife, the protagonist Dimple wants to break through the traditional taboos of a wife. This novel tells the story of Dimple, a seemingly docile young Bengali girl who, as any other normal girl, is full of dreams about her married life and so she eagerly and impatiently waits for marriage. She marries Amit Basu. She visualizes a new life for herself in America where Amit is expecting to immigrate. She is expected to play the role of an ideal Indian wife, stay at home and keep the house for the husband. Her frustration is built up gradually by the circumstances. She resents being wife in the Basu family and rebels against wifedom in many ways. One such way is here including a miscarriage by skipping herself free from her pregnancy, which she views as a
Basu’s property even in her womb. But herself-identity is avoided by marriage. She aspires for self-recognition and dream fulfillment. But Basu behaves in a different way. He wants her to a docile and submissive. So Dimple hates Basu and his behaviour. He needs her only for sexual harassment. She feels it's a sort guilty. Finally in her mentally upset state, she kills Amit in an act of self-liberation and eventually commits suicide.

The third and most accomplished novel “Jasmine” is an account of adaptation and not a defeat. It is the story of a Punjabi rural girl, Jyothi. Prakash, an energetic and enthusiastic young man enters in Jyothi’s life as her husband. When Prakash prepares to go to America, she says, “I’ll go with you and if you leave me, I’ll jump into a well”. A woman has to accept, the path of her husband, Renamed as Jasmine, joyously sharing the ambition of her husband, she looks forward going to America, a land of opportunities even this dream gets shattered by the murder of Prakash on the eve of his departure. She decides to go America and fulfill Prakash’s mission and perform “Sati”. Having learned to “Walk and Talk” like an American, she grabs every opportunity to become American. Jasmine becomes Jase. At the end she kills Sukhawinder, the Khalsa lion who killed Prakash. After that she goes to Iowa assuming a new name “Jase”. The manifold facets or roles played by Jasmine as Jase and Jase assault the power in woman. This power can be equal to Sakthi which is command over quality that destroys and fights against all evils. Jasmine has broken away from the shackles of caste, gender and family. She has learnt to live not for her husband or for her
children but herself. Jasmine is a survivor, a fighter and an adaptor. She figures against Unfavourable circumstances, comes out a winner and carves out a new life in an alien country. Bharathi Mukherjee’s succeeding novel “The Holder of the World” re-inforces expatriation as a Journey of the human mind. Like Jasmine who travels westward, Hannah Estean’s Voyage to the Orient tells us the protagonist’s latest tensions, aspirations and ambitions. Hannah is born in Massachusetts who travels to India. She becomes involved with a few Indian lovers and eventually a king who gives her a diamond known as true Emperor’s Tear. The story is told the detective’s searching for the diamond and Hannah’s viewpoint.

The physical journey of the female hero not only leads to probing of the self but also makes her recognize the side of herself. She returns to her native land, not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. In her next novel, Leave it to me, Bharathi Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman sociopath named Debby Dimartino, short name Debi who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents (described as a murderer and a flower child). The novel also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional involvement of the chief character in her quest for revenge.

Bharathi Mukherjee’s latest novel Desirable Daughters is a tale of immigrants and the attitude of three sisters and their ways of dealing with
situations. *Desirable Daughters* as the title suggests, one kind of daughter, which parents would be proud of and for whom every parent would crave. The three sisters, who are the daughters of Motilal Bhattacharya and the great-grand-daughters of Jai Krishna Gangooli, belong to a traditional Bengali Brahmin family. Padma, Parvathi and Tara are symbolic names of Shakti (Goddess of Hindu) do not flaunt the some ethical values but have the grit to carve a niche for them. They are a blend of traditional and modern outlook. Padma and Parvathi do not regret their choices, the former an immigrant of ethnic origin in New Jersey, and the latter married to a boy of her own choice and settled in the plush locality of Bombay with an encourage of servants to catch her. Tara, the narrator of the novel marries Bishwapiya Chatterjee, goes on arranged marriage. Tara finds that her married life is not fulfilling and she walks out of her traditional life, a typical American divorce settlement follows. Tara works as a volunteer in a pre-school. She enjoys her love life with Andy. Tara sends his son with his father as a divorce settlement. The fluidity of her identity, testifies not only his own but also the fluidity of the immigrants. Finally Tara returns to her father’s house for solace. This novel to a certain extent seems to be the autobiography of Bharathi Mukherjee who has two sisters.

Bharathi Mukherjee’s last novel is *The Tree Bride*. Here the root-search links the past incidents with the present happenings of Tara’s life of *Desirable Daughters*. The search to find out the identity of her stalker leads to several revelations. The plot of *The Tree Bird* moves back and forth from colonial India of
the pre-independence times to San Francisco and back. As women have experienced displacement and dislocations in personal lives, they are better suited for adaptability in an alien culture. A close reading of Mukherjee’s novels reveals that her primary aim is to champion the cause of women. Mukherjee’s first books weave complex tales but they lack the art of storytelling. But her later works are more successful at capturing the readers. Thus, Bharathi Mukherjee is a typical feminist writer. Her novels truly adhere to the temperament and mood of the society in which she lived.

In post-colonial societies, the crisis of identity often seems to override all considerations. For some, identity is social and rooted in the culture; whereas for some, it means personal achievements. E.H.Erikson described identity as “a subject sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image” (Vol.51: 13). Identity defines a person and impacts upon everything he or she does; from the relationships they form, to the work they do and everything in between. It works like a constant companion of an individual and an individual’s identity is related with race, class and gender. Other factors such as nationality also led to individual’s identity. National identity now a-days takes precedence over other possible identities. That’s why, perhaps, we don’t tire of speaking about Diaspora which refers to change of place and habitation. What comes across is that identity has been the core issue in exploration of Diaspora.
Identity crisis and alienation are some of the greatest problems confronting modern man on move. In the twentieth-century especially, the post-war period, has been an age of great spiritual and mental stress and strain and has rightly been dubbed ‘The Age of Alienation’. Edmund Fuller remarks that in our ages “Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine, and ruin but from inner problems…. a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in this way of existence’’ (18). The injuries inflicted and the scars left on his psyche make him realize his helplessness. Sometimes, being part of a diaspora- away from one’s own roots, mother culture and place also becomes a significant reason of this modern malaise. Alienated individuals have been vigorously delineated in modern literature; the outsider as a protagonist is recurrent figure in much of 20th century Indo-English fiction. Bharati Mukherji is in the same lineage of showing the pleasures and pains of being in a diaspora through her novels.

She occupies an outstanding place among the Indian women novelists writing in English and belongs to the body of writers who, by choice or otherwise, have left their countries of origin and made their homes elsewhere. Identity politics permeate Mukherjee’s texts. Her novels, like *Wife, Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World* explore the shifting identities of diasporic women, both in present-day United States, Canada, and India, and in the past. The novels of Bharati Mukherjee’s are self actualizing. Quest for the definition of self and search for identity are main features of her women who are seen caught in the flux of tradition and modernity. The present research aims at discussing Bharati
Mukherjee’s *Wife* focusing on how cultural displacement or dislocation cause new identities but of course, through a rigorous path. In *Wife*, Mukherjee expresses and challenges the hardships of multicultural society of an immigrant. She sets the novel in the United States to reveal both the nations limitations in multiculturalism and the discrepancies between a policy of cultural difference and the American dream of Individualism and opportunity. In her portrayal of Dimple, a newly wed woman emigrates from India to the United States and suffers under the disempowerment and pain caused by a different society. Mukherjee depicts a fixed American culture that negates individual identity in favor of communal identities located in foreign culture. In turn, it limits the liberty and success of its mythological promises. From the very beginning of the novel *Wife*, the sympathetic alienation and ultimate impossibility of the multicultural finds expression through definition, often a violent act that strips away nuance and actual possibility. Mukherjee presents us with a story of an immigrant who does not survive; so long forced to identify with either Indian or American culture. Dimple completely separates herself from any culture what so ever, relying only on “individual initiative [for] that’s what it came down to and her life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself” (212). She pleases others by identifying with a group culture that ignores her personal need to change in America and identifies her only by her role where the Indian community sees Dimple as wife, and multicultural America separates her from itself as an immigrant. At the novel’s end, Dimple murders her husband, and Mukherjee
leaves us with an image of Dimple talking to herself and to the knife that she used to stab him in one elongated disintegration into insanity. No longer associated with any culture, least of all a successful, new, hybrid one, Dimple isolates herself completely. She exits as an unrealized transition, a middle ground between the fixed disparate cultural identities for her immigrant community and the hybrid culture of the ideal America.

Mukherjee acknowledges that Dimple’s immigration has been one of misguided Americanization, but in the end Dimple finally transforms not into an Indian in America, nor into an American, but into an American with an Indian past. Migration, in short, is a painful process causing detraction. No amount of talk about multiculturalism has been able to provide the diasporic subjects themselves have to figure out ways of transcending their liminality which would result in their well being.

However, with a knowledge of it is to be homeless, the nations concerned can also adapt means of helping diasporic subjects cope better. The immigrant experience is complicated as a sensitive immigrant finds himself or herself perpetually at a transit station fraught with memories of the original home which are struggling with the realities of the new world. Bharati Mukherjee masterfully explores the themes of the complexities of the immigrant experience and foreignness, the clash of life styles cultural disorientations, conflicts of assimilation, the tangled ties between generations. She points the portraits of Indian families form between the full of representing family traditions, and the American way of life. In 1973,
Bharati Mukherjee returned to India after twelve years in North America, both the United States and Canada. Instead of a homecoming, the yearlong sabbatical from Canada, chronicled by both Mukherjee and her Canadian husband Clark Blaise in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977), enabled Mukherjee to conceptualize her migrant position: “The year in India had forced me to view myself more as an immigrant than an exile. Through the year as a desolate tourist in her birthplace, Mukherjee’s conception of her migrant position changes from exile in Canada to immigrant” (297); she transformed. In 1988, she transformed yet again and became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America. Critics have recognized the evolution of Mukherjee’s literary characters from exile to immigrant. Fakrul Alam divides her work into four distinct phases characterized by exile, expatriation, immigration, and a concern not so much with immigrants as with the spatiotemporal connections between cultures. Maya Manju Sharma considers Mukherjee’s development from expatriate to immigrant an internalized perspective, an inner world. Both of these formulations, however, neglect the importance of the nation as an imagined cultural space within the literature of immigration. Alam’s first three divisional terms rely on a nation for definition: an exile *from* a nation, an expatriate *of* one nation *in* another, and an immigrant *from* one nation moving *to* another. The fourth category ignores the importance of the immigrant as the agent that *creates* the connections between national cultures. Although rightfully concerned with the immigrant’s self-fashioning with her concern for the individual’s *inner* world, Sharma, too, fails to stress the
importance of the nation. These critics neglect to discuss how the nation imagined in Mukherjee’s literature transforms and are transformed by her protagonists, rendering immigration more than a tale of individual adaptation and change. By asserting the importance of the nation, however, Bharati Mukherjee demonstrates that the transformation that results from immigration is multidirectional.

The immigrant does not simply enter a nation, disrupt it, or change because of it; a relationship develops between the individual and the nation, which enables the nation to transform as well. Transformation occurs through confrontation with the global and subsequent reinvigoration of the nation. As a newcomer from another culture, the conspicuous immigrant clashes with American culture and highlights inconsistencies in both its present and its past. As Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt note, “the act of immigration magnifies the consciousness of identity. In other words, whereas marked identity and its accompanying questions and looks may not be anomalous for women in their homeland, it becomes an elusive entity after immigration necessarily questioned by white Americans”. (34)

By illuminating the contradictions between a cultural mythology of tolerance and a present that emphasizes difference or neglects immigrants’ place in history, Mukherjee’s immigrants seek to solidify their identity by propelling Americans out of their stagnancy or isolationism in an increasingly globalized world. This relationship is one of constant negotiation between the individual and the nation and between the nation and the world. Mukherjee asks Americans –
immigrants included – to re-evaluate themselves and their nation through a return to their mythological roots and a re-imagining of their national identity. Given Mukherjee’s Indian origins, her focus on America, and her immigrant experience and immigrant characters, we must ask ourselves where we situate her fiction. Is her literature postcolonial? Immigrant? Indian? American? Indian-American? World literature? Immigrant literature? She adamantly identifies herself as an American author, but her conception of America does not necessarily exclude her from any of these literary categories. Mukherjee uses her literature as a means of imagining America as a space that joins, conflates, and complicates these discourses because of the individuals who cross and have crossed - its borders. Because of the polygenetic cultural origins of Mukherjee’s immigrant characters and their global movement, the relationship between the immigrant and the nation develops in the context of globalization and its discourses. In accepting the international immigrant, the nation must acknowledge the impact of increased mobility and communication and the possible threats a shrinking world has on its boundaries. The readers consider that Mukherjee’s characters change both in individual texts and in Mukherjee’s entire literary corpus, understanding them as a series of engagements with the changing view of the nation, particularly in relation to ethnicity and cultural diversity with immigrants. Through three of Mukherjee’s novels - Wife (1975), Jasmine (1989), and The Holder of the World (1993) “I trace the development of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and the larger project of globalization that enables these discourses. By simultaneously concentrating on
the individual immigrant while expanding the national focus to accommodate global forces, Mukherjee claims the immigrant’s rightful and vital place within America and the nation’s resilience in a continually evolving world. Radical social changes in the twentieth century forced America to acknowledge its shifting relationship to nations across the globe and to redefine itself culturally to accommodate its growing contact with peoples across the world. Advances in transportation and communication technology connected America to the world, expanding American culture to the globe but also bringing the world into America. Wars spanned the globe and journalism and television media brought the images of the World Wars into every citizen’s awareness. European powers relinquished or lost their imperial holdings. Immigration boomed at the turn of the century with an influx of typically white Europeans and again after 1965, when the national origins quotas of previous U.S. immigrations policies were lifted, resulting in a new wave of typically non-white immigrants from the Third World. By 1990, almost “eight percent of Americans were foreign-born, forcing Americans to acknowledge other cultures as they literally moved next door” (Portes and Rumbaut 6). The influx of cultures forced Americans to ask a new what parts of their culture and nation were fundamentally American. Emerging literatures brought the crisis from the political level into the cultural. As a discourse in which authors can imagine and develop different representations and ideals of America, literature provided a transformative site for writers such as Mukherjee who wrote against the normative white ideas of an America that excluded them. Early
twentieth-century literatures of European immigrants focused on the hardships of living in America but also on its promises. In her autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912), for example, Mary Antin, a Russian Jewish immigrant, depicted lives of poverty and alienation, but ultimately she resurrected the American mythos of religious freedom and paradise. Other migrant Jewish writers, such as Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yezierska, Henry Roth, and Bernard Malamud (whom Mukherjee found particularly enlightening and influential to her own writing), fictionalized the difficulties of assimilation and acceptance in America. Writers from the second wave of American immigration, however, wrote at the intersection of this early twentieth-century American immigrant tradition and the rise of postcolonial literatures and theory propelled especially by the 1978 publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* that increased the awareness of cultures both within and without the United States and the production and publication of ethnic literatures from non-white sources. Many Asian American writers, such as Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston, figured immigration struggles in terms of generational conflict between the actual immigrants themselves and their American-born children, and critics regarded their writing as insulated by national origin instead of participating in American culture, often defining these authors and their subjects by hyphenation: Asian-American, Chinese-American, et cetera. Gloria Anzaldúa, a Latina writer and critic, introduced America to the concept of borderlands that, while affirming the liminal spaces between cultural identities,
remained separate from a unified American culture, in fact positing that such a universalizing concept did not exist.

All of these racial and ethnic distinctions circulating within American literature and criticism at the end of the twentieth century challenged the monolithic existence and nature of a universal American culture. Fears of the dissolution of national culture by globalization led to prolific critical production, collected in notable volumes such as Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake’s 1996 *Global or Local* and Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi’s 1998 *Cultures of Globalization*. Postcolonial studies generated much discussion as well, particularly in critical efforts to situate the United States in terms of postcolonial theory. The year 2000 saw the publication *Postcolonial America*, edited by Richard C. King, and *Post-colonial Theory in the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, edited by Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt. The adjectival phrasing of the first volume, as well as the contents within, frames America as a postcolonial nation, which assumes that all of its inhabitants and cultural productions are in some way postcolonial, while the latter volume supposes postcoloniality not strictly as an objective state but as a subjectivity, and it applies postcolonial theory to the individuals writing about and within the nation, including immigrants like Bharati Mukherjee. Following closely behind these volumes, *American Literature and Post-Colonial Theory* (2003), edited by Deborah L. Madsen, considers postcolonial theory a powerful approach to ethnic literatures of the United States, and Inderpal Grewal investigates the circulating discourses of *Transnational*
America (2005) through a postcolonial lens. Revathi Krishnaswamy describes the ambiguity of distinguishing between these two theoretical concerns with globalization and postcolonialism: It is indeed unclear whether contemporary globalization theory has been made possible by the postcolonial challenge to older Eurocentric forms of globalization premised on the centrality of the nation and narrated in terms of modernization or whether postcoloniality itself is a consequence of a globalization premised on the marginalization of the nation, especially in the domain of the cultural and the imaginary. The overlap and ambiguity of the terms suggests frustration with imagining America in a global context through either theoretical stance. The variety of these works in literary criticism show a concern with trying to define the nation as a whole in its relation to the world around it and with increased consideration of its immigrant citizens.

In 1996, Mukherjee began an interview by strongly dissociating herself with postcolonial studies, deeming it - an inappropriate category in which to place her works because of its dependence on the specific colonial and historical legacies of her country of origin, India. Removing herself from a distinctly postcolonial categorization refutes the criticism she has received for the Western infused Catholic school education that largely informs her writing. Instead, as Inderpal Grewal asserts, Mukherjee’s fiction became more accessible to the American reader because of her identification as an American of Bengali origin. Mukherjee’s cosmopolitanism coexisted easily with her belief in the nation-state as the guarantor of rights and privileges as well as with a stable ethnic identity that was
not seen as conflicted with her American identity. Mukherjee’s association with America, with the destination of immigration, then, takes precedence in the politics of immigrant identity. Mukherjee has repeatedly affirmed her status as an American citizen, both by law and in literature. By rejecting hyphenation for its politics of hate and the campaigns of revenge spawned by Eurocentric patriots on the one hand and the professional multiculturalists on the other, Mukherjee labels herself neither Indian-American nor Asian-American but distinctly and solely American, “a self-empowering act that demand[s] that the nation deliver the promises of the American Dream and the American Constitution to all its citizens” (33). The rejection resists the nation’s contemporaneous policies of multiculturalism that emphasize difference; while at the same time, it seeks to restore American culture to its ideological origins. In defining her relationship to the nation, Mukherjee implies that only an immigrant (or, perhaps, an ethnic American conscious of her immigrant descent) with transnational consciousness can re-envision the nation in a way that forces readers to remember the promises of an American Dream and re-evaluate the nation’s relationship to its ideological roots.

Mukherjee’s idea of the American implies a double movement - a progressive movement forward from immigrant to citizen, which requires a movement backward in search of origins. The originary quest serves an important function in the American mythos as a tool of revision. Mukherjee’s characters embark on this quest to legitimize their inclusion in America and suggest that
America’s origins are immigrant in nature; not only in literal transplantation but in the way each citizen conceptualizes the nation. In other words, the American consciousness is an immigrant consciousness. For Mukherjee, a stronger American culture requires the nation to constantly reassert its foundational beliefs by accepting the immigrant and the transnational cultures she brings with her and by accommodating the global forces that continue to shape individuals and nations. In her novels, Mukherjee forces America to return to its origins by invoking America’s scripted narratives. She positions her protagonists in the mythologies of the frontier and American individualism, in the literary canon, in the contexts of liberal American multiculturalism rhetoric, all spaces that either exclude or Obviously, this generalization favors the immigrant and overlooks Native Americans or American Indians whose history with European settlement and the birth of the United States is a painful and bloody one. However, the influx of non-native peoples and their brutal conquest of the land, coupled with the founding of a nation distinct from Native American tribal nations, rendered Native Americans immigrants in their own land. Or, rather, they have been so marginalized and left out of the American canon and imaginary that writers such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko, of what has been called the Native American Renaissance, have begun their own literary restorative acts to place Native Americans back in the American canon. Mukherjee does not ignore American Indians but rewrites their presence in the ambiguity of an (American) Indian- (national) Indian construct that equates the two identities, an admittedly
problematic appropriation. Further exploration into Mukherjee’s or other immigrant or minority writers’ acknowledgement of Native Americans could be particularly illuminating and useful to dispel or analyze these problems.

Lisa Lowe’s influential work *Immigrant Acts* describes the disparity between national culture and immigrants’ influence: If the nation proposes American culture as the key site for the resolution of inequalities and stratifications that cannot be resolved on the political terrain of representative democracy, then that culture performs that reconciliation by naturalizing a universality that exempts the non-American from its history of development or admits the non-American only through a multiculturalism that aestheticizes ethnic differences as if they could be separated from history. In contrast, the cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality displace the fiction of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the immigrant’s before history or exempt the immigrant’s from history. Mukherjee seeks to highlight the gaps and fissures between American reality and American ideology and reinsert her characters in these spaces in order to re-present America as a more complete nation. By placing a non-Anglo or non-Western immigrant in these recognizable narratives that most natural-born (white) Americans regard as their birthright, Mukherjee subversively rewrites them, defamiliarizing the narratives in order to assert the immigrant’s place in the nation’s history and cultural imaginary.
Furthermore, her rewriting imagines a reinvigorated America, a new nation that accommodates and adapts to the external changing world. At the same time that Mukherjee restores the immigrant to an extant canon, she also carves out a new space for her own literature. Her writing differs from the immigration literature of the early twentieth century like that of Mary Antin, with its assimilationist doctrines that sought to absorb and reform the immigrant into a centralized Anglo-American culture in the flawed melting-pot mythology. Nor does it follow many of the patterns established by other (post-) ethnic and borderland writers who only seek to show the inconsistencies of American culture and deeply embedded intolerance. In their Introduction to *Post-Colonial Theory and the United States*, Singh and Schmidt offer an illuminating and detailed discussion of these two different postcolonial schools in U.S. literature. The post ethnicity school is assimilationist, the ultimate form of consent‘narrative, when past conflicts are left behind (made post-) for a radically remade identity transcending the past. Instead, the borders school understands that such divided or border identities descend eternally from the contradictions within modernity itself, from the moment that the Americas‘ were discovered‘ and the struggle began to define whether these Americas were an alternative to or a proof of Europe‘s claim to be the superior civilization. Hence, the borders school more readily recognizes the inconsistencies and imperfections of U.S. culture. Mukherjee‘s approach somewhat mixes these two schools. She recognizes America‘s - gaps and fissures but offers a solution for closing them; she desires neither to assimilate to a
homogenous American culture nor to raze it, but to reimagine it through a new formulation, a symbiotic and hybrid relationship between individual and nation that incorporates and responds to global transformations.

As an American Dreamer, being an American India-born writer Bharati Mukherjee eloquently declares ‘I am an American, not an Asian American. Her forceful statement invited much criticism from those who thought her disloyal to her roots (India, as represented by the word Asian” (Malashri Lal1995) points out that Mukherjee has become a propagandist on behalf of a new community and tends to downgrade her Indian heritage and affiliations. Similarly, Ragini Ramachandra (1991) criticizes her as “the one, who has become a source of considerable embarrassment in recent times to a sensitive, discerning, [and] self- respecting Indian reader”(56). She then contrasts Mukherjee with other writers such as Raja Rao and Santha Rama Rau who were also expatriates. In contrast to Mukherjee, they still retained their Indianness and were proud of being called Indian writers. Ramachandra further criticizes Mukherjee’s pride in –growing less and less Indian with every passing year and blatantly making a virtue of her rootlessness.

Mukherjee’s ‘I am an American’ statement was finally uttered after she had lived as a migrant in Canada and experienced discrimination against Asians there. She had been ready to embrace Canada as her second country, but then realized that after fourteen years, as a dark skinned Canadian, as a
non-European immigrant to Canada, life was really impossible, not that it was impossible, but that it was very hard (Mukherjee in Vignisson, 1992-3:157). In 1980, she decided to migrate back to the U.S. and eventually became a citizen in a melting pot country which to her is “the stage for the drama of self-transformation (Mukherjee, 1997:1).

Mukherjee’s writings occupy a distinctive place in American literature and she successfully became a major figure in contemporary American literature. Her writings generally reflect her own experiences of relocated, telling the stories of immigrants who struggle to define themselves within a kind of middle passage. Her writings can be subsumed into diasporic writing’, which Victor J. Ramraj (1996) defines as works produced by globally dispersed minority communities that have common ancestral homelands. These writings may come from two groups of people writers. First, they are produced by the offspring of the old diasporic people who were uprooted from their homelands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and transported from one region of the globe to another. Secondly, these writings emerge from the recent or new diasporic people from the English-speaking regions such as India, Asia, Africa, and group of people from West Indies and Fiji. Mukherjee herself admits that “an immigrant like her because, [she] come[s] from the Third World, [has] a very different notion of what constitutes a novel” (Mukherjee in Connell, 1990:29). She reveals that her stories do not only present America like those
of Richard Ford or John Updike, but [they have] many pluralities (Mukherjee in Ameena Meer, 1989:5). They reveal the experiences of American immigrants who undergo transformations within themselves and change the country. Her writings thus capture vividly the migrant life of characters that – like Mukherjee herself -struggle to negotiate the traps and opportunities of old and new, India and America, and past and present to fit them in American society. Living in three different countries, India, the U.S and Canada - Mukherjee can be categorized as a (diasporic) writer.

Although Mukherjee calls herself an American‘writer and refuses to be hyphenated as an Asian-American writer, she experiences the process of unhousement‘(leaving India as her motherland) and rehousement‘(becoming a naturalized‘American) that undoubtedly distinguishes her from Western writers and South Asian home‘writers. This process reflects her attempt to take the best from both worlds, but her fictions suffer the sense of hybridity and cultural entanglement (Lau, 2005: 241). Nevertheless, some critics still describe her as the first Asian American writer to exhibit a full awareness of the global context of contemporary Asian immigrant … (Wong, 1993:54). She herself admits in her article, Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists‘(1988), that America is the binary space of mother land/host land, old or new which she defines as a world of …doubles (1). The Asian-American duality places her in an ambivalent space that impels her writing. Ken Goodwin (2008) asserts that Mukherjee expresses very acutely the distress of being
excluded from the literary discourse of both her original and, even more, her
adopted country (408). Although she feels upset being excluded from her original
and adopted country, hyphenation offers her a privileged position as an
American writer, since it enables her to provide an inside and
outside‘perspective on the new’ America.

She further states that it is not the nostalgia of the homeland that she
foregrounds in her writings but the exuberance of the immigration which
fosters new beginnings. Although Mukherjee seems to deny any attachment to
the homeland, the depiction of Indian- ness in her fictions reveals a
nostalgic yearning for India. Commenting on Mukherjee’s reluctance to
answer questions about her Indianess, Lal says that her sari-clad, dark-eyed,
dark-haired appearance, an obvious Bengali-Brahmin name and her use of
Indian material clearly reflect connections to her country of origin. Lal also
points out Mukherjee’s refusal to be included among other Indian writers
working in English such as Anita Desai or R.K Narayan. Instead she positions
herself among American writers such as Bernard Malamud and says that “I see
myself as an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose
parents and grandparents had passed through Ellis Island” (Mukherjee, 1985:3).

In an interview with Runar Vignisson (1992-3), Mukherjee admits that to
release herself from the past (old world) is in –some ways very healthy. She
disagrees with the conservative white American sociologists and European or
non- European immigrants who claim that to –lose one’s original culture is sad;
it’s a loss, net loss. She further asserts that not making the transformation from expatriate to immigrant is to be caught in nostalgia, and to refuse to participate in the new world (quoted in Brewster, 1993:116). Although to her the process of migration requires “a decade of painful introspection to put nostalgia in perspective and to make transition from expatriate to immigrant” (Mukherjee, 1997:2) she insists on discarding the past, since “[t]here is no sense, she believes, in holding on to a past that does not qualify one’s reality with meaning” (Venkateswaran, 1993:40). In her introduction to Darkness (1985) she firmly says, “If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait - surrendering little bits of a reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past - you’ll never belong, anywhere” (2).

Her claim to discard the past recalls her refusal of a hyphenated identity as Asian-American. For Mukherjee, Asianness (Indianness) becomes something in the past and for her the old world was dead and she exhilaratingly celebrates herself as a naturalized‘American. From Mukherjee’s point of view, the past has to be discarded so that she can embrace the values of her adopted land. Contra Mukherjee, I would like to argue in this thesis that although she claims the past should have no meaning in diasporic life, this is not the case in her fictions Wife (1975) and Jasmine (1989). To the main female characters, Dimple Das Gupta and Jyoti Vindh, the past has, in fact, particular meanings affecting their present states.