CHAPTER – III

DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY IN HER NOVELS

The ‘globalisation’ was invented during the eighties of the twentieth century, but how wrong it is to imagine that nobody moved about the world before it. Not only the rich have travelled; the migrant worker has a long history. Even before the eighteenth century, adverse economic circumstances had forced poor people to set off in search of mythical cities paved with gold. Men have usually been seen as the prime movers; women have often been assumed simply to have followed their men folk as dependants. In the United States especially a feminist-inspired social history has been restoring the woman immigrant and reframing the history of immigration many young women were among those dreaming of prosperity and freedom who sailed past the Statue of Liberty to arrive on Ellis Island, where the camera caught their faces filled with bewilderment, fear and anticipation. Like the men, they came to earn higher wages than they could at home.

The historical perspectives on women migrants in many lands are not only fascinating in themselves; they have an urgent contemporary relevance. In the present era capital moves at lightning speed, emptying sites of labour and devastating source of livelihood. Yet the human beings whose lives have
been disrupted and who seek better economic conditions are forced to travel dangerously and encounter many obstacles, from state officials to other workers who feel threatened by their arrival. This is likely to be one of the most explosive issues of the future; the grunt secret of globalization. Women, who constitute a majority of the World’s poor, are a crucial element in this harsh drama.

A surge of human migration might be seen as one of the outstanding social phenomena of modern history. The twentieth century has marked a turning point towards far-greater female migration over long distances. In fact, the enormous increase in the female labour force has partly resulted from the greater number of women migrants.¹ Today women account for approximately half of all global migrants. The largest number of legal migrants in the world still go to the United States, and there women have predominated in migration flows since the 1930s. Nevertheless, it is important to make gender distinctions within the developing countries, rather than categorizing them together.

Journey in a metaphorical sense may be taken as a process of translation or the process of undergoing changes. Cultural translation is for Bhabha, a part of the “spatial histories of displacement.” He argues that culture is both ‘transnational’ and “translational”. It is transnational because contemporary
post-colonial discourses are rooted in specific historical situations of displacement such as the Middle Passage or the migration of Third World people after the World War II. It is translational because it makes “the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue.”

Mukherjee’s novels translate culture by creating a virtual space in which the narrator can suspend time, effectively dehistoricizing the narrative. This critical move allows her to consider how location influences experiences and allows the immigrant woman to construct a subject position. In other words, the novel allows her in the post-colonial world to question the translational and transnational aspects of culture along with a critical examination of the historical contingencies that are produced by playing with the concepts of history, time, and space.

Mukherjee’s early novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Jasmine* are basically grant novels. *Jasmine* is the story of an immigrant from the Third World to the United States who had been uprooted and re-rooted in an alien soil, America, where she has to confront uncertainties. The novelist writes:

“In America, nothing lasts, I can say that now and it doesn’t shock me, but I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic,
agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible or so wonderful, that it won’t disintegrate. (Jasmine 181)

Jasmine is an embodiment of old-world dutifulness. She is conscious of her sacred relationship with her husband who is always pushed from one disaster to another. In all her fights, Jasmine emerges not as a tragic character but as a one who is determined to change her destiny and explore the infinite possibilities among uncertainties in America as Mukherjee believed in the existence of alternate realities. *Jasmine*, the novel, must be read and enjoyed as, in fact, an account of adaptation and not defeat.

To all the men who enter Jasmine’s life after her altered identities, is her Indianness with its adaptability that endears her to them. The novelist narrates:

“Taylor didn’t want to change me. He didn’t want to score and sanitise the foreignness”. (Jasmine185)

And also,

“Bud courts me because I am an alien, I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The cast plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am”. (Jasmine 200.)
Jasmine’s new role as Jane and Jase represents the possibilities of alternate realities, the ability to be re-born. She realizes that she has become a drifter moving in a world of uncertainties:

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

In Wife it can be seen that Mukherjee was going through her hostile stage in Canada. The Novel shows her alienation, and marginality leading to a feeling of dispossession from her heritage in the character of Dimple. In Dimple’s case, the dispossession culminates in a terrible brutalization of her psyche and a scanning of her character. Her efforts to adjust to life in New York culminate in Culture shock. She is driven to despair, madness, and violence. She ends up killing her husband:

“There’s nothing wrong with sitting on a public bench and waiting for one’s husband, is there?” Dimple countered. She seemed to be waiting for events that failed to occur or occurred unnoticed. Her life was slow, full of miscalculations.” (Wife 178.)

“Dimple was not sure where she wanted to die, but she was sure that dying would be just as senseless and unfair”. (Wife184.)
And also, she was not sure anymore what she had been.

In *The Tiger’s Daughter* Tara returns home after seven years in America. In it, Mukherjee seems to be compelled to work out her form from her psyche. In order to do so, she makes a metaphorical trip back to Calcutta of the late sixties and early seventies with Naxal riots and protests. This novel exemplifies her hostility with implied alienation to both India and Canada. The novel shows her double alienation. In North America, Tara, in fact, felt herself as an alien where she was racially an outsider. In India, she was not married to a person but to a foreigner and the foreigner was a burden. Thus, there her alienation is at two levels. In the end, the two worlds cannot be reconciled. As the alienation from the mother country seems stronger, Tara chooses to return to David and America.

Mukherjee’s *Daughter* reflects the confrontation between illusion and reality. Tara being an immigrant, away from home, idealizes her own country and cherishes nostalgic memory of it. Tara was packed off by her father at the early age of 15 for America. In America, she experienced homesickness. Little things pained her and she sensed discrimination everywhere. She prays to Kali for her strength so that she would not break before the Americans. New York drives her to despair:
“On days when she had thought she could not possibly survive, she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more Indian. (The Tiger’s Daughter)

Like Tara, Hannah is a stunning creation, a bold mind striving for identity in strange surroundings, a timeless creature trying to survive in a rigid inexorably defined society. Her difference from other lies in her ability for establishing connectedness across cultural boundaries. Ostracism opens up unwalled worlds for her. She feels unfinished, unformed until she responds to the reality around her. She is different because she is still connected to the emotional realities of human life at all levels and places. It is her openness to experience and connectedness to human beings that enable her to survive and identify her at anytime or any place to be a Salem Bibi.

Ethnic women in America are clearly twice marginalized: by virtues of their ethnicity and their gender. The central figures in Mukherjee’s novels Daughter, Wife, and Jasmine – Tara, Dimple, Jasmine – fight two simultaneous battles against marginalization during their early expatriate experiences in America; coming as they are from (an) other world(s), their very identities are in question in America, calling out for a revisioning and a re-defining at the start. The moments of change or transformation or re-incarnation are crucial because, though the exercise is assertive, powerful, celebratory as well in its
mainstream movements, the echoes at the margins valorize the anxieties of expatriation.

Mukherjee’s characters are raised in conservative, often sexually repressive, communities. They desire the sexual freedom. The traditional concept of marriage which immigrants bring with them is challenged by the values of a permissive foreign culture. The structures that keep marriages intact in India are absent in the West, thus leaving the immigrants’ marriages fragile and vulnerable. Having an affair is not merely a sexual temptation, but it offers a way of reasserting one’s autonomy, one’s control over one’s life. The danger is alluring, due to loneliness, the uncertainty and the emptiness.

In Mukherjee’s world, Jasmine empowers her in an alien culture after having been raped by Half-Face. Bhagmati in *The Holder of the World* is disempowered after her rape in a culture that values virginity and chastity; and Hannah by her liaison with Jadav Singh chooses to break social norms concerning inter-racial relationships and the power of women to choose their sexual partners like Tara who had a liaison with Andy even though her husband Bish is in her life. The rape or physical assault or molestation or deflowering empowers Tara to face life with determination.
Though Jasmine has come to America with the crazy notion of erecting a funeral pyre for her dead husband’s clothes on his University campus and burning herself on it, by grasping at the dream of a new life, she has to sacrifice herself and her original self. She needs to discard her ethnicity. It results in alternate identities as women have to change sexual behavior. Dimple’s and Jasmine’s sexual behavior with an American man and Half-Face respectively makes them detach from traditional sexual moves and assimilate the new world through their rapid Westernization or Americanization. Jasmine is released from her traditional identity as a de-sexual widow soon after she arrives in America, for in being raped by Half-Face. This helps her grow in confidence to live by, sexual desire which very often helps women to accept their lines, or timidity which compels them to do so.

In fact, Jasmine, Dimple, Tara, Hannah and so on often surrender to sexual fantasies of male conquest and social fantasies of conquering the new territory of their husband’s world. And it is the failure of these fantasies which pushes them to decide to escape in various ways – Jasmine kills Half – Face and goes with American men like Taylor and Bud; Dimple murders Amit, Tara returns to India and realizes the love for David and Hannah abandons Legge and surrenders to Jadav Singh only to return to Salem as Bibi-Salem Bibi.
In Mukherjee’s *Daughter* Tara makes her a misfit in the company of her friends and relatives. Her alienation is deepened as she is welcomed by her relatives as ‘Americawali’ and her husband as in ‘meccha’. Such labels of distinction intensify the alienation in the mind of Tara and they deepen the angst of her mind. Tara returning to India after seven years in the U.S.A. experiences the alienation of an expatriate who senses a gulf between herself and her native people and traditions. She realizes that her alienation extends further back into her Indian past, to her education under Belgian nuns:

“How does the foreignness of the spirit begin? … Does it begin right in the centre of Calcutta, with forty ruddy headdresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian Sun?” (The Tiger’s Daughter 37)

Dimple also experiences an intense loneliness of the expatriate. There is a progressive and total estrangement from the environment, from her and from existence itself:

“She was so much worse than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians; so left alone with borrowed disguises, she felt a shadow without feeling.” (Wife 200)

Dimple discovers the victimization through American media. Mukherjee’s *Wife* presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic
individual. Rootlessness and unreal existence make a deliberate distortion of Indian womanhood. She is an instance of the forlorn and all ill accommodated self of an Indian wife. S.P. Swain in “Dimple in Wife: A study of the Lacerated Self”, says: “To understand the reality of Dimple’s psyche one has to delve deep into the inner recesses of her mind, the intricate stirrings of her feelings.”

Dimple in Wife dreams of an independent flat. But actually in America “she was much worse than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left alone with borrowed disguises, she felt like a shadow without feeling”. (Wife, p. 200) Later she begins to resent her own passivity. She feels she is falling apart. She kills her husband with the kitchen knife, the very knife with which she chopped chicken and mutton in the same kitchen on the same counter.

Dimple’s journey in Wife, unlike Tara’s in Daughters, is undertaken in search of fulfillment and self-expression. She has been educated in India and is married to an Indian husband; yet she is ill at ease in her world. She appears to be constantly bored with herself. She moves from one unreal objective to another; from the dream of marriage as an escape from this boredom to the hope of emigration. “Marriage, she was sure, would free her, fill her with passion” (Wife13). When her marriage to Amit remains unfulfilled, she turns to thoughts of America. In order to be able to begin life afresh, she decides to
induce an abortion (*Wife*42). Shyam M. Asnani in “Identity Crisis in *The Nowhere Man and Wife*” says:

“In contrast, Dimple is unwilling to brave the new world outside, feels bored, dejected and dismally ignorant of actual patterns of social interaction in America and is ultimately driven into an entropic state of inertia, nervous debility, and mental decrepitude. Her sudden forays into the world outside the apartment prove abortive. Her displacement ends on a tragic note.”7

In Dimple’s case the loss of identity is not only due to being an exile in America but also due to her constitutional temperament and her alienation from her husband. More so, due to her self-alienation she loses the contact with reality. Her coming to America might have aggravated her feel of alienation. She is perilously estranged from her own self. She is alien to it. It is her self-alienation that breeds a terrible anguish in her and prompts her to murder Amit as “her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost air borne” (*Wife*117). She is an alien to the world of Amit, an outsider to her husband. Certainly it is neither the cultural conflict nor a feminine need for freedom can account for Dimple’s bizarre, blasphemous imagination and behavior but rather Dimple has to cope up with her traumatic mental condition all alone as Amit fails Dimple on all
planes – physical, mental and emotional. She turns towards Ira, Leni and Milt Glasser in her moments of crisis. Ira and Lemi fail her as friends. Milt proves to be a temporary transgression. She is an alienated being undergoing the supposed after-effects of alienation – psychosis, psychosomatic disorder, delinquency and contemplation of suicide.

It is the gloomy corridors of her psyche that Mukherjee probes with a keen and penetrating psychological subtlety. Dimple moves from a state of mute resentment to an escalating disgust and intolerance which finally culminates in disaster. Initially, she decides to marry a neuro-surgeon but finally agrees to marry an engineer for affluence. As a being, she is a partial woman and her psychic obsessions are about the inadequacies of her figure and complexion. Lack of communication stifles and chokes her voice and disintegrates her sensibility. It takes away the sanity of her mind. She has nightmares of violence, of suicide and of death. She even has the sensation of being raped and killed in her flat. Thoughts of illusion and reality alternate in her psyche – the illusion of committing suicide and the reality of butchering her husband.

Dimple is an escapist, lost in her private world of fantasy and aspires for freedom and love in marriage. This brings her indignation, grief, resentment, peevishness, spite and sterile danger. Denied self-hood, Dimple’s only act of
self-assertion is murder. The instrument which symbolized her bondage-as ‘wife,’ (...) becomes the instrument of murder. Jasmine is also put through the most grueling confrontations with death (of her husband Prakash), murder (the killing of Half-face who raped her), assault and crippling (of Bud) and suicide (of her neighbour Darvell).

Mukherjee herself says that: “as a writer, I have to find metaphors for talking about the psychic violence of up-rooting and re-rooting.” The physical violence can take either the form of sexual violence or of actual homes burning down. Mukherjee introduces violence, a kind of psychic violence in Tara, Dimple and Jasmine.

A loss of self-esteem is one of the commonest experiences of women in all cultures. Women in general become trapped in a self-destructive gender-based situation not because they form a destructive relationship but because the relationship is thrust on them as is the case with Jasmine, Dimple, Tara, Hannah and so on, who are compelled to accept exploitative relationships because of parental, religious or cultural authority. The pressure of the male power as experienced by Jasmine by the brutal rape by Half-Face, and Dimple by her materialistic husband who fails to read her mind, Hannah by Gabriel Legge and Tara by Andy so on, often frustrates the redemptive exercises
initiated by women. These are fictional accounts of women’s struggle in their culture or in an alien culture.

Displacement distances Dimple from Amit; she is lonely and alienated. Her mental aberrations cannot bridge the hiatus between the dream-world of imagination and the drab-world of reality. Psychoanalysts have identified the journey as a voyage of self-discovery which provides the missing parts of the traveler’s experience and helps identify her individual needs and desires. In it, the goal is the psychic liberation that provides a sense of identity and self-worth and allows her to interact with her social environment as an individual.

II

Cultural alienation is a world phenomenon today. The tremendous difference between two ways of life leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called culture shock. When an individual leaves his or her own culture and enters another, his/her values come into conflict with the new ones he or she finds.

Mukherjee’s *Daughter* is a manifestation of cultural conflict in which a Bengali Brahmin girl goes to America for higher studies, marries an American
and returns to India only to find herself confused, lost, totally strange and an alien in a native land, India. The young girl is Tara, the great granddaughter of Harilal Banerjee and the daughter of Bengali Tiger, the owner of famous Banerjee and Thomas (Tobacco) Co. Ltd. Tara is packed off by her father at an early age of 15, to America for higher studies. Her initial reaction to American life is one of fear and anger:

“For Tara Nasser had almost been an almost unsalvageable mistake. If she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps, if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise’s to remain composed and ladylike in all emergencies, she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first track.”

(The Tiger’s Daughter 10)

In America, she becomes homesick. She senses discrimination. Her roommate refuses to share her bottle of mango chutney. In The Tiger’s Daughter Tara’s efforts to adapt to American society are measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life. F.A. Inamdar in “Immigrant Lives: Protagonists in The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife” makes a comment that, “For Tara, Calcutta appears to be Conrad’s Heart of Darkness with riots in the city, buses burning and workers surrounding the warehouses”.8
Seven years ago, Tara admired “the houses on Marine Drive” (*The Tiger’s Daughter*) but her stay at Vassar has changed her outlook on Indian life. The very houses she admired then, “now their shabbiness appalled her” (*The Tiger’s Daughter*). It is again America’s influence on her that makes Bombay’s railway station “more like a hospital” (*The Tiger’s Daughter*). Tara’s rootless self makes the scenery outside “merely alien and hostile” (*The Tiger’s Daughter*).

There has been a strange fusion of the Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of Tara. They are confronted with each other. Sometimes, she makes futile effort to establish her American self. But it clashes with her early life in Calcutta on her return from America. She can neither take refuge in India nor in her newly discovered life in America. The outcome of this confrontation is her split psyche. She becomes depressed and disgusted with the deteriorating situation of India. In fact, in the end of the novel, her new personality finds herself difficult to adjust with the situation. Finally, she wishes to go back to the U.S.A. and to her husband.

The cultural shock to Tara in *Daughter* is too big for her to bear. She has returned from America with high hopes of a fond reunion with parents, relations and friends. But at the end of the novel, she leaves for America in a hurry, suddenly informing her helpless parents about her decision to return to David.
and the United States. Her resolve is preceded by a gradual disillusionment with the Calcutta of her early youth. There are four important episodes that lead to the climax of her departure.

The first episode is related to her visit to the burning Ghats with an eccentric old man, O Yonto Roy Chowdhury, a tea estate owner, whom she meets at the Catelli. He decides to save her from the chaos surrounding the traditional way of life of his class in Calcutta, but in the process unwillingly administers the first serious shock to her sensibility.

The second episode is of the picnic organized by Tiger Banerjee friends at his factory premises for the entertainment of his daughter and her friends. A small snake is discovered in the swimming pool, where they frolic for sometime before lunch is served. Tara is so horrified that she reacts by screaming loudly, which surprises even her parents. The Third of her shocking experience is at the summer resort of Darjeeling, where a group of middle-class Indian tourists behave rudely towards her when she goes out riding with her friend, Pronob and English girl they meet at their hotel. The last straw is her seduction by Tuntunwala at the Nayapur Guest House, where she goes, at the suggestion of her father, to calm her nerves after the Darjeeling experience. That is when Tara finally decides to return to America. Her disillusionment with an India in upheaval is complete, and she concludes that it would not be possible for her
– though born, bred and educated in Calcutta – to adjust to the changed conditions after her exposure to life in the West. Like her author, she too is a middle-woman caught in a cross-cultural turmoil.

Tara realizes that America has transformed her completely:

“Tara’s westernization has opened her eyes to the gulf between two worlds that still makes India the despair of those who govern it.” (The Tiger’s Daughter)

Thus, in India, she sees disease, despair, riot, poverty etc. Now, she has started looking at the ugly aspects of India. Always in her mind, there is ongoing conflict between her old sense of perception and outlook on Calcutta and her changed outlook. Jasbir Jain in –

“Foreignness of Spirit: The World of Bharati Mukherjee’s Novels” says:

“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, a foreigner.”

In fact, Tara starts a life of duality and conflict since her childhood. After marriage, she undergoes a traumatic dilemma enjoined upon her to belong to
an entirely new set-up. This in itself is a migration – a migration from one’s own former self to an imposed one. And this conflict gets multiplied with migration to another country. Tara’s situation is to be looked at from this angle. Brinda Bose in “A Question of Identity: where Gender, Race and America Meet in Bharati Mukherjee” says:

“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 cultural and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the new learning is imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other.

These different influences involved them in tortured processes of self-recognition and self-assimilation right from the start; the confusion is doubled upon coming to America.”¹⁰

In fact, Tara’s confusion results from her own ‘unstable self’. In Wife the cultural and social gulf dividing the two worlds- India and America – makes her feel frustrated and lonely due to dull existence in the apartment. She used to contemplate on the methods of suicide. She becomes depressed and neurotic. She feels neglected by her husband. Dimple seduces Milt Glasser and it
becomes a traumatic experience for her, who feels transformed after her act of betrayal to Amit. It gives her strength to reject India. Jasbir Jain in “Foreignness of Spirit: The World of Bharati Mukherjee’s Novels” states that it is very difficult to treat the novel Wife related to a theme called culture-shock or cultural confrontation. He says:

“Dimple’s dreams are very vaguely related to independence or self-realization but more directly related to a sexual awareness, to the sexual power a woman can exercise and how she can successfully step out of the limits put down by the Sita legend … The reasons or causes for Dimple’s neurotic behavior are not sufficiently elaborated … Even the cultural conflict does not adequately account for Dimple’s behavior.”

It is quite true that her isolation is not rooted in loneliness or in cultural differences but in her estrangement from her own past and her own inner being. But when a person visits an unknown land, he or she is an outsider in a no-man’s land. There he or she has to struggle a lot for his or her survival. The discovery of a new self makes him/her forget his/her native culture. On return to his or her native lands he or she finds himself/herself alien in his/her native land by having lost his/her native roots. His/her mind is again torn apart between the cultural clashes of two environments. He/she is forced to fight
with his/her split personality. Hence, it may be taken that Dimple’s case is related to this alienness in a new culture with her split personality which is the result of cultural void or divide.

An important concern of the post-colonial literature is related to place and displacement. The concern with identifying a relationship between self and place leads to a crisis of identity. The self may be eroded either because of dislocation or because of cultural denigration. Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* says:

>“Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all Post-colonial literatures in English.””\(^{12}\)

The theme of exile is frequently concerned with place and displacement and establishing of new relationship. Ashcroft maintains:

>“the theme of exile … is one manifestation of the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement … as well as with the complex material circumstances implicit in the transportation of language from its place of origin and its imposed and imposing relationship on and with the new environment.””\(^{13}\)
Mukherjee suffered a literal geographical displacement and is confronted with social and cultural alienation. Her work makes metaphorical reference to ‘uprooting’ and ‘unhousement’ of the immigrants in their attempt to construct a future by dealing with the notion of place and displacement in her writings.

In Mukherjee’s novels not only is expatriation a major theme but it becomes a metaphor for deeper levels of alienation like existential alienation and self-estrangement which results in exile. Fakrul Alam in *Bharati Mukherjee* says:

“The Tiger’s Daughter is designed to capture the predicament of someone returning to her homeland after a period of self-imposed exile: to such a person, home will never be home again, and life in exile, bitter draught though it often is, will be preferable to what home has become.”14

*Jasmine* is an exile in flight from the old world of India and old cultural values. Her sense and sensibilities are actively engaged with the world outside her, faced with rejection as a new comer Jasmine, clings to her ethnic identity as Viney Kirpal in “The Third World Novel of Expatriation : A Study of Émigré Fiction by Indian, West African and Caribbean” writers says: “Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these
migrants in the new land”.¹⁵ The dictionary meaning of the word ‘to identify’ is to ‘become identical’, which means becoming the same as or essentially alike. The word ‘identity’ also implies certain homogeneity and coalescence; in other words assimilation. Identification can be on many levels; psychological, sociological, linguistic, cultural and emotional. The extent to which identification has been achieved on all these fronts will qualify how complete one’s identification has been to the new surroundings. The quest for identity by marginal groups in developing multi-racial societies emerges as one of the major concerns in literature.

In Mukherjee, one can find a common, shared focus on ethnic group struggling for identity. She shows how the ethnic groups strive to retain their identity by upholding traditional values and customs as well as seeking assimilation in a multi-racial, modern, and changing society. The novelist reveals the process of change and the contradictions that stem in the period of flux.

Diasporic experience is a double identification that constitutes hybrid forms of identity. Such forms of identity differ from the essentialised notion of national and ethnic identity. It also explores multiple belongings that enable people to inhabit more than one space at the same time. Tara is a fictional rendering of such cultural hybridity. Tara says, “I am both” (Desirable
Daughters, p. 6). Being simultaneously an Indian and an American she has gained the third space of enunciation.

In Canada, Mukherjee claims to have experienced an anti-Indian attitude. Canada’s hostility to Indians and the non-recognition of her writings in Canada are the twin recurring themes in her novels. She experienced herself as a psychological expatriate in Canada and clung to her ethnic identity. In fact, Mukherjee had to come to terms with her own identity in an alien land, caught as she was between two conflicting cultures. So, Mukherjee’s novels deal with the theme of identity and the dichotomy in her attitude to her homeland and also with the paradoxes and contradictions in the immigrant psyche. Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife* reflect a world that refuses to hold together both at the individual and cultural levels. These are the novels of and about isolation. The protagonists Tara and Dimple are pre-occupied in exploring the nature of their own identities. They remain voiceless. Their voiceless emotions arise out of a questioning of cultural issues.

While trying to establish an identity of her own in America Dimple miserably fails to do. As she has been caught between two different cultures and not able to establish her identity, Amit appears to Dimple a projection of her neurotic self which she wants to annihilate and hence her committing the
act of murder. She feels herself possessed by demonic power. The murdering of Amit is an assertion of her American identity. As P.S. Swain says:

“Dimple, like Tara, is the nowhere woman. She is neither of India nor of America but a stunned wanderer between these two worlds, yet to attain a distinct identity... Her quest is a quest for a voice, a quest for identity.”

Like Dimple’s the American experience shocked Jane and disgusted her many a time. In the process of her transformation Jane was seized by a longing to belong. She closely identifies herself with Bud’s adopted son ‘Du’, a Vietnamese, because he was an immigrant like herself. Pushpa N. Parekh in “Telling Her Tale: Narrative voice and Gender Roles in Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine” says:

“As the Jasmine-Jane protagonist learns to cast herself in different roles, she finds her initial identity in America immuned in the volitional silence and invisibility of a law breaker in two senses. She is an illegal alien who has defied the immigration laws and a murderer who defies the ruthless violence of a male-powered capitalist society.”

Jasmine discovers her identity as difference, as a multiply split subjectivity: Jyoti/Jasmine/Kali/Jase/Jane. She does not remain Jyoti (light) but recognizes her multiplicity only after the violence – the rape. After the
violence, she forsooks her identity and recognizes within her jasmine, the caregiver and also Jase, the fireless adventurer. She becomes a nomad and a hybrid and shuttles between different identities including the veritable Kali, the killer of Half-Face. It is through her internalized mode of India that Jasmine works out the theory of Karma and Kal (time). For the theory of Karma, she brings forth the unconscious mode of her thinking. She says: “My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter” (Jasmine 40). As a fighter and adapter, and even after so many transformations of herself into different names, she still enquires, “Who I am” (Jasmine 197). She quotes the words of Karim who says about her: “I am tornado ... How many more shapes are in me, how many more selves, and how many more husbands” (Jasmine 215). Here she expresses the inner pangs of an exile and an expatriate who lives in America.

Tara in The Tiger’s Daughter belongs to both tradition and modernity. Her identity is highly assimilative. She moves on both the planes – the Indian and the American. She vacillates between two lives: “may be I really was between two lives...” (The Tiger’s Daughter 251) Yet to strike roots, yet to belong to any of these lives, she exemplifies the existential dilemma, of diaspora and the problem of an immigrant who has a fluid identity associated with mobility and plurality rather than stasis and singularity. She wants to redefine herself and to
reconstruct her feminine self in time with her novel experience on an alien soil. She wants to have a new identity but she fails. In spite of her liberated and emergent attitudes, her desire to construct hybridity, her acceptance of her son’s gay sexuality and live-in relationship, she fails to transcend the tradition about life of an Indian woman. She wants to redefine herself and create fresh gender relations.

Mukherjee is fascinated by people with a fluid identity, people who are adventurous, who are constantly on the go, people who live a life in transit, who have to forgo their former identities in order to accommodate and assimilate themselves in another country, in order to acquire the identity of the other. Though Tara is all – embracing, she is essentially Bengali upper class Brahmin elite. She says: “even as proud members of the majority community, we were a blessed, elite minority and we knew it” (Desirable Daughters 29). Sometimes the readers suspect whether Tara is a status – conscious, caste-conscious snob. 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.”

(Desirable Daughters 44)
These are Tara’s resonating words in praise of her Brahmin lineage. But these facets of her personality do not hinder her strategies of survival in the adopted land. For six long years, she flouts the Indian tradition of arranged marriage and lives with a Hungarian refugee. The reconciliation of the broken family also symbolizes the reconciliation of cultures. The bombing of her house symbolizes the end of a ‘single’ existence. Cultures need not conflict with one another or be mutually exclusive. Materialism of the West can be complemented with the spiritualism of the East, subjugation of the east can be offset by the liberation of the west.

In the end, Bish learns that running after money can never lead to fulfillment. Tara learns the meaninglessness of her attempt at sexual liberation. Rabi, the second-generation immigrant learns that his parents’ cultural legacy is a treasure – trove of spiritualism and wisdom.

Mukherjee’s women find their ethnic and American identities. They have to find their identities with self, with tradition, and with the wonders and horrors of a new culture, with growing aspirations, hopes and desires. However, her growing concern is that these new born identities should not suffer from the horror and terror of marginalization. Mukherjee’s women evolve from the homesick as Tara returns home to find her alienated and Dimple’s and Jasmine’s confusion turns violent to kill Amit, and Half-Face.
It is due to a fluid identity which torments them to alternate between the desire for remembering and the need for forgetting with its accompanying pain. Even on returning to India she feels herself an outsider and an alien to the native soil. Mukherjee’s works Darkness, Jasmine, and Holder show her preoccupation with her sense of place and location, both geographically and ideologically. Nalini Iyer in “American/Indian: Metaphors of the Self in Bharati Mukherjee’s The Holder of the World” admits:

“As geographic space, location becomes a metaphor for self; self-fashioning for the immigrant character in her work. As ideological space, location in Mukherjee’s narrative is the author’s interrogation of such self-fashioning by questioning gender, race, and ethnicity as they render, identity is a fluid rather than a fixed entity.”18

Thus Mukherjee talks about the changing social milieu and identity crisis in Bengali community in British India. Her characters like Tara, Padma, and Parvati do not consider westernization or Americanization as a conscious abandonment of their own group identity to Mukherjee Bengali Brahmin identity. S.P. Swain in “Problems of Identity: A Study of Bharati Mukherjee’s Desirable Daughters” admits:
“In Desirable Daughters Bharati Mukherjee has delineated the individual self quagmire in the kaleidoscopic spatio-temporal reality of the American as well as the Indian society.”\textsuperscript{19}

The self is the distinct and characteristic individuality of a person. The human self is a self-organizing, interactive system of thoughts, feelings and motives that characterizes an individual. Self and society are interconnected and this link is a kind of web, the construction.

In this modern era, the self finds it difficult to come to terms with the social environment because the inner values nurtured by the self and the outer social demands are incompatible. This inability to connect the self with the society results in the alienation of self. In the words of O.P. Saxena:

“… self alienation, however, means the loss of contact of the individual self with any inclination or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which an individual is forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feels incapable of controlling his actions.”\textsuperscript{20}

The processes of social change that have taken place in the twentieth-century England have played havoc with the personal accommodation of selves into society. In the twentieth century, the Victorian idea of ‘Permanence of
Institution’ was displaced by the sense of universal mutability, marked by a bewildering flux of ideas and of tentative experiment. The twentieth century witnessed crises of unparalleled magnitude and scope: two world wars, a severe economic depression, revolutionary movements of tremendous magnitude and fury and threat of nuclear holocaust, cybernation, technological development, globalization and mechanical pace of living have had significant effect on the social fabric of the society. New attitudes towards morality, marriage, female sexuality and divorce have emerged. The institution of marriage retains its sanctity for those who desire permanent relationships and the stability of family life while it does not lose its popularity among the flippant who keep divorce in view as a back door of escape.

These drastic changes that have taken place through the late twentieth century into the twenty first century have given rise to a relatively new set of complexities regarding self, identity and alienation. Today, people are hungry for meaning, identity, for some roots in existence, for some purpose in human experience, for some protection against anxieties and frustrations. But as the forces of cultural and societal expectations are a Herculean obstacle to overcome, the individual self finds itself in a state of conflict. The disparity between what an individual wants to desire for and the societal expectation is
wide. This lack of compatibility between the self and society is the essence of Mukherjee's novels. S.P. Swain comments:

“\textit{This novel (Desirable Daughters) is not just an idyllic tale of the three desirable daughters (sic) and their divorce circumstances of upbringing but it is a complex transitional narrative commenting on the intricate and enigmatic process of growing up and of the feminist struggle of these three sisters to stick to their own protean self, their cultural moorings in times of crisis.”}^{21}

Likewise, in Mukherjee’s world, the issues of diaspora globalization, consumerism, transnationalism, cultural hybridity, alienation and identity crisis have become the leit motif due to cultural dislocation. In the quest for identity, the self is dislocated in space and time from its roots and has a homing instinct, the desire to discover its ‘in betweenness’ in a transnational and trans-cultural space.
REFERENCES


