THE IMMIGRANT IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S NOVELS: AN ANALYSIS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO IDENTITY CRISSES AND CULTURAL TRANSPLANT

ABSTRACT

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By

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Under the Supervision of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis assesses the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, which deal with the problems of immigrants, with special focus on identity crises and cultural transplant. The thesis attempts to highlight the conditions of Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention on the lives and experiences of South Asian Women immigrants to the New World.

Bharati Mukherjee is a postcolonial, contemporary writer who has presented her themes of cultural conflict in different dimensions. She has depicted the problems faced by Indian and other Third World immigrants to America. This thesis explores through detailed analysis and critical assessment the novels of Bharati Mukherjee in order to discover the modes in which she portrays her various immigrants. The analysis has necessitated the use of contemporary literary theory. Mukherjee is primarily concerned with the problems of women immigrants.

The present work focuses on thematic analysis with special attention on identity crises and cultural transplant. This thesis seeks to study the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation, experienced by the immigrant with special reference to Mukherjee's women characters.
Mukherjee’s novels represent three stages in her career. The first phase represents her attempt to find her identity in her Indian heritage. During this phase *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* were published. Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion, which includes a strong yearning for the past, pain of exile and homelessness, the conflict between the old-self and the new in unfamiliar surroundings which Mukherjee herself experienced as an expatriate in Canada. The expatriate dwells on her/his ‘ex’ status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates her/his present in the new country, In *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*, both Tara and Dimple, share the expatriate characteristic of being maladjusted both in the native culture and in the alien one. In the above mentioned novels, Mukherjee writes about her experience of Canada and finds a voice of her own in the experiences of Tara and Dimple. Mukherjee does not believe in multiculturalism.

Mukherjee is not interested in the preservation of culture, and she does not stop with the celebration of longings for the past, rather all her characters are pioneers who undergo personal changes to adjust to new surroundings.

The second stage originates in Mukherjee’s own experience of racism in Canada. Apart from *Wife*, a number of short stories were published in this period. She exposes the outrage heaped on immigrants in Canada. Characters in this stage are shown as
innocent victims of racial discrimination. She concentrates on the nature of individual experience when two culturally divergent characters confront each other and attempt to establish themselves. The third phase witnesses the publication of *Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave It to Me* and *Desirable Daughters*. The characters are adventurers and explorers, rather than refugees and outcasts. She portrays them as survivors and as inhabitants of a new changing America. Beginning with an expatriate’s uprooted identity in the early 70’s; her creative writing explores the transitional dilemma of characters in early 80’s. In *Jasmine* (1989), Mukherjee tries to reach a solution of the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures, which the protagonist undertakes during her journey. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person. Mukherjee explores other processes of cultural transplant in *The Holder of the World* (1993). It is a tale about dislocation and transformation that arises when two cultures come into contact with each other viz the Puritan 17th and early 18th century American world trying to come to terms with the Mughal view of Indian life. The title *The Holder of the World*, the literal translation of Alamgir, is the title of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. This is the story of two white women, Hannah who lived in the seventeenth Century and Beigh, who lives in the present one. Beigh Masters becomes obsessed with retracing the former’s
transformation from a puritan girl brought up at Salem in Massachusetts to the Bibi of a Hindu Raja. In *Leave It to Me* (1997), Mukherjee reverts to her earlier themes and enlarges upon them. She creates Debby Dee, a complex multiracial orphan raised in the off-beat California. Debby comes to India in search of her roots. She is confused, hurt and angry. She passes through various phases of life before she can be at peace with herself. Mukherjee calls Debby ‘the difficult sister of Jasmine’. *Desirable Daughters* (2002) is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary story of an Indian-American woman who, in many ways, has broken off with tradition but ultimately discovers that strong ties remain.

The central female characters, despite the differences in race, class and economic status viz. Dimple, Jasmine, Hannah, Debby, all have fluid identities rather than fixed ones. The protagonist’s names change as well as their residence. All novels explore the shifting identities of diasporic women, both in the United States and India. Mukherjee saw her Indianness ‘as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated’. All of them move beyond the rules set by patriarchy. They use sexuality and violence in power struggle with dominant authorities to move ahead in the quest. Mukherjee shows that the physical body merely serves as a vehicle for the inner self’s journey towards a higher plane. Mukherjee
makes her readers realize that individuals are a series of identities, simultaneous identities.

Pain of uprooting is experienced by the Protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee. They reach the alien country believing it to be the Promised Land, a land of limitless possibilities but reaching there, they realize that their wishes will never come true. This culminates in cultural shock. Mukherjee is preoccupied with the problems of immigration. Immigrants in America gain a separate identity. They adjust, develop their own definition and call themselves N.R.Is. Mukherjee seems to be saying that the burden of responsibility on the immigrant women is greater than that of those who do not leave the shores of India. The writings of Mukherjee indicate her quest to find a solution to women’s problems in a New World. At the same time, she acknowledges the reality, one’s cultural inheritance is an integral part of one’s personality in moments of trial, and culture provides the answer. Bharati Mukherjee admits that her characters are a breed of pioneers who have the guts to forsake a predictable life in order to throw themselves into a new one.
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To,

My parents whose blessings made it possible
This is to certify that Ms. Ambreen Khanam has completed her thesis entitled 'The Immigrant in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels: An Analysis With Special Reference to Identity Crises and Cultural Transplant' under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is her own work.

Seemin Hasan
Supervisor
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Ambreen Khanam
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Chapter 1

Literary Criticism and Theory: A Brief Overview
This thesis assesses the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, which deal with the problems of immigrants, with special focus on identity crisis and cultural transplant. The thesis attempts to highlight the conditions of Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention on the lives and experiences of South Asian women immigrants to the New World.

Bharati Mukherjee is a postcolonial, contemporary writer who has presented her themes of cultural conflict in different dimensions. She has depicted the problems faced by Indians and other Third World immigrants to America. This thesis explores, through detailed analysis and critical assessment, the novels of Bharati Mukherjee in order to discover the modes in which she portrays her various immigrants. The analysis has necessitated the use of contemporary literary theory. Mukherjee is primarily concerned with the problems of women immigrants. Feminist literary criticism is an approach which focuses on gender politics. It is a political movement defined in opposition to patriarchal social structures and the systematic domination of women and children by men. Feminist criticism developed from women’s movements in Europe and North America in the 1960s. The second wave of feminism, which questions the social inequalities experienced by women, takes into account the deep seated ideological structures which place women at a disadvantage in relation to men.
Patriarchy is one such structure. Patriarchy is a status, which deprives women of their own voices. In feminist social and cultural theory, there is an interlocking of politico-economic, cultural and social structures through which men dominate women. Historically, the first of the new movements to generate its own distinctive cultural theory is ‘second-wave’ feminism. Women’s resistance to patriarchal oppression is as old as patriarchy itself. Feminist intellectuals perceive women’s oppression as having cultural, rather than biological roots. They see women’s cultural production as central to ‘consciousness raising’ and hence to social change.

Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists differ in their perceptions of their roles in society and in their expectation from life. Tara Banerjee (The Tiger’s Daughter) falls in love with an American David Cartwright and marries him against her father’s wishes and in the eyes of her clan pollutes herself by marrying a man from another race. The Indian society to which she belongs is a patriarchal society and it hardly ever allows women to take decisions and talk of liberation and equality. Here, male members decide the fate of their female counterparts. Dimple (Wife) starts breaking down after the realization that she has been deceived in marriage and Amit will not cater to her dream world, and she murders him in a misguided act of liberation. Mukherjee’s next novel Jasmine is the celebration of the strength of womanhood. Search for self-recognition makes the protagonist rebel against
blind belief and superstition. The image of Goddess Kali i.e. the Goddess of strength brings out the protagonist’s feminist traits. Jasmine has embarked on a perilous journey to the New World, ‘greedy with wants and reckless from hope.’ This is the final affirmation of an optimist—a true feminist. The feminist movement gives way to feminist literature and feminist criticism. Showalter claims ‘the program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories.’

Showalter’s generation of critics, including Jonathan Culler and Card Gilligan include aspects of history, linguistics, psychology etc. in their readings.

Hannah Easton (The Holder of The World) and Debby Dee (Leave It to Me) both brought up by strict conservative foster parents, migrate from one continent to another to seek happiness. The three Bhattacharjee sisters (Desirable Daughters) were trained to be desirable daughters, yet they defy the dictates of patriarchy.

Psycho-analysis has been helpful in the study of immigrant psychology, especially aberrative behavior patterns visible in Dimple’s neurosis, Debby’s murderous inclinations and Tara’s adjustment problems. Since the 1920s, a very widespread form of psychological literary criticism has come to be psychoanalytic criticism, which was established by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).
Freud had developed the dynamic form of psychology that he called psychoanalysis, as a means of analyses and therapy for neurosis. Freud, Jones, and Bonaparte were the first psychoanalysts. Their interest in literature was to reveal an individual author's psychology and validate psychoanalytic concepts.

Julia Kristeva, the psychoanalyst-feminist, explains the separation of the child from the mother. Chodorow contends that 'girls identify with their mothers and that their ego boundaries are flexible and less defensive than boys.'²

Cultural Criticism has helped to clarify the effects of cultural conflicts and, at the same time, reproduced culture itself. There is so much cultural mixing in the post colonial era that it has given birth to hybrid culture or multiculturalism which is the extension and institutionalization of cultural diversity through such avenues as the legal system, the education system, government policy towards health and housing and respect for culture-specific, linguistic, communal and religious practices and customs.

Mukherjee, in her novels, depicts immigrant experiences and cultural conflicts. Fredric Jameson comments:

The post modern is [...] the forcefield in which very different kinds of cultural impulses what Raymond Williams has usefully termed "residual" and "emergent" forms of cultural production must make their way. If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back in a
view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces, whose affectivity is undecidable.³

Structuralist criticism designates the practice of critics who analyse literature on the explicit model of structuralist linguistics. Structuralist premises and procedures, however, continue to manifest themselves in a number of current enterprises and especially in the semiotic analysis of cultural phenomenon, in stylistics and in the investigation of the formal structures that, in their combinations and variations, constitute the plots in novels.

The present work focuses on thematic analysis with special attention on identity crisis and cultural transplant. This thesis seeks to study the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feeling of alienation, experienced by the immigrant with special reference to Mukherjee’s women characters. Asserting her immigrant status she quotes:

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries [...] when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country.⁴

The act of migration no doubt entails identity crises as well as cultural clashes. The second wave feminism acknowledges Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86) as a major source of intellectual
inspiration. She defines woman as ‘a free and autonomous being like all human creatures [...] finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other’. Mukherjee’s women experience ‘Otherness’ not only because they are women but also because they are immigrants. They travel through a gamut of emotions, ranging from naive beliefs in dreams and promises to extreme frustration and anger. Shift to America from Canada helped Mukherjee to overcome the crisis of identity and brought her a sense of elation. Mukherjee’s background and her early experiences had a great bearing on her writing and outlook of life. Mukherjee said:

While changing citizenship is easy, swapping culture is not, I want to write about others, who for economic, social, political or psychological reasons have had to uproot themselves from a life that was predictable to one where you make up your own rules.

Bharati Mukherjee was born on 27 July 1940 in Calcutta, India, to an upper-middle class, Hindu Brahmin family. She was the second of three daughters of Sudhir Lal, and Bina Banerjee. Both husband and wife provided ample, educational opportunities to their daughters. Mukherjee’s mother was determined that her daughters’ lives would not be confined to home and family. She was the driving force behind the success of her daughters. At the age of fifteen, Mukherjee finished her High School and went on to a Calcutta University affiliated Women’s College run by Irish nuns.
After getting her B.A. degree from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and her M.A. in English and Ancient Indian culture from the University of Baroda in 1961, she came to Iowa, United States, to participate in a Writer’s Workshop on P.E.O. (International Peace Scholarship). She planned to study there to earn her M.F.A. degree, then return to India to marry a Bengali Brahmin as per her father’s wish. Hindu tradition forbade intercaste, interlanguage interethnic marriages. Bengali tradition even discouraged emigration. To remove oneself from Bengal was to dilute true culture. But here she was drawn to a Canadian writer Clark Blaise. After a fortnight’s courtship, the couple married impulsively in a Lawyer’s office above a coffee shop. She soon realized that the bond was permanent. Mukherjee says that ‘the big things in my life happen fast’. After receiving her Ph.D. in 1968, Mukherjee moved to Canada with her husband, where she became a naturalized citizen in 1972. The fourteen years in Canada were some of the hardest of her life. The country was hostile to immigrants while it propagated the concept of cultural assimilation. In 1966, she joined Mc Gill University. Beginning her career as a lecturer, Mukherjee moved up very swiftly to become a professor in 1978. In those challenging years in Canada, she was able to produce her first two novels The Tiger’s Daughter (1972) and Wife (1975). Mukherjee felt the need to claim her identity in a powerful way, turning aside prejudice to which she was subjected.
These tensions emerge in these two novels. She also registered her sentiments in her first collection of short stories. *Darkness* (1985) reflects her mood of cultural transplant. Mukherjee was unhappy with her life in Canada. She encountered many difficulties as a writer. She felt that there was a strong bias against Canadian citizens of Indian origin. In 1980, Mukherjee left Canada, and migrated to United States with her family as a permanent U.S. resident, and started work at the University of California, Berkeley, California.

Mukherjee felt great relief in America and merged much more easily with the life and people around. She felt that America had a more positive attitude towards Indian immigrants as compared to Canada. Canada is a country that resists cultural fusion. Mukherjee states 'Canada refuses to renovate its national self-image to include its changing complexion. It is a new World Country with old world concepts of a fixed, exclusivist national identity'.

She had diverse experiences throughout life. She lived through several phases of life, including a life of exile in Canada and finally as an immigrant to U.S. 'I am an American writer, in the American mainstream trying to extend it [...] not an Indian writer, not an exile not an expatriate but an immigrant whose investment is in the American reality, not the Indian'.


Bharati Mukherjee’s voice has increasingly gained special attention in contemporary modern English literature. A close examination of Mukherjee’s background and her life reveals a series of displacements. She moved from place to place, nation to nation.

She has produced fiction not only about uprooted individuals, the anguish of expatriation, and the inevitable frustrations felt by immigrants trying to cope with loneliness and an often hostile culture, but also about the excitement of immigration, the sense of rebirth and the expectations of a better that are part of the immigrant experience.9

Mukherjee is the author of seven novels and two collections of short stories, including The Middleman and Other Stories, for which she won the National Book Critics Circle Award. She has also co-authored two non-fiction works with her husband Clark Blaise. In 1973 Mukherjee and her husband went to India for a year. Days and Nights in Calcutta (1977) details their different responses to the country. As an immigrant herself, Mukherjee had seen and experienced life closely and intensely. This led to a colouring of her vision of life and her novels are the projection of her quest for identity in a world full of loneliness and despair. Mukherjee had a strong desire to express the shifting tensions and complexities of an immigrant in an alien land. In her fiction, her women characters are seen struggling to obtain a footing in a New World and redefining for the values, the beliefs, and quests for an identity in a world that is rapidly changing. Alienation, identity crisis, cultural
clashes are some of the themes that characterize contemporary fiction. Mukherjee’s novels frequently use the quest mode. Her characters, variously, quest for identity, quest for peace, quest for roots, and quest for meaning.

Mukherjee’s novels represent three stages in her career. The first phase represents her attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage. During this phase *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* were published. Expatriation is actually a complex state of mind and emotion, which includes a strong yearning for the past, pain of exile and homelessness, the conflict between the old-self and the new in an unfamiliar surroundings which Mukherjee herself experienced as an expatriate in Canada. The fiction written in Canada reflects her experience of expatriation. The expatriate dwells on her/his ‘ex’ status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates her/his present in the new country. In *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*, both Tara and Dimple, share the expatriate characteristic of being maladjusted both in the native culture and in the alien one. In the above mentioned novels, Mukherjee writes about put her experience of Canada and finds a voice of her own in the experiences of Tara and Dimple. Mukherjee does not believe in multiculturalism. According to John K. Hoppe ‘Multiculturalism emphasizes the difference between racial heritages. This emphasis on the difference has, too often, led to the dehumanization of the different. And dehumanization
leads to discrimination. And discrimination can ultimately lead to genocide.\textsuperscript{10} Mukherjee is not interested in the preservation of culture, and she does not stop with the celebration of longings for the past, rather all her characters are pioneers who undergo personal changes to adjust to new surroundings.

The second stage originates in Mukherjee’s own experience of racism in Canada. Apart from Wife, a number of short stories were published in this period. She exposes the outrage heaped on immigrants in Canada. Characters in this stage are shown as innocent victims of racial discrimination. She concentrates on the nature of individual experience when two culturally divergent characters confront each other and attempt to establish themselves. The third phase saw the publication of Jasmine, The Holder of the World, Leave It to Me and Desirable Daughters’. The characters now are adventurers and explorers, rather than refugees and outcasts. She portrays them as survivors and as inhabitants of a new changing America. Beginning with an expatriate’s uprooted identity in the early 70’s; her creative writing explores the transitional dilemma of characters in early 80’s. In Jasmine (1989), Mukherjee tries to reach a solution of the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures, which the protagonist undertakes during her journey. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person. Mukherjee explores other process of branching of cultural
transplant in *The Holder of the World* (1993). It is a tale about dislocation and transformation that arises when two cultures come in contact with each other viz. the Puritan 17th and early 18th Century American world trying to come to terms with the Mughal view of Indian life. The title *The Holder of the World*, the literal translation of Alamgir, is the title for the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. This is a story of two white women, Hannah who lived in the seventeenth century and Beigh, who lives in the present one. Beigh Masters becomes obsessed with retracing the former’s transformation from a Puritan girl brought up at Salem in Massachusetts to the ‘Bibi’ of a Hindu Raja. In *Leave It to Me* (1997), Mukherjee reverts to her earlier themes and enlarges upon them. She creates Debby Dee, a complex, multiracial orphan raised in the off-beat California. Debby comes to India in search of her roots. She is confused, hurt, and angry. She passes through various phases of life before she can be at peace with herself. Mukherjee calls Debby ‘the difficult sister of Jasmine’. *Desirable Daughters* (2002) is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary story of an Indian-American woman who, in many ways, broken off with tradition but ultimately discovers that strong ties remain.

Mukherjee says that ‘the immigrants in my stories go through extreme transformations in America and at the same time they alter the country’s appearance and psychological make-up’.
Through her writing, Mukherjee presents an America that is an idea, not political, social or moral, rather a stage for transformation. In an interview she states that:

What America offers me is romanticism and hope I am coming out of a continent of cynicism and irony, a traditional society, you are what you are according to the family you were born into [...] and I find myself in a country where merit counts theoretically at least.\textsuperscript{12}

America is centered around a constitution that promises democracy, promises equal rights. Mukherjee asserts that ‘I am an American, not an Asian-American. My rejection of hyphenation has been called race treachery, but it is really a demand that America delivers the promises of its dream to all its citizens equally.’\textsuperscript{13}

Culture is too baffling a term to be defined precisely. Many intellectuals have tried to define culture. The word culture come from the Latin root ‘Colere’ which mean to inhabit, to cultivate, or to honor. In general it refers to human activity. UNESCO defines culture as the ‘set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group’. Culture encompasses in addition to art and literature, life styles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Culture is the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviour and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.
Cultural studies emerged as one of the most significant global movements during the last quarter of the twentieth century especially in immigrant literature. Immigrant worries whether they are sufficiently cultured as individuals to get on in life. They worry about the possibility and desirability of living in a multicultural society. Raymond Williams, the Welsh cultural theorist in his book, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, drew attention to four important kinds of meaning that attach to the word 'an individual habit of mind; the state of intellectual development of a whole society; the arts and the whole way of life of a group of people'.

Andrew Milner and Jeff Browitt offer their working definition of culture as, 'referring to that entire range of institutions, artifacts and practices that make up our symbolic universe. In one or another of its meanings, the terms will thus embrace; art and religion, science and sport, education and leisure.'

Culture means caste, race, religion, region, flora and fauna, clothes, food, language, customs, attitudes and beliefs. Culture is related to religious and educational variation. Transplant means removal from taking from one place to another place. The job of the transplanted is to imitate the native. Mukherjee’s women who migrate cannot accurately imitate the original. As a consequence they suffer from culture-shock. The term culture-shock describes the anxiety produced when a person moves to a completely new
environment. This term expresses the lack of direction, feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment. We can also define culture-shock as the physical and emotional discomfort one suffers when coming to live in a place different from the place of origin. Mukherjee has repeatedly asserted in her interviews and essays that America has always been a country of immigrants, which means that any one central dominant culture does not exist. America is the melting pot of cultures. But in *Jasmine* she has moved to 'fusion' rather than melting pot, signifying that everyone changes slightly while retaining original self. Melting pot assumes the loss of the old self and the creation of a new self.

Bharati Mukherjee has moved to fusion from the melting pot theory. She refers to this phenomenon in explicit terms:

It was not right to describe the American experience as one of the melting pot but a more appropriate word would be "fusion" because immigrants in America did not melt into or were forged into something like their white counterpart but immigration was a two way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience.\(^\text{16}\)

Diversity of cultures and complications provide little scope for total assimilation. In cases where cultural dissimilarities are sharper in terms of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious determinants, the issue gets complex for the immigrant to cope with. The process of migration to America started in the mid nineteenth century, has reached a high level in terms of immigrant
population. These days immigrants are economic refugees, leaving their country willingly for the satisfaction of some personal ambition. For the immigrant the new culture, which develops in an alien land, is completely different from the parent culture. The migration of multiple races, classes and cultures to America has totally changed the face of America. Those immigrants, who choose to stay and finally settle down, experience cultural transformation.

Identity is the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known. It considers different social facts such as gender, race, class, age, parentage, nationality, marital status, profession, religion and sexuality that mutually constitute an individual’s social locations. An individual’s experiences influence the formation of one’s cultural identity. Identity crisis means the crisis that comes when one’s adjustment with any of the above mentioned things is disturbed. Bharati Mukherjee’s work deals with identity crises of women who move to United States.

Identities both condition and are conditioned by the kinds of interpretations people give to the experiences they have. As Mohanty says, ‘Identities are ways of making sense of our experience, they are theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways’.17
A leading theme throughout Mukherjee’s novels is the clash of cultures and how it affects identity. Mukherjee states:

Culture clashes and coalescences have always been very important in understanding who we are as peoples and as individuals. Imperial literature, post colonial literature, “first contact” literature in North America – just to name a few sub-genres have spoken the importance of addressing the process of specific cultural encounters.18

This thesis aims at an in-depth study of various facets of identity crises of immigrant, Indians especially women. The first investigation is of the problems faced by women within Indian culture in India. Indian women confront numerous anxieties regarding marriage and adjustment to in-laws. Dimple Dasgupta and Jyoti are depicted passing through this phase. Mukherjee brilliantly and sensitively perceives and defines the personal yet universally recurrent reactions and hopes of both these girls. Tara Banerjee is totally confused and lost, and remains suspended between worlds.

Another aspect concerns Indian women’s adjustments to western culture. Dimple and Jasmine, both face the problems of loss of culture and both of them struggle to assume a new identity in the U.S. Both pass through torturous physical mental and emotional agony, which leads to violence. Dimple is an Indian immigrant’s wife in North America. The novel tracks the violence building up inside and all around her in the North America until she
is driven to murder her husband. Dimple suffered crisis of identity caused by entry into a new culture. Dimple has come to America ready to be transformed and to seek an identity. She represents Indian wives in America while Jasmine exemplifies all immigrant women who have taken their destiny in their hands. Jasmine leaves for America on forged papers knowing not what the future holds in store for her. She is more fluid and adjusting than Dimple. She responds promptly to American culture and assimilates.

Jasmine starts her life in the U.S with a murder while Dimple rounds up her stay there with the murder of Amit. Dimple had an uncaring husband, so she butchered him. Jasmine had a faithful and loving husband who was mercilessly butchered by the terrorists. To avenge his death Jasmine discarded the old identity and took on a number of new identities. Dimple is an escapist, who lived in her private world of fantasy, on the other hand Jasmine, rejects despair and cynicism and believes that she can move ahead to make a life for herself. Unlike Dimple she has a surviving spirit, she survives all alone in an alien country.

This thesis also explores the identity crisis of white-skinned women who migrate to India. Hannah Easton (The Holder of The World) is an immigrant from America who came to India in the 17th century. She is a white Puritan woman from Salem who makes a journey to the Coromandel Shores in the late 17th Century and
finally becomes the mistress of the Indian ruler Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad. This study discusses the transformations that results from the meeting of different cultures. This study emphasizes the multiple planes of Hannah’s identity who has a Christian, a Hindu and a Muslim self. Hannah’s life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways of defining identity. For the adventurous, freedom-loving, Hannah, India is an ideal place. She is able to lead a life of sensuality and emotions in India. She does not feel remorse at the loss of her old life. Like Jasmine, she finds contentment in the new land.

White-skinned women, in interaction with Indianness, feature in the sub-plot of *The Holder of the World*. It tells the story of Beigh Masters, the novel’s narrator. She has a lover, a brilliant South Indian computer scientist, named Venn Iyer. The narrator deliberately, selects to associate with a man from another race and crosses racial boundaries and attempts to eradicate them.

The problems of Indian women returning home and then encountering a rearranged Indian situation are identified in the individual, as well as comparative study of Tara Banerjee and Tara Bhattacharjee. Tara Bhattacharjee is the youngest of three daughters of a traditional Bengali family of Calcutta, who struggles to reconcile her assimilated life in San Francisco to the traditional culture of her family and community. She finds the duplicity of the
conservative Indian society very upsetting. Tara Banerjee, too, is shocked to discover that Calcutta has become as dangerous and as alien as America appeared to her in the beginning. She finds that she does not fit into Calcutta life, which she had left seven years ago and for which she yearned desperately at Poughkeepsie.

Maternal wisdom falls short in most of the cases. Jasmine is raised in a family that does not feel affection for her. Her mother tries to strangle her at birth because she already has four daughters. Dimple does not open her heart to her mother. There is a lack of communication between mother and daughter. Hannah Easton follows the example of her mother. Her mother had deserted her daughter by running away with an Indian lover. Hannah, too, comes to India to become the mistress of a Hindu Raja. In Debby’s case, the drugged mother did not even know she had given birth to a baby.

The return of maternal wisdom is rediscovered in *Desirable Daughters*. Tara Bhattacharjee solves all her problem of identity crisis by identifying herself with the legend of Tara Lata. Her visit to her motherland represents final moments of liberation.

All these aspects combine to define the modern Indian woman. The attempt of this thesis is to define how Mukherjee’s novels present an intensive as well as an extensive study of the Indian woman who has found her place in not only the global
situation but also in global literature. The immigrant situation, too, has been discussed from the point of view of both men’s as well as women’s experiences. The value of Mukherjee’s novels lies in their sensitive portrayals of situations that form the crucial points of New World experiences.

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Chapter 2

Immigration, The Pain and the Exuberance: Analysis of The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife
The Tiger's Daughter is Bharati Mukherjee's first novel. It was published on 5 Nov. 1971. Among other things, the novel discusses the shock and uneasiness that are part of the immigrant experience. Mukherjee says in an interview 'The Tiger's Daughter was loved by every body'.

The novel represents the initial stages of Mukherjee's development as a writer. When she was writing The Tiger's Daughter, Mukherjee had a baby and a full load of doctoral classes. Mukherjee says 'I thought of it then as the beginning of my American writing career, but in truth it was the end of that; it was the end of that long-nurtured Indian project'.

The route she took brought her eventually to a position from which she could dissect immigrant lives. Mukherjee uses, in the novel, the archetype of the returning exile. The protagonist, Tara's, return brings terrible wounds. The novel gives a vivid picture of the psyche of an immigrant, of the tensions and the disappointments created in the mind as a result of the clashes between two different environments. The protagonist Tara, Banerjee Cartwright, experiences similar confusion on her visit to India. Her American self clashes with her deep rooted Indianness on her visit to Calcutta. The Tiger's Daughter is a fine
manifestation of cultural transplant. Fakrul Alam sums up Mukherjee’s motive:

The Tigers Daughter, then, 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.

In The Tiger's Daughter Tara rejects Indian modes of life. The city and the people she had come back to be with after seven years abroad were, she finds, in a state of decline. 'Calcutta was the deadliest city in the world, alarm and impatience were equally useless'. (201)

Tara finds Calcutta in a state of perpetual violence and political unrest. Poverty, disease overpopulation and class conflicts seem to prevail and flourish. When Tara’s family receives her, she finds Howrah station dramatically changed. 'The place was too noisy and filthy, of course, to allow her any insight into the world, to which she had returned'. (36)

In the slums of Calcutta she saw a girl whose arms were covered with muddy bandages. Tara saw ‘blood spreading on the bandage. There were sores on the little girl’s legs, sores that oozed bloody pus with each shiver of hatred. How horrible, thought Tara, the kid’s got leprosy, she’s being eaten away!’(145) Tara’s visit gives exposure to ‘[...] ugliness and danger, to viruses that stalked
the street, to dogs and cows scraping in garbage dumps.’(138) Even though she lived in crowded New York; the crowded Calcutta seemed very different. The streets here were the roughest she had ever seen.

Tara’s western education makes her more and more conscious of the degenerating social set up of Calcutta. Her new perspective towards Calcutta adds to her frustration and disgust. Tara dreamt of India as the perfect place that would never change. She is shocked to discover that Calcutta has become as dangerous and alien as America had appeared to her in the beginning. The opening of the novel describes a luxury hotel that was once one of the glories of Calcutta. The once magnificent entrance now seems:

Small almost shabby, marked by a sun bleached awning and two potted hibiscus shrubs. The walls and woodwork are patterned with mold and rust around vertical drains. The side walks along the hotel front are painted with obscenities and political slogans that have been partially erased. (3)

It was a place where, earlier, the elite would assemble to discuss political and commercial issues. Now ‘these few come to the Catelli for their daily ritual of espresso or tea. And the doorman gathers them in with an emotional salute.’(4)

Tara finds that in India nothing meets her expectations. She had expected that her return to India would give her peace and
pleasure, which she did not find in America, in the last seven years.

For years, she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. (30)

Tara begins to feel:

That the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one. That it was fatal to fight for justice, that it was better to remain passive and absorb all shocks as they came. (157)

This arouses in her a feeling of restlessness. She feels like a stranger because Calcutta in reality is not the Eden-like place she has preserved in her memory. She could not respond to the changes in the city of Calcutta because for years she had yearned for this return ‘She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces’. (128) In these times of disorder ‘Calcutta was losing its memories in a bonfire of effigies, buses and trams.’ (12) The newspapers were full of ‘epidemics, collisions, fatal quarrels and starvation, stretching before her was the vision of modern India’. (74)

The novel, at a level, discusses the emotional reactions of an expatriate woman on a prolonged visit to her native country. Tara
had come to India to rediscover her Indian roots and to soak in the peace that the whole world found in India and which she believed was her natural right. However, she discovers that her American self is out of harmony with her deep rooted Indianness. Tara Banerjee came home hoping to heal her wounds in a familiar context. To her amazement she discovered that the context she has cherished for seven years in the alien land had changed to include harassment she had not been aware of earlier. Living with her American husband for seven years she had now come to India all alone. The absent American husband is a constant point of reference in the novel. Physically, her husband David, never appears in the novel but all the time Tara is surrounded by his presence. He seems to be advising her and she obeys him like a dutiful Indian wife. This is the psychology of the eternal Indian woman. She constantly writes to him and steals time to think about him. It was fate that she fell in love with an American. Being a foreigner, David had a theoretical point of view about India. He had no practical experience, as he had never visited India. Tara could not communicate the finer gradations of her family background and Calcutta to him. David asked strange questions about Indian customs and traditions. Tara was shocked to realize that she felt terribly insecure in the new alien culture. 'Madison square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner'. (102) Being married to a foreigner does not broaden Tara’s
horizon for she finds that she cannot explain or discuss many things with him. Tara confided very few things in her letters to her husband and managed quite deftly not to give her own feelings away.

David had a desire to know more and more about India and he had been reading books about India for quite sometime ‘he thought the customs she praised merely degraded the poor in India. He had started to read Segal’s book on India’ (157)

Tara is sheepish where India is concerned. David wanted her to take a stand against injustice, against unemployment hunger and bribery. He made horrible analogies between her Calcutta and Czarist Russia on the eve of revolution’. (157)

Tara believes that ‘she could never tell David that the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one’. (157)

Always, in her mind, there is an on going conflict between her old sense of perception and outlook on Calcutta and her changed outlook. Jasbir Jain argues:

Tara’s consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India a new it is not through her childhood association or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David. Her reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner.\textsuperscript{5}
There are certain experiences that are not likely to be understood by her husband and she keeps them closed secrets. She realizes that the alien land has become more of a home to her and vice versa. *The Tiger’s Daughter* is a heroine-centered novel where David is an absent figure. His role is negligible in the novel but Mukherjee uses him, very aptly, to comment on the problems inherent in cross-cultural relationships. Moreover, Mukherjee appears to be saying that misunderstanding, confusion and incomprehension are inevitable in any cross-cultural encounter, which, in return, causes pain and bewilderment.

Tara repents coming to India without David. ‘I was stupid to come without him, she thought, even with him rewriting his novel during the vacation. Perhaps I was too impulsive, confusing my fear of New York with homesickness. Or perhaps I was going mad’. (26) The greatest irony here is that she experiences loneliness in her native land. Her grief was private but she lived with it.

Tara experiences anger and loss in her relationship with her mother. The relationship, she discovers, was constructed between her and her mother in a specific cultural context. The all-encompassing level of faith is no longer there. Tara’s mother was a devout Hindu, saintly figure. Tara finds that this system of her mother’s blind belief in religion does not offer any solution of her problems. She is plunged into the consciousness that her ties with
her mother have been severed. Arati does not like her white-
skinned son-in-law. Instead she would have preferred a Bengali.
She would not have allowed David to participate in her pooja; ‘how
to explain, our God to these Europeans?’ (63)

Calcutta proves to be extremely caste conscious. All her
relatives and friends try to make Tara feel guilty. Pronob, Sanjay,
Reena, all educated in India in the pattern of western system of
education, pinch and prod her all the time. They approve of foreign
manners, foreign fashions but they do not approve of a foreign
matrimonial alliance.

They were racial purists, thought Tara desperately. They
liked foreigners in movie magazines Nat Wood and Bob
Wagner in faded photoplays. They loved Englishmen like
Worthington at the British Council. But they did not approve
of foreign marriage patterns. So much for the glamour of
her own marriage. She had expected admiration from these
friends. She had wanted them to consider her marriage an
emancipated gesture. But emancipation was suspicious it
presupposed bondage. (107)

Mukherjee who, herself, married a foreigner, makes a
criticism of the community mentality of the Indians who are crazy
about foreign items but discourage marriages with foreigners.

Tara wanted David to be appreciated but none even once
appreciated him. She would have felt better if, for her sake,
friends and relatives had maintained a courteous attitude towards
her absent husband. She did not encourage David to come
because she was not sure he would be received warm-heartedly.
Tara finds herself alien in both the worlds. The pain of rootlessness is reflected everywhere. She hides facts from David and in turn, hides America's bitter experiences from her Indian friends. She wonders:

What David would do if he ever came to India. He was not like her. Would he sling his Camera like other Americans and photograph beggars in Shambazar, squatters in Tollygunge, prostitutes in free school street. Would he try to capture in colour the pain of Calcutta? (130-131)

An important incident, which adds to Tara's deep depression and shock, occurs when she advises women participating in a beauty contest to appear in swimming costumes. People around her are outraged. She is rebuked by an Indian physician. 'I think your years abroad have robbed you of feminine propriety or you are joking with us.' (222)

Tara then wishes heartily that 'She had not come to India without her husband'. (80)

The novel is in the third person narration, Mukherjee presents the novel from Tara's point of view. Using Tara as her mouthpiece, Mukherjee registers her disillusionment with the changes that have taken place in Calcutta. Bharati Mukherjee said about her first novel:

It is the wisest of my novels in the sense that I was between both worlds. I was detached enough from India, so that I could look back with affection and irony, but I didn't
know America enough to feel any conflict. I was like a bridge poised between two worlds.  

*The Tiger’s Daughter* is divided into four parts. Part I deals with the past of Tara and the process of her settling down in New York.

*The Tiger’s Daughter* is Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin of Calcutta, schooled at Poughkeepsie, New York. She is the daughter of an industrialist, Banerjee, known as Bengal Tiger for his sharp business skills. Mukherjee uses this metaphor very aptly and defines Banerjee thus ‘a strong man is a mediator between divine and mortal fates. While the restive city forced weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty, the Bengal Tiger remained powerful, just and fearless’. (120)

The novel presents the history and life of earlier Bengali social classes. It sketches how non-violent and disciplined Calcutta, as well as the old landmarks of Calcutta culture is being replaced. The Bengal Tiger sends his only child, a girl of fifteen, out of India for college.

If she had not been Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great grand daughter 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 week. (13)
Tara did not forget her Camac Street friends. They wrote long letters to her ‘In their letters they complained wittily of boredom in Calcutta, the movies at the Metro, the foul temper of the whiskered nun from Mauritius, the weather’s beastliness’. (13)

These friends, who had never left home, envied Tara’s freedom but not, ‘Once did they detect Tara’s fears’. (13) The girls in the hostel try to draw her out. They lend her books and records and hand lotions unasked. Yet, she experiences discrimination. Little things pain her. For instance, her roommate did not share her bottle of mango chutney. She wants to talk about her family. She boasts that, ‘my great grand father’s name was Hari Lal Banerjee. He was a very plucky man’. (14) Unfortunately, such remarks make a bad impression on the Americans and she is forced to give up such reminiscences. She prays to Kali for strength so that she may not break down before the Americans. Gradually Tara starts to reduce her dependence on others and feels better adjusted.

Part II deals with Tara’s arrival at Bombay, her journey to her hometown Calcutta and her reactions to the changed India. After her marriage she makes a trip home to India after a gap of seven years. As she steps into Bombay, she is filled with disappointment. Bombay railway station appears ‘more like a hospital; there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks’. (24).
When she reaches home she feels momentary peace of mind:

After seven years abroad, after extra-ordinary turns of destiny that had swept her from Calcutta to Poughkeepsie, and Madison, and finally to a two-room apartment within walking distance of Columbia, strange turns that had taught her to worry over a dissertation on Katherine Mansfield, the plight of women and racial minorities, Tara was grateful to call this (her father’s) restful house home. (41)

In Calcutta she finds everything deteriorating. Seven years back, Tara had admired the houses on Marine Drive [...] ‘now their shabbiness appalled her’. (18)

She is unable to adjust with her old friends ‘Seven years ago she had played with these friends, done homework with Nilima, briefly fancied herself in love with Pronob, debated Reena at the British Council’. (55) But now ‘She feared their tone, their omissions, their aristocratic oneness’. (54) Tara’s friends show their disapproval of her which makes her feel distant and their beliefs begin to unsettle her. They suggest ‘her marriage had been imprudent, that the seven years abroad had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature’. (70)

The mean comment of Aunt Jharna, calling her husband an outcaste, outraged her. Aunt Jharna laughed with a quiet violence. You have come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mleccha husband? (45)
Most painful of all, Tara senses that her mother’s attitude towards her has changed. Her marriage to David has resulted in a loss of love from her mother’s quarter.

Perhaps her mother, sitting serenely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin; was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow. (63)

Tara is horrified to realize that her friends and relatives literally considered her an outcaste because of her marriage to a man of another race. She feels ‘quite cut off’, (110) from the people she grew up with. Tara is unable to participate in the religious rituals at home. She grows nervous over her mother’s simple request to share piety with her family. ‘Tara hid behind flippant remarks, dragging up half forgotten invitations to parties and charity carnivals as defenses against her mother’s request’. (67)

Tara feels that she has forgotten many of her Hindu rituals of worshipping. For instance:

When the sandalwood paste had been ground Tara scrapped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center. (64)
Tara becomes acutely conscious of the loss of her own cultural heritage. She is unable to sing bhajans, which she sang in her childhood.

And sad, Tara thought, inspite of the promised bhajan. As a child, Tara remembered, she had sung bhajans in that house. She had sat on a love seat beside a very holy man with a lump and had sung Raghupati Raghaw Rajaram. But that had been a very long time ago, before some invisible spirit or darkness had covered her like skin. (67)

Tara’s return to India is marked by a number of dramatic changes. Not just the place, but people, religious rituals, cultural and social activities also appear alien to her. She seems to have outgrown her earlier identity. The seven years in America with her American husband have given way to new preferences, new attitudes – in fact a totally new identity. The novel traps Tara in a crisis phase. She is constantly troubled by the search for her real self.

Mukherjee, here, raises a very current and pertinent question. Why do immigrants to USA need to abandon certain aspects of their Indianness? Dimple (Wife) and Jyoti (Jasmine) faced this crisis in USA. Tara, in a variation, encounters it at home.

Part III of the novel deals with Tara’s life at Calcutta with her friends. Tara’s reaction to the changed social situation in Calcutta made her friend Reena comment that she has ‘become too self centered and European’ (107)
Seven years in America have reshaped Tara’s vision. She experiences pain and retorts that ‘it was hopeless that things in Calcutta would never get any better’. (134)

Tara’s mind remains mainly on David’s letters. He wrote that he had bought two or three books on India and would read them ‘She thought that the letter was really trying to tell her that he had not understood her country through her, that probably he had not understood her either’. (62)

She misses David and worries continually about losing him to some illicit connection ‘David had confessed his weaknesses, his troubles with his novel, Susie Goldberg’s occasional charm. Tara was afraid he no longer wanted to make her over to his ideal image, that he no longer loved her’. (63)

Tara finds herself maladjusted wherever she goes. With her torn personality she tries to be an Indian and adjust with her friends. She feels like returning to America. Her father, in order to entertain her, sends her on a picnic to Darjeeling.

Part IV of the novel deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her family and friends for a vacation. Tara tries to enjoy the scenic, natural beauty. But her trip is marred by ugly and violent incidents. In the mountains of Darjeeling Tara and her friends meet a girl, Antonia Whitehead, who simply wanted to be their
friend. Antonia Whitehead had been born in Buffalo and had lived there with her parents. Her father had died of a heart attack and her mother had remarried. At the age of fifteen she left home and traveled to San Francisco, later to Arizona, to Singapore and finally to Calcutta ‘Which she said, she wanted to call home’ (197) Pronob then wonders why she was visiting India. Reena replied ‘Of course we known she’s here to seek peace and real happiness! Everyone comes here for that’. (197) Tara knows that Antonia is just as she was during her first few weeks in Calcutta. ‘Tara saw a faint rubbing of herself as she had been her first weeks in Calcutta, when her responses too had been impatient, menacing and equally innocent’. (198)

On the request of her mother she visits Mata Kananbala Devi. She forgets all the malice and hatred for the time being and feels her soul uplifted by the ‘darshan’ of Mata. It is a typically Indian experience for her ‘Tara found herself shouting “Ma, Ma, Mata” with the rest. She found it easy suddenly to love everyone’. (207) Tara finds peace and consolation nowhere. Everything appears frustrating to her. For the time being Tara casts aside all her suspicion and apprehensions, ‘Warm and persistent tears rose in Tara’s heart. She forgot her instinctive suspicions her fears of misunderstandings and scenes. She forgot her guardedness and atrophy in that religious moment. “Ma, Ma, Mata!” (207)
The Bengal Tiger and his family returned to Calcutta the day before the rains were scheduled to start in Darjeeling. Tara’s mother Arati planned a weekend visit to Nayapur, a new township in a complex of coal mines, steel foundries and plants for hydroelectricity. The Bengal Tiger is enthusiastic about the trip and is anxious to show off Bengal’s industrial progress to his daughter. But two days before they were scheduled to leave, a business tangle develop, and the Bengal Tiger file to Delhi along with Arati. Tara then goes with her friends. She meets a politician Mr. Tuntun Wala, the same ugly Marwari fellow with whom she had shared her railway compartment while traveling from Bombay to Calcutta. He had come to Nayapur to plan the strategy for the final weeks of his election campaign. Tara is flattered by the attentions of this man. In a shocking turn of events this man rapes Tara. It seems Tara is just ignorant of the changes that have taken place in Calcutta because:

In another Calcutta such a scene would not have happened. Tara would not have walked into the suite of a gentleman for medicine, and a gentleman would not have dared to make such improper suggestions to her. But except for Camac Street, Calcutta had changed greatly; and even Camac Street had felt the first stirrings of death, with new dreams like Nayapur. Tara’s Calcutta was disappearing. New dramas occurred with each new bulldozer incision in the green and romantic hills. Slow learners like Tara were merely victims. (235)

Tara’s first reaction is to complain to her journalist friend Sanjay to tell him Tuntunwala was a parasite who would survive
only at their expense. ‘He was a man of such energy, so aggressive, so brittle and ferocious that next to him businessmen like Pronob seemed flabby’. (161-162)

Tara later decides not to share her knowledge of her seduction with any of her friends, just for fear of disgrace. She realizes ‘In a land where a friendly smile, an accidental brush of the fingers, can ignite rumors – even law suites – how is one to speak of Mr. Tuntunwala’s violence? The others would have to make their own compromises’. (236)

Certainly this incident depicts the discordant aspect of Calcutta, violence of revolutionaries and corruption of conservative politicians. Tara had not known before coming to Calcutta that this would happen to her. She feels very insecure in her birth place. It is ironic that Tara’s father, who is popularly known as the Bengal Tiger for his strength and courage, cannot save his daughter from becoming Tuntunwala’s victim. Tara writes a note to her friends saying that she has suddenly taken ill, and immediately leaves for Camac Street by train. Reaching there she talked constantly of returning to David. The Bengal Tiger and his wife get helpless before Tara’s determination to go back. Tara goes to the Air India Office and reserves a seat on a flight to New York. Tara’s decision to return to David is not a positive realization or finding of roots away from home, but an escape from the present. To Tara, New
York and Calcutta are not very different from each other. Being married to an American makes it more difficult for Tara to find roots.

After a short time of this reservation she becomes a victim of violence caused by the marchers who were proceeding towards Catelli-Continental in a mob. The mob does not spare her and her friends Jyonto and Pronob. Locked in a car she only thinks about her husband David before she blacks out.

The conclusion of *The Tiger’s Daughter* like the conclusion of *Wife* has a rattling effect on the readers. Tara, a petite, wealthy, protected and educated woman is dragged through horrific experiences. Gothic elements have been skillfully used by Mukherjee to highlight the inhumanity of modern times. The turmoil outside is but an external manifestation of Tara’s inner state of mind and by leaving her in the midst of the rioting mob Mukherjee hints at the irreconcilability of such conflicts.

Tara Banerjee Cartwright returns to India to recover her roots after seven years of living in the United States, she finds India very different. The novel traces an immigrant’s experience of alienation. Tara senses a gulf between herself and her native tradition, culture and people. She suffers crisis of Identity. M. Sivaram Krishna observes:
Tara in The Tiger's Daughter finds it difficult to relate herself to her family, city culture, in general since her marriage to an American, her western education are enough signs to brand her as an "alienated" westernized woman. The implicit logic is that since she is exposed to the west and has absorbed its values she must be necessarily alienated. Therefore, even when she tries to "voice" her continuing attachment for and identity with India, the voice does not carry conviction for it is at variance with the usual stance – of indifference and arrogance—one generally associates with the "westernized"(exiled) Indian.7

Tara Banerjee, is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee herself. The novel addresses Mukherjee’s personal difficulties of being between two worlds. Similarly 'Days and Nights'- co-authored with her husband is a shared account of the first trip the couple took together after being married. Each offers a different India through their separate journals and ultimately the two tell the tale of daily difficulties of cultural barriers. Like Mukherjee, Tara has married an American novelist who stays back home during his summer break so that he can write.

Mukherjee, however, denied that the novel is 'based on any real person'.8 and declared that 'the novel wasn't autobiographical'9

Ananda Prabha Barat argues that on coming home after seven years. Tara feels perplexed:

There is a strange fusion of the Americaanness and indianness in the psyche of Tara. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. The outcome of this confrontation is her split up psyche10.
According to Roshni Rustomji, in her novels, Mukherjee presents ‘some of the more violent and grotesque aspects of cultural collisions’.11

M.Sivaramakrishna takes a geographical aspect and comparing *Wife* and *The Tiger’s Daughter* says that Tara and Dimple are expatriates, geographically, as well as, in mind and spirit ‘the retention of their identity as Indians is in constant tension with the need for its renunciation if they have to acquire a new identity as immigrants’.12

Tara Banerjee, after realizing her own sense of alienation, reaches at a conclusion that it extends further back into her Indian past, to her education under nuns.

How does the foreignness of the spirit begin? Tara wondered. Does it begin right in the center of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white headdresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun? (45)

Gurleen Grewal is of the view that *The Tigers’ Daughter* is a candid, barely concealed account of the author’s own displacement through education: tutored by nuns in Calcutta, having studied in America and married an American’.13

Tara’s psyche is tragic as a result of the tension generated in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments and the
conflict generated from the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia.

Maya Manju comments:

When Tara/Bharati goes west, she undergoes a new birth in the womb of Vassar and growth in graduate school. The new birthed consciousness – birthed in dormitories and classrooms by a western curriculum and consciousness – seeks to hold its history at its center where the knowledge is visionless. Like Henry James heroine, Isabel Archer, who goes to Europe/Britain, the source of her tradition, for vision in knowledge, so Tara/Bharati must come to the source the omphalos of all visions the Catelli-Continental. Thanks to Jyonto Roy Chowdhury, and her years away, Tara begins to exchange vision for insight. At the end of the novel, as she sits shivering in the Fiat, surrounded by a mob, wondering whether she will ever see her husband again, she sees the vision twinkling, pinching, pulling, slapping through the crowd that surrounds the hotel. Bharati Mukherjee is refusing to state what it is, invites a reader response in decoding the vision.

*The Tiger's Daughter* is a work of fiction that draws upon Mukherjee’s own first years of marriage and her return to her place of birth for a visit to a world unlike the one that she preserved in her memory. Roshni Rustom Ji-Kerns says that women writers of the Indian Diaspora deal with immigrant lives, expatriates and depict ‘people who are caught in the awkward act of juggling with multiple cultures’.  

Mukherjee’s first novel deals with ‘the emotions of expatriate Indian women responding to a prolonged visit to their country of origin.’
Through out the novel, then, Tara comes in contact with the new Calcutta and must come to realize that the images she had preserved in her memory in America no longer correspond to the city scenes she is now viewing on her trip home.

The protagonist Tara Banerjee returns to India after seven years. This is the common theme in Common Wealth literature. The protagonist’s return, after seven years occurs in Chinua Achebe’s ‘Things Fall apart’, Okonkwo, too, returns from exile to find his village and people completely changed. In ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ Bharati Mukherjee takes up the theme of the immigrant’s return. This is a reversal of Dimple’s (Wife) experience where she had dreamt of America as the Promised Land and lived on to have her dreams shattered. The novel registers Mukherjee’s personal crises of being caught between two worlds where her identity was in question. Coming to India Tara is shocked to discover that Calcutta has become as dangerous and as alien as America appeared to her in the beginning. Her old friends Reena, Sanjay and Pronob make her feel as alien as the girls in the American dormitory had done. Tara remembers how, in various subtle ways, she had sensed discrimination. Her roommates were contemptuous of her mango chutney and pickles. They felt such diets belonged to sluggish and lazy people. She even prayed to Kali for her survival. She makes hysterical attempts to feel at home in New York; ‘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’. (41)

Manju Sharma points out that:

Tara is the alter ego of the author is clear from the autobiographical details in *Days and Nights*; the settings of Tara are also battles in the growth of the author’s sensibility from that of the expatriate to that of the immigrant.\(^\text{17}\)

Mukherjee acknowledges that the character of Tara was ‘very much me, too, so it’s obviously a kind of alter ego that I wasn’t totally aware of when I embarked on this’.\(^\text{18}\)

Tara represents the tussle between tradition and modernity. She is an expatriate in mind as well as spirit, exhibiting the expatriate characteristic of being ill at ease both in the native culture and alien one. Jasbir Jain remarks that Mukherjee’s novels are representative of the expatriate sensibility.\(^\text{19}\)

Leading seven years of life with her American husband she came to her native place to relax and recharge but contrary to her expectations, Tara finds India completely changed. She finds that she does not fit into the old life of Calcutta, which she had left seven years ago, and for which she yearned when she was at Poughkeepsie. She realized, with shock, that the old world could not be recreated. Change is essential. One has to change in order
to survive. Her friends want to hear about the fantastic aspects of American life. Helplessly she tells Sanjay:

How much easier she thought it was to live in Calcutta. How much simpler to trust the city's police inspector and play tennis with him on Saturdays. How humane to accompany a friendly editor to watch the riots in town. New York, she confided was a gruesome nightmare. It wasn't muggings she feared so much as rude little invasions. The thought of a stranger looking into her pocket book, laughing at the notes she had made to herself, about her life and times, old sales slips accumulated over months for merchandise long lost or broken, credit card with unflattering pictures by which a criminal could identify her.(86)

Tara herself is responsible for the change in people's attitude. She realizes that admiration for her does not come to her from anywhere. Her relatives and friends snigger that Tara has defied her parents and married a man from another race. This marriage burdens her heart:

In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac Street her friends were curious only about the adjustments she had made. (78)

Tara clings to the thought of David in an attempt to maintain her identity in Calcutta and to prevent it from changing beyond all recognition 'he seemed like a figure standing in shadows, or a foreigner with an accent on television'. (77) Her relatives exaggerated their disappointment that David had not accompanied Tara. She suspected they were relieved that he had not come. 'She was just an eccentric and imprudent creature whose marriage
had barred her from sharing the full confidence of her St. Blaise’s friends’. (195)

According to Ananda Prabha Barat ‘she is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are the two worlds wide apart’.  

Her estrangement is deepened as she is called by her relatives as ‘Americawali’, and her husband a ‘mleccha’. Such labels intensify her anger, and her feeling of rootlessness.

Roshni Rustomji Kerns describes her constant feeling of restlessness regarding her role as a Bengali wife of an American ‘Tara’s petulance and constant nervousness regarding her role as the Bengali wife of an American, visiting her family in Calcutta; overshadows her well intentioned efforts to understand her world of diverse cultures’.

Tara’s misery is further heightened when she meets Marwari businessman politician P.K. Tuntunwala who is a classic usurper, a leader businessman who had taken over Calcutta’s commerce. Initially Tara is repelled by him but soon she finds herself attracted to him. She is mesmerized by his slogans and messages like ‘Strength is love’.

This brutal man makes a move to molest Tara. Rape implies disrespect of a woman, her dignity comes in question. Earlier it
was considered as miserable reality. Women were cornered and remained silent. Tara, an educated woman, thought this happened only in the west but she became a victim in her own native place. The story of Tara is a tale of a very torturous visit to India. This is her immigrant experience in return, crushing of her private concept of Eden. She came to India to gather a package of love that, when delivered is in complete contrast to what she has come looking for. Tara, after a short while, became a victim of violence. Violence and riots are the symbolic representation of Tara’s inner turmoil and if we look at it the other way round, they are the final seal on her belief that nothing is in control in India. Corruption of politicians like Tuntunwala shocks her. He grabbed political power in Calcutta, displaying himself as a man of law and order. Tara thought that he is ‘a dangerous man. He could create whatever situation, whatever catastrophe he needed’ (97).

Such politicians get away with all corruptions and impose their wills over Calcutta life. The greatest irony hidden in the title of the novel is that Tara overcomes the racial hardships of survival in a foreign country and nothing happens to her but she becomes victim of her tragic end in her birth place. Tara, an Indian born, feels a greater love and security in the arms of her American husband. Her father is called the ‘Bengal Tiger’ a royal breed which is found only in Bengal. Bengal Tiger is the most ferocious and famous in the world. Bearing this title is a mark of honor. Tara’s
father is known for his business skills and extraordinary acumen. So ‘The Tiger’s Daughter’ must be a ‘tigress’ bold, brave able to take on anything but we find Tara has moments of shock depression and vulnerability. She did not inherit all these traits. She fails to prove herself as the ‘exquisite and intellectual daughter of very big industrial magnate.’(221)

Mukherjee was highly influenced by her father in her childhood. He was energetic and gregarious, a larger than life character who became the model for the Tiger of The Tiger’s Daughter. Mukherjee remembers nostalgically, he was ‘an extraordinary man […] Very much the benevolent patriarch who wanted the best for his daughters. And to him, the “best” meant intellectually fulfilling lives’.

Thus, Tara’s journey to India, ironically proves disheartening leading to depression and finally her tragic end. ‘It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India’. (157) Locked in a car she only thinks about David ‘Tara could no longer visualize his face in its entirety, only bits and pieces in precise detail, and this terrified her’. (77)

The novel ends with Tara contemplating ‘Whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn’t, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely’. (248)
Inspite of her seven year stay abroad, Tara has retained her innocence. She does not possess the strength required to protect herself from people like Tuntunwala. Her experience with him shatters her. She decides to return to David like a child running back into the protective arms of an adult. Tara is certainly not one of the emergent women of modern fiction, unlike other heroines of Bharati Mukherjee. To her, a father in childhood and a husband in later life are essential as protectors. Tara remains after all, the traditional daughter and wife.

**WIFE**


‘Wife’ is an excellent example of the encounter between different cultures. The story of Dimple Dasgupta explores the meeting of East and West through immigrant experiences in the U.S.

Jody Manson says ‘the protagonist Dimple Das Gupta like Mukherjee, experiences Identity crises through the cultural forces that powerfully shape her self perception and deny her access to control her own life’.  

Mukherjee’s experiences in Canada led her to see herself as an expatriate and this theme is reflected in her writings. Her own
crisis in Canada was grievous. She was misunderstood by her American family and also by society. Mukherjee felt upset when she realized this and also when she saw other people experiencing the same thing. She regrets that she had a bad time in the 1970s in Canada. She felt that there was a strong bias against Canadian citizens of Indian origin, especially in Toronto. She diverted from writing for Art for Art’s sake to matter-of-fact writing. Mukherjee spent her childhood in England and she also had some exposure to America. She did not suffer the pangs of identity crisis or cultural transplant during these early visits because she went with her parents and sister. After her M.A. she went to Iowa in America to participate in a writer’s workshop. Here she met and fell in love with a writer, Clark Blaise. Marriage to Clark Blaise took her into the folds of an American family which did not understand her and whom she did not understand.

When writing *Wife* she herself was going through a dark, neurotic phase. When she married Clark Blaise she gave up her cultural identity and every thing else for the sake of this white man and her only role was that of a wife. Inspite of belonging to an upper middle class family, having liberal parents, having received elitist education, she was bound to the duties of a wife, almost in the way they were defined by conservative Indian society. Role fulfillment as Clark’s wife had the same stress, tensions and
burdens as it did for any conservative Hindu Bengali girl from Calcutta married into a Hindu Bengali family.

Mukherjee’s anger at the predicament of Bengali wives in Calcutta merged with her own frustrations as an Indian immigrant in Canada and gave *Wife* the feel of a book with a tone of bitterness and tinged with violence. *Wife* was a very painful book.²⁴ for her to write.

In the novel, Bharati Mukherjee highlights the theme of an Indian wife torn between the role fulfillment that society expects of her as discussed above and her need for individual and self-expression. Mukherjee chose this subject for fictional treatment because she wanted point out that marriage is as much of a new experience for an Indian wife as for any other girl. No girl is born a wife. Role-fulfillment comes gradually. Once a university professor asked her, ‘What do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one?’²⁵

As Blaise explains the young girl ‘may end up, for she cannot refuse to marry – with a lout who will not tolerate the slightest deviation from expectancy, or the most pathetic gestures towards self expression’.²⁶

About *Wife* he remarks that Wife is ‘about such a girl [...] whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed in the madness of emigration to New York into murder’.²⁷
Mukherjee says that *Wife* is about 'a young Bengali wife who was sensitive enough to feel the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and break out'.

Bharati Mukherjee used Dimple Dasgupta as her subject because she herself is an immigrant and she felt very close to Dimple – an immigrant wife who questions her traditional value systems. In this mood, she began to empathise with the conservative lower middle class Indian girls who suffer greatly while fulfilling roles as wives.

*Wife* is a fascinating story which deals with the pre and post experiences of Dimple Dasgupta–an ordinary looking, dull, middle-class girl, who fed on film magazines and TV serials and who is unable to accept the monotonous existence that marriage leads her into. It presents the surprise of role reversal. The wife, in mythical terms, has sacred association. She stands for Lakshmi, Durga, motherhood and womanliness. Dimple defied all these principles. Dimple did not want to entangle herself in the complications of woman-hood. Even the prospect of motherhood did not arouse any feelings in her. She terminates her pregnancy by skipping rope until the baby is aborted. She kept an untidy house and remained remote from her husband. We see tragic irony in the title of the novel.
In 1960s and 70s, India witnessed the promotion of family planning policies. Educated people did not have many children. When the novel was written, the popular belief prevailed that children should not come too soon after marriage. Dimple was quite young and did not want to be a mother and she thought that carrying a baby to America would interfere in her new life. In the novel incidents like killing of a mouse and the induced abortion are meant to represent the truthful historical situation in middle-class Hindu society in Bengal in the 1970s. Critics are of the view that Dimple is not a faithful wife to Amit. She betrays her husband and murders him. Each stab is symbolic of her destroying the bond of marriage and terminating her role as a good wife. Dimple, when she could not find the solution to her problem goes mad and in the fit of lunacy she kills her husband. Dimple gets addicted to violence shown on television. She watches television endlessly because Amit is busy. She cannot work because she does not have a work permit. She finds that American society is highly materialistic. The God they worship is money. No body has time for people without business. Dimple goes crazy. This mind-set is society given. The entire set of inherited Indian values becomes redundant. She needs somebody to open her heart to. The television fills this void. Too much of viewing damages her peace of mind and equilibrium. She mixes up facts from real life with the
incidents she watches on television, so much so, that she loses the ability to distinguish them from the world of reality.

When she commits the murder she is not cold-blooded. She performs it like an action in a play. In her rendering, she is almost like a character in an American television show.

In the novel Bharati Mukherjee is using Dimple as a tool to tell Americans that this is how the Indian wives suffer. Dimple is held suspended between two worlds. Asnani comments:

Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be submissive and self-effacing.29

Bharati Mukherjee recreates the conservative Hindu Bengali society of the nineteen-seventies in India. In this set-up, girls were reared strictly according to old, traditional codes. Right from childhood, girls were made conscious of their subordinate status. They were time and again reminded by their families and by society that they could not assert any individuality in the parental house because they were destined for their husbands who would have the ultimate authority in their lives. However, exposure to the western education made women aware of their changing roles.

The plot of the novel, Wife, is intricately woven around an Indian couple who move to the U.S.A. for the realisation of their
dreams. The protagonist in *Wife* is a 19 year-old young girl named Dimple. Like all other young girls of her generation, she believes in dreams, which govern her life. Dimple Dasgupta is rather child-like and lives mostly in a world of imagination. She constantly dreams of marriage. She believes that marriage will bring love and freedom. She fantasized about young men with mustaches, dressed in spotless white, peering into opened skulls. Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns and fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love.

While arranging a marriage parents locate suitable partners for their children. The choice is governed by status and income. Children accept the parental choice without protest. People in the early nineteen-seventies believed totally in arranged marriages.

Certain professions have been glorified at certain times. We find that Dimple’s father, being an Electrical Engineer himself, is looking for an engineer husband for his daughter. He even advertises in the matrimonial columns of the newspaper. Dimple, on the other hand, dreams of marrying a neurosurgeon.

Delay in the fixing of her marriage makes her nervous and sick. Mrs. Dasgupta reads the illness as a bad sign. According to her, mysterious pains, headaches and hysterics were Nature’s ways of indicating that the young woman is ready for marriage.
She urged Mr. Dasgupta to look more carefully at matrimonial advertisements. Dimple gets impatient and feels that twenty years of her life have been wasted. She writes to well known magazines asking for beauty tips. She believes in the need for physical charms to attract a prospective groom:

She worried that she was ugly worried about her Star-shaped body and rudimentary breasts. Would the now inevitable engineer..... be disappointed that she wasn’t bosomy and fair like a Bombay starlet? She thought of breasts as having destinies of their own, ruining marriages or making fortunes. (4)

Bharati Mukherjee, in this novel, attempts to highlight what she considers to be the hollowness of the institution of arranged marriages. In the preceding novel, The Tiger’s Daughter, Bharati Mukherjee describes a traditional Indian marriage with a bitter tone:

When the choice is made and the bargaining ...... settled with maximum discontent, then the Brahmin Priest appears ... And after a fire has been lit .... When the guests have been fed .... Then the groom takes his bride, a total stranger, and rapes her on a brand new flower-decked bed.31 (56)

Finally, the search is over and Dimple gets married to Amit Basu, a middle class young engineer who seems set to make a fortune in America. Amit was not the man Dimple had imagined for her husband. Mr. Dasgupta as a traditional Indian father fulfils the role of a father by planning, arranging and executing her wedding.
To her would be in laws, he boasts of his daughter 'she is so sweet and docile, I tell you. She will never give a moment's headache.'(25)

Much too soon after marriage, this young, immature girl finds her dreams come crushing down and feels cheated. Her romantic temperament is rudely curbed by the demands of everyday, practical life. Marriage did not bring what she had expected. Even Amit, to her surprise, is not totally happy with Dimple. He amazes her one day by saying 'I always thought I'd marry a tall girl. You know the kind I mean, one meter sixty-one or sixty-two centimeters, tall and slim. Also convent educated, fluent in English'. (26)

Dimple experiences her first pang of regret that she had not taken the university examinations. She wondered what excuse she could offer him for her weak spoken English. She then remembers her friend Pixie nostalgically. She thinks how perfect life would have been if she had a job like Pixie's and a telephone in her office, and hair styled at Eve's, and even a boss to frown at her through the glass. Losing herself in such romantic dreams becomes Dimple's past time. She blocks out the disappointments of daily life with effective imagination. The same tendency, later in America, turns to psychic brooding and she progresses to devising methods of suicide and murder. Dimple's primary emotion after
marriage is resentment. In her new house, she resents her husband because he expects her, like Sita to jump into the fire if necessary. Dimple before marriage, had idealized Sita. Sita is the consort of the Hindu god Rama. She was abducted by Ravana who is the embodiment of evil. Sita, in Hindu mythology, is the symbol of wifely devotion and self-surrender. She kept herself chaste by concentrating her heart on Rama throughout her long imprisonment. On her return from exile she asserted her purity and proved it by voluntarily undergoing an ordeal by fire. As Dimple discovered that Amit was no Ram, she resented his expectations of idealism from her. Dimple aspires to the roles traditionally assigned to women but fails to achieve them because of her innate weaknesses. At the same time, she is incapable of breaking away from these traditional shackles to move ahead. She finds her new role as wife extremely taxing. She resents her mother-in-law. She does not like the new name ‘Nandini’ given to her by her mother-in-law, which Dimple considers ‘old-fashioned and unsung’. She finds the apartment much too small over crowded and unattractive. Her silent resentment brooded intensely is later going to become a serpent of agony threatening to swallow her. ‘It was this passive resistance, this withholding of niggardly affection from Amit, This burying of ones’ head among dusty, lace doilies that she found so degrading’.(30)
Her agony steals on her silently and dangerously so much so that the awareness of impending mother-hood does not arouse in her feelings of tenderness and excitement natural to a young mother. Instead she thinks of getting rid of ‘Whatever it was that, blocked her tubes and pipes’. (31) She decides not to bear any child and justifies herself by arguing that she hopes to begin a fresh life in U.S. ‘I want everything to be nice and new’. (41)

She begins to feel that a child will be a hindrance in her life in U.S. She daydreams about abortions. She gives vicious squeezes to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding. She works hard running up and down the three flights with large plastic pails filled with water. She hallucinates about her baby. ‘It had wrinkled skin like a very old man’s and a large head filled with water’. (41)

She skips so hard that it results in an abortion. She remembers the bathroom floor was slippery especially near the mouth of the large drain:

She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned, then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs, then she had collapsed. (42)

Dimple registers her protest by premature termination of the pregnancy because, as she admits, ‘no one had consulted her before depositing it in her body’. (31)
This reaction is certainly a part of a sadistic tendency. She behaves in an abnormal way and thinks bitterly that no one had prepared her for motherhood. She again broods intensely: ‘She was probably more fertile than others, and there was that poor village woman rendered roofless because of her infertility. Life was too unjust’. (31)

Amit sentimentalises the loss of a baby: ‘It was going to be a boy! I was going to teach him cricket! This must be a bad omen’. (43)

Dimple prays that America would answer their queries quickly. She hopes that America would welcome them. Though she imagines that moving to U.S will bring about a drastic change in her life, she soon realizes that her bitterness and loneliness only increase in the U.S. But once again even after going to America her hopes are shattered. America does not give her freedom and fulfillment of her dreams. Dimple gets entangled between two cultures. Romantic Dimple and jobless Amit develop a gap in their relationship and this gap widens day by day. She believed that a man without a job was not a man at all. ‘She was bitter that marriage had betrayed her, had not provided all the glittery things she had imagined’. (101)
She thinks of seven ways to commit suicide. The surest way she felt would be to borrow a can of Drano from under the kitchen sink and drink it, diluted slightly with water. (102)

Dimple admires Jyoti Sen who like Amit is a Bengali immigrant to U.S. Dimple now contemplates that marriage was a chance business. It could easily have been Jyoti instead of Amit whom she had married. Both were of the same caste and both were engineers. She wanted Amit to be: ‘infallible, intractable, godlike, but with boyish charm; wanted him to find a job so that after a decent number of years he could take his savings and retire with her to a three story house in Ballygunje Park’. (89)

Dimple feels envious of her American friend Ina Mullick. Ina went to the beach in a peasant skirt and socks that she had bought in Colaba Causeway, Bombay but which looked very American on her. In contrasts, Dimple felt ashamed of her sari-swathed skinny body. ‘It seemed so inappropriate a body for having fun on an American beach.’(103)

She keeps seeing herself through Ina’s eyes, or rather imagines she is seeing herself through Ina’s eyes. After this disturbing realization she sinks into her own world of isolation and every time she thinks of different ways of committing suicide and feels desperate. She has multiple complaints against life.
Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a Chimera. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries; he was unreal. She was furious, desperate; she felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster. (156)

She feels isolated from Amit as well as her surroundings. She now depends totally on T.V. and magazines. In India in the early seventies there were few television-sets. Dimple in America, was fascinated by the sophisticated and varied network and thus television affects her life dreadfully. Television introduces her to love American style. Everything she saw on TV was about love, even murder and death were derailed love. Her T.V. watching stuns her by its incredible violence ‘the women on television led complicated lives, became pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances murdered or were murdered, were brought to trial and released’. (73)

Dimple developed a passion to become a new woman and lead a very free and exciting life soap opera style. Soap operas represent a media phenomenon of the seventies. Detergent companies sponsored mushy, sentimental shows about women. They targeted the bored non-working women. Dimple became obsessed with these shows. She lived by proxy through the characters on television. These women represented the ultimate modern woman to her.
Apart from this, in her isolation she dreams of catching diseases. 'Lukemia was the most glamorous'. She browses, she thinks only in soap opera terms. She has no inhibition in expressing whatever she feels. She encounters the horrific scenes of murder and violence in U.S. where crime is the topic of every drawing room discussion.

The anxiety of boredom, caused by empty days, haunts her. She loses her balance. Mentally she degenerate and begins to develop a horror of things around her. Everything scared her, 'the spluttering of the radiator, the brown corduroy sofa with depressions where Leni and Ina had sat before they slipped into more relaxed positions on the floor, the needles in the rug, ironing board.'(155-56)

She finds herself collapsing inwardly. The dreams of imaginary dangers gradually lead her to lose touch with reality. When she sits down to list the reasons why she is unhappy, she is unable to define them:

1. 'The plants were dying.
2.
3.
4.
5. It was no use; it was too hard to be honest in writing.' (180)
Since she is not sure of her problems, her mind goes blank and devises at least ten different ways of ending her life, 'getting her head caught in the oven, slicing open her jugular vein, getting suffocated in a garbage bag, getting her head hit with shovels and finally getting mugged and killed in the laundry room in the basement after midnight'. (154)

Dimple however does not exercise any of these methods but this reflects upon her neurotic behaviour, relating it to her wish to remain ill in terms of striving for satisfaction. She welcomes and relishes painful experience. This can be interpreted as Dimples cry for help. Unfortunately there is no body who can hear this cry for help. She bottles her emotions and can not open her heart. She needs somebody desperately to talk to her. Dimple can never become a part of American society and hence remains what Ratna Das, a middle aged modern wife of a media man calls her ‘a resident alien’ (46)

She develops an illicit relationship with Milt Glasser in a passionate attempt to find an identity in America and to satisfy her sexual drives. She realizes how different Milt is from Amit. ‘Milt was a nice person, impulsive and frank’ (195)

Brinda Bose says that:

Dimple’s brief but momentous affair with an American man is merely the foreshadowing of the choices that terrify as well as liberate Jasmine. In Mukherjee’s fiction, a woman’s
sexual freedom often functions as a measure of her increasing detachment from traditional sexual modes and, correspondingly of her assimilation in the New World through her rapid Westernization/ Americanization.32

In wearing Milt’s sister, Marsha’s, clothes and shoes, in borrowing English words from Ina Mullick, she is neither of India nor of America but a wanderer between two worlds struggling to get an identity. She begins to experience a split personality. She sees her body and soul falling apart ‘she feels more lonely more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow without feelings.’(200)

She collapses with her problem and cannot find a way out. Unlike Jasmine, Dimple could not give herself a chance to rebuild herself. Jasmine survived while Dimple collapsed because she could not take any initiative, as Indian women are not taught to do so. The big attraction for America often plunges immigrants into identity crisis. Series of disappointment lead her to the problem of neurosis, which in turn leads to her decision to kill her husband Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The idea of murdering Amit makes her feel very American. The idea fascinates her and she thinks that ‘she would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a T.V. series’. (195)
The depression gets heavier and heavier. Her emotions, which need outlet, burst at last and reach a terrible climax in the murder of Amit.

She sneaked up on him and chose a spot, her favorite spot just under the hairline, where the mole was getting larger and browner and she drew an imaginary line of kisses because she did not want him to think she was the impulsive, foolish sort who acted like a maniac just because the husband was suffering from insomnia. She touched the mole very lightly and let her fingers draw a circle around the delectable spot, and then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times, each time a little harder. (212)

Thus, after killing Amit, her masochistic drives find satisfaction. She finds the colour of his blood a beautiful ‘pretty pink’. Pink traditionally symbolises innocence and purity. She stabbed him seven times, which is symbolic of her destroying the bond of marriage represented by the seven ‘vachan’ in the Hindu tradition. She terminates her role as wife.

This conclusion is suggestive of the huge impact of excessive television viewing. Having no life apart from that of being a wife, Dimple is unable to be an individual. Her ideas and taste are fashioned only by the glamorous world of films and advertisements. Dimple like many other young women of her generation, succumbed to the pressures of cultural transplant. The trauma of identity crisis drew her married life to a terrible conclusion, which she naively believed would be taken care of. The
dreams of a prosperous life were nullified by her insanity. Linda Sandler explains it in terms of her traditional upbringing:

Dimple emigrate to the electronic age with her traditional values almost intact, only partly modified by the Pop culture of modern Calcutta, she is enable to make the transition from Before to After and chooses violence as a “problem-solving” device.\textsuperscript{33}

The major themes of the novel are clash between East and West; Dimple’s attempt to find a solution to culture-shock and her struggle to find a new identity. F.A. Inamdar observes ‘the novel Bharati Mukherjee’s \textit{Wife} is not just a novel on immigration and it is difficult to treat the novel as a study of cultural shock’.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Wife} has invited criticism from a number of critics like Jasber Jain, who is of the view that Dimple is too abnormal and involved in a dream world to be portrayed as either a victim of patriarchal society or of expatriation.

Dimple believed that the freedom offered by immigration would give her a new identity. She did not want to carry any relics from her old life. She is caught in the web of her desire to become a traditional Indian wife and is tempted by the self-sufficiency of the western woman simultaneously. Sometimes she wants to abandon her Bengali self. On the contrary Amit wants to retain it. He disapproves of women who go to college, wear pants and smoke cigarettes.
Bharati Mukherjee introduces her American friend Ina Mullick into Dimple’s life as a challenge to the restrictions of traditional wife hood. ‘Well, Dimple’, said Ina, as she sat on the edge of the coffee table nearly at Dimple’s elbow, “what do you do all day? You must be bored out of your skull.” Dimple flushed with anger. “I am not bored”. (76) Ina Mullick’s western attitude tempts her to abandon her Bengali-self, while Amit asks her to retain it.

Dimple admires Joyti Sen’s wife Meena Sen because she is comfortable with her life in America and accepts her as a friend. But she fixes Ina Mullick as her role model because she is ‘more American than the Americans’. (68)

She keeps trying to adjust herself to this strange New World. She does not participate in any household activity and does not perform any domestic duties. Her increasing inability to order her life is reflected in the disorder of things in her apartment. She fills herself with rage against Amit. She does not find any solutions to her problems and she turns neurotic. In India this problem would have been solved. She could have communicated her stress to her mother or to a friend. She tries to find a solution to her problems in soap opera, and does not realise that it is leading her towards violence.

Dimple’s romantic hero comes to life in Milt Glasser. She falls in love with him ‘he was, to her America’ (174).
In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Hancock asks Mukherjee, ‘Is Infidelity and murder the only solution?’

Mukherjee replied:

Dimple’s decision to murder her husband is her misguided act of self-assertion. If she had remained a housewife living with her extended family in India, she probably would not have asked herself questions such as, am I unhappy, do I deserve to be unhappy. And if, by chance, she had asked herself these questions, she might have settled her problems by committing suicide. So turning to violence outward rather than inward is part of her slow and misguided Americanization. Wife is a novel that is very dear to me.

Jasbir Jain points out, ‘Dimple’s problem is her utter rootlessness as she cannot come to terms with either her own culture or America’s culture, she finds herself at cross roads and visualizes her life as ‘a dying bonfire.’ (119)

Sivarama Krishna remarks that the loss of Dimple’s identity is the result of her being an exile. It is all due to her loss of contact with reality. Amit, being very busy, turns away from her world of fantasy. Her dislike of Amit’s ways of life makes her dislike him and the world around her. Despair sets in and she turns neurotic. S.P. Swain says ‘Dimple 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 her husband’.  

M. Rajeshwar approaches the novel in terms of morality. ‘Having thus killed Amit, Dimple has ultimately succeeded in
achieving a modicum of satisfaction for masochistic drives. She has turned the whole society into a punishing agent. Society will never forgive her for killing a dutiful husband'.

Mukherjee is of the view 'In a bizarre way, my stuff is meant to be optimistic. Dimple, if she had remained in Calcutta, would have gone into depression, and she would have found a very convenient way out for unhappy Bengali wives'.

Liew Geok Leong admires the novel for taking 'the psychology of displacement as far as possible in its terse pursuit of disaster'.

Dimple is an Indian wife who struggles to find a distinct identity in an alien land. She submissively marries Amit Basu, an ambitious engineer, who plans to emigrate to U.S. In America she experiences cultural shock and find expression for her frustration in the horrific murder of her husband.

The name Dimple means a depression in the cheek. This surface depression becomes symbolic of the depression within her. She hates her books and does not appear in her B.A. examination. She lacks ambition. Delay in marriage made her nervous and sick. She dreams of an ideal man.

She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a body builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers and put the ideal man and herself
in a restaurant on park street or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel. (23)

This reflects her childish and immature yearning for an ideal man. She cannot relate to the house of her in laws. The degrading ‘lace doilies’ generate in her a longing for ‘her own room in Rash Behari Avenue’. She does not feel at ease with her pregnancy. She desires to part with the stuff that ‘blocked her tubes and pipes’. Her abnormality reaches its height when she skips her way to abortion.

She kills a mouse because it looked pregnant to her. This incident signifies a gratification of a sadistic tendency. Pregnancy is a blessing for traditional women. They maintain the continuity of the extended family. Women are the very source of ‘creation’. Rosanne Klass comments:

For an Indian wife, childlessness is a disaster, pregnancy the achievement that seats her status. To overturn such ingrained values would involve a major emotional upheaval; yet Dimple acts on the vaguest and not undefined impulses, and thinks no more about it.  

In the novel, Wife, Bharati Mukherjee disapproves of the Indian arranged marriages. Parents, in making the selection of mates, are often moved by their own caprices and personal desires and neglect the wishes of the people to be married. Bharati Mukherjee has portrayed a conventional and stereotyped marriage. This is one of the most important factors responsible for Dimple’s
neurotic behaviour. A submissive, docile girl turned out to be a murderer. She wanted to marry a neurosurgeon so that she could lead a luxurious life. Unfortunately she got married to Amit who could not give her as many material comforts. Dimple was not a character who could withstand the vicissitudes of life with Amit. There developed a gap between husband and wife. Dimple sank into the world of solitude. And in America, at every step, she suffered from loneliness.

Once when Amit and Dimple returned home from an outing, Amit promised to look after her and protect her from everything that seemed to be unsettling her, and he draw a conclusion ‘every thing about you is shocking and exciting and a little sad’. (201)

Dimple remained lonely and confused as ever, doubtful about Amit’s intentions and even more cut off than before from Amit.

When he lost his job, Amit absorbed himself in his search for economic security. He did not have the time to understand the changes going on inside Dimple and the bridge between them widened. Brinda Bose very aptly points out ‘Dimple is very helplessly caught in the gripping quest for a new female American identity for her, a happy guiltless amalgamation seems impossible. She experiences a simultaneous fracturing and evolving of identity’.41
In India she lived with her parents and then with her mother-in-law. In joint families, the elders take all-important decisions. The supreme authority rests with the eldest male member of the family who manages all the family affairs. In America, she fails to adjust to an alien culture. All of it results in terrible confusion. Her reactions do not remain normal. She behaves in a mad way.

She indulges in an extramarital relationship with Milt Glasser in a misguided attempt to come to terms with the American culture. Amit could not feed her fantasy life; he was merely a provider of small things. Series of disappointments in life leads her to kill Amit. The murder of Amit is the result of ruthlessness doled out by life. Finally, it is only the dream world of ads and T.V. which gives her the confidence to kill Amit, because ‘women on television got away with murder’. (22)

She reaches a point where all her dreams are shattered. Too much of T.V, magazines and brooding lead her to kill Amit. K.S.Narayan comments ‘the novel raises an important question: was the Indian wife happier in India with her limited freedom and greater docility, or does she achieve happiness in her painful search for more individual freedom and in the process of maturing’? 42

K.S.Narayan voices a patriarchal bias in the question that he has raised. Ignorance is bliss. Knowledge and information add to
one’s misery. She tells Amit and blames America for her identity crisis. ‘This wouldn’t have happened if we had stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home.’ (132) Dimple stabs him seven times with a knife symbolically destroying the bond of marriage, and ending her disharmonious life. Mukherjee records that:

In the United States, she suddenly learns to ask herself “self-oriented questions. Am I happy? Am I unhappy?” And that to me is progress. So instead of committing suicide, turning society-mandated violence inward, she, in a misguided act, kills the enemy [...] its meant to be a positive act of self-assertive.43

Brinda Bose is of the view that:

The enemy she kills is the traditional Indian husband whom she has outgrown but in the evolutionary process that leads her to this final act of self assertion, Dimple is forced to enact many metaphorical murders upon her own senses. The murders are in step with each successive realization of how far she has traveled from her nascent being in India and in the margins of these tiny crucifixions lies the story of the struggle to evolve into a whole new entity.44

Linda Sandler describes her feeling of rootlessness, ‘she is uprooted from her family and her familiar world, and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustrations and unhooks her further from reality’.45

M.L. Pandit comparing the two novels The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife says both Tara and Dimple are projected as ‘middle women’ oscillating between two cultures and:
Both are shown as experiencing culture in diametrically opposed conditions. Their disillusionment with India and America respectively is not sudden but gradual, over a period of time, and by stages. They take drastic steps, at the end, to get away from cultural maladjustment that enmeshes them.

**Notes and References**


17. Maya Manju sharma, op.cit, p.5.


22. Geoff Hancock, op.cit, p. 41.


27. Days, p. 141.


31. The Tiger's Daughter, op.cit, p. 156.


35. Geoff Hancock, op.cit, p. 44.


38. *Iowa Review*, op.cit, p. 20.


43. *Iowa Review*, op.cit, p. 20.

44. Brinda Bose, op.cit, p. 56.

45. Linda Sandler, op.cit, p. 75.

Chapter 3

New Identities: Analysis of Jasmine and The Holder of the World
When Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* was published in 1989, it received wide critical attention in the media. The publication had been preceded by her gaining the distinction of becoming the first naturalized American citizen to win the 'National Book Critics Circle' award for fiction. She won that award in 1988 for *The Middleman and other Stories*.

After social, and gender related titles of daughter and wife, *Jasmine* the third novel, points at a change in the title itself. The central character rises above, being merely daughter or wife. The novel chronicles the experiences of a Hindu teenaged widow, named Jyoti, as she travels from India to America. Faced with a loss of identity at each stage of the journey, Jasmine manages to evolve a new identity at each stage. Whenever necessary, she frames her own code of conduct to suit the given situation. Bharati Mukherjee analyses complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures, which the heroine undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. Her odyssey is symbolic of transformation, displacement and a search for identity. The story opens with the village astrologer, under the banyan tree, foretelling Joyti's 'widowhood and exile'. Jyoti belongs to a society where, 'bad luck dogged dowry less wives, rebellious wives, barren wives. They fell into
wells, they got run over by trains, they burned to death heating milk on Kerosene stoves'.

Bharati Mukherjee explores the burden of old world responsibilities and cultural ties, which represent female oppression, along with the potential of American style individualism and the female spirit of liberation. The novel tells the story of a young girl, born in the village of Hasnapur, India, who undergoes enormous personal and cultural changes. Jyoti is a poor but a bright student who aspires for good education. She is educated, inspite of the protest of her conservative father. She shows the capacity to fight and to survive. Jasmine’s mother shows unusual courage in opposing the plans of the family to push her daughter into a hurried marriage, with an aged widower. Jyoti eventually marries a modern, Indian man Prakash, whose dream is to study in the U.S and to start an electronic business. Jyoti is now re-named Jasmine by her husband. She experiences her first identity shift, in the move from feudal Hasnapur to urban Jullandhar. She continues to be influenced and guided by her traditional upbringing and considers Prakash to be merely a hi-tech expert who knows nothing about a woman’s desire to be a mother. Prakash Vijh’s values are those of Gandhi and Nehru, unlike other men of his generation. As a village girl, she is ‘born to what kind of submission, that expectation of ignorance’.
Prakash, tragically enough, cannot escape the violence that has spread from the provinces to the city. A bomb wired into a radio kills him. With Prakash’s death, Jyoti develops a new sense of purpose. She decides to go to U.S alone, with the sole purpose of committing ‘sati’ in the campus of the University where Prakash had planned to enroll himself. ‘I had planned it all so perfectly. To lay out the suit, to fill it with twigs and papers. To light it, than to lie upon it in the white cotton sari I had brought from home’. (118)

This gruesome plan inspires her to travel to the U.S Jasmine leaves for America on forged papers knowing not what future holds in store for her. She is skeptical of life, in the unknown country; ‘What country? What continent? We pass through wars, through players. I am hungry for news, but the discarded papers are in characters or languages I cannot read’ (101)

She ends up in a motel room at the run down Florida court with the captain of the trawler, Half-Face, whose name derives from the loss of an eye, an ear and half his face in Vietnam. Half-Face communicates his carnal intention to Jasmine. ‘You know what’s coming and there ain’t nobody here to help you, so my advice is to lie back and enjoy it. Hell, you’ll probably like it. I do not get many complaints’. (115).

In the words of Ruppel F. Timothy:
for Half-Face and his cohorts, women have not complained because ultimately they accepted the inevitability of the hierarchical situation and their presumed sexual nature, thus discovering that they “really” liked it after all. In this interested configuration of desire, cause and effect are conflated, and the threat of violence occluded.

Jasmine tells him that she is a wretched, Hindu widow. She has not come to America to follow the American dream of life, liberty, and happiness but rather to fulfill the traditional role of the Indian widow, and her mission is to bring her husband’s suit to America. He laughs mirthlessly at her idea, ‘getting your ass kicked halfway around the world just to burn a suit. I never heard such a fool notion’. (114).

He rapes Jasmine. The rape signals a crucial moment in her successive transformation, and the formation of the spirit of survival. Instead of killing herself and passively accepting herself solely as a victim, she kills her attacker. Jasmine’s killing of Half-Face is a kind of self-assertion. Samir Dayal comments ‘she experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life affirming transformation’.³

After this evil incident, Jasmine starts afresh. She happens to meet Lillian Gordon, a kind Quaker lady, who harbors her, renames her ‘Jazzy’ and teaches her to talk, walk and dress like an American. Lillian Gordon is a woman whose personal mission in life is to help ‘Americanize’ illegal immigrants in practical common
ways. ‘She wasn’t a missionary dispensing new visions and stamping out the old; she was a facilitator, who made possible the lives of absolute ordinariness that we ached for’. (131)

With her new name, Jasmine slowly gains confidence in acting American ‘Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn’t tell if with the Hasnapuri sidle I’d also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty.’ (133) She advises her, ‘let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you’. (131) Later on she helps Jasmine to proceed to New York for a suitable job, with an introductory letter to her daughter staying there. Mukherjee explores the promise of American style individualism and female liberation. Jasmine survives in this strange New World. Jasmine believes that, she has been born more than once. Thus, her changing names reflect her rebirths. Jasmine’s journey serves as a metaphor for the ever moving, regenerating process of life itself.

Jasmine decides to get in touch with the Indian Professor, Devinder Vadhera, who had been instrumental in her husband’s admission. Here, among the Vadhera’s, she is a helpless widow, not entitled to enjoy life. She feels increasing panic yelling up within her:

I felt my English was deserting me [...]. Nirmala brought plain saris and salwar-kameez outfits for me from the shops so I wouldn’t have to embarrass myself or offend the old people in cast-off American T-shirts. The saris patterns were for much older women, widows (144-145).
Having experienced the freedom of being an American, she finds the restrictions misplaced. She leaves the professor’s family and contacts Lillian’s daughter, Kate.

With the help of Kate, Jasmine continues to transform herself into an independent American woman. Kate finds her work with Taylor and Wylie Hayes. They gave her new name, Jase. ‘I liked the name he gave me: Jase. Jase was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silks chartreuse pants’. (176)

The addition of a steady income adds to Jasmine’s transformation. She is absorbed in the American world, forgetting all about her mission, as she herself accepts:

I should have saved; a cash stash is the only safety net [...] Jyoti would have saved. But Jyoti was now a sati-goddess; she had burned herself in a trash-can-funeral pyre behind a boarded-up motel in Florida. Jasmine lived for the future, for Vijh & Wife. Jase went for movies and lived for today. (176)

Jasmine’s life changes further when Duff gives her another name; ‘Day Mummy’. In the new surrounding marked by personal warmth, Jasmine becomes more Americanized, more confident of her proficiency in English but her Indian values do surface now and then. For instance, Wylie’s idea of leaving her husband Taylor, in search of ‘real happiness’, shocks her. She feels:
America had thrown me again. There was no word I could learn, no one I could consult, to understand, what Wylie was saying or why she had done it. She wasn’t happy? She looked happy, sounded happy, acted happy. Then what did happy mean? Her only chance? Happiness was so narrow a door, so selective? (181-182)

For the traditional Indian wife, it is impossible to think about breaking her bond with her husband. Jasmine learns the transitoriness of human relationships in America. She now begins to understand the bitter truth.

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, 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. (181)

Pushpa N. Parekh observes:

Wylie’s apparent ‘reasonless’ abandoning of Taylor and Duff is a jolt back to the inexplicable and unexplainable nature of human action. Instead of fate or destiny or an unknown power being responsible for a family’s break-up, Jasmine witnesses an American woman, Wylie, deliberately choosing to leave. Jasmine’s inner monologues and silent reflections capture her deliberations on cultural differences and an immigrant woman’s emotional adherence to her traditional beliefs while intellectually exploring the new avenues opened to her by the modern value systems.4

Jasmine establishes herself and is no longer haunted by rootlessness. At this juncture, Sukhwinder, the assassin of her husband appears in New York. To protect her new family, Jase escapes to Baden, Iowa. Her escape is not a sign of cowardice, it
represents the ‘life-affirming’ force. She is running away to preserve life and not escaping from life. This journey becomes a tale of moral courage, a search for concrete identity. Uprooted from her native land, Jyoti does her best to absorb herself into a new and alien society as an ‘immigrant’.

Jasmine’s metamorphosis, with its shocking upheavals and its slow evolutionary steps incorporates all the traumas of cultural transplant and identity crisis. In Iowa, Jasmine gets a job as a teller, and meets the fifty-year old Bud Ripplemeyer, an old banker. Bud not only gives her a new life, but also another new name – ‘Jane’. It is her strangeness that adds to her beauty, ‘Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am’. (200) Every move by Jasmine is a step forward in her Americanization. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her new name Jane is indicative of steady immersion into the melting pot of American culture. It is argued that, Mukherjee gives Jyoti more than one name during the course of the story to portray the ability of a modern woman to have multiple selves during her lifetime.

Jasmine willingly embraces the company of Bud out of matrimony and also carries his child in her womb. When Taylor and Duff arrive Iowa, Jasmine decides to cast off the role of the
caregiver, and drops the name Jane. ‘It isn’t guilt that I feel; it’s relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars. (240)

Jasmine finally decides to live the American dream to the fullest, and begins her journey to California to make that dream come true. She leaves Iowa for the promise of a new state, opens all the possibilities of the woman she is capable of becoming.

Jasmine’s restless moves from one place to another, betray her alienation and bewilderment. She remains very conscious of the fact that she is an ‘outsider’ in America – an illegal immigrant without a passport, living among aliens. She is always apprehensive about Americans and she constantly suffers humiliation and disappointment. ‘This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing’. (29). Her Indian values echo in her heart; ‘a good Hasnapur wife doesn’t eat just because she is hungry. Food is a way of granting or withholding love’ (216) ‘[...] I will wait supper for you. Indians wives never eat before their husbands’. (213) This proves that even if she is living with an American in an American household, her ideal is an Indian wife, who is by nature self-sacrificing.
Samir Dayal pinpoints that ‘she perpetually haunts, and is haunted by, her ghostly identities. She shuttles between differing identities’.5

Jasmine is also a rebel and revolutionary. She protests against Indian stereotypical, patriarchy-defined concept of womanhood. She revolts against the conservative Indian attitude towards poor widows who are treated like non-entities. Bharati Mukherjee, through her character, raises her voice against ‘Sati’ system, which compels young widows to sacrifice their lives.

In the novel *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee describes, in detail, the changes the immigrants undergo as they forge new lives for themselves in America. Some, like Professor Vadhera and his wife Nirmala, never truly let go of their past lives, creating for themselves a world in America that is never really American.

[...they had Indian food stores in the block, Punjabi newspapers and Hindi film magazines at the corner news stand and a movie every night without having to dress up for it. They had a grateful servant who took her pay in food and saris (145-146).]

However, by staying in the safe comfortable walls of Flushing, the Vadheras never truly experience the freedom that Jasmine finds at the end of the novel. Instead of living the American dream, they long for the mother-country they no longer live in, and others, like Du, are able to be both the image of an
American and yet always retain with them, the memories of the world that they left behind. Du, never completely abandoned his past, and so lives a life caught between two cultures, and is able to survive. Finally, immigrants like Jasmine define themselves in order to adapt to their changing world. By showing how immigrants survive in an alien land in unique ways, Mukherjee suggests, a true immigrant is one who adjusts and changes.

For Mukherjee the change of personality is associated with the death of one’s former self. Jasmine throughout the novel realizes her names are tied to the men she loved: ‘I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half Face for Kali’ (197).

The protagonist’s name changes and so does her residence. This becomes a metaphor for an immigrant woman’s process of uprooting and re-rooting. Her multiple selves blend her ‘wants’ and ‘dreams’ into realities. Her journey is from self-denial to self-realization. Bharati Mukherjee shows how immigrants like Jasmine shed parts of the self, in order to adapt and survive. Ruppel, F. Timothy says:

Each of her names represents a transitional self as she travels from Hasnapur, India to Baden, Iowa. Rather than a recapitulation of the stereotype of the deceitful, mendacious Asian, these name changes can be seen as a response to the still ongoing effects of colonialism.6
As she begins her new life with Taylor and Duff, she is able to shed those women inside her with her tears. ‘I cry into Taylor’s shoulder, cry through all the lives I’ve given birth to, cry for all my dead’. (241)

With the shedding of her past lives, Jasmine is finally free to live, and chooses her own path for the future. She lives each moment of her life fully as she treats; ‘every second of (her) your existence as a possible assignment from God’ (61)

For Jasmine, there is a constant shuttling of identities which makes her realize, ‘Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff’s Day Mummy and Taylor and Wylie’s aupair in Manhattan, that Jasmine is not this Jane Ripplemeyer’. (127)

She achieved total integration within herself, ‘I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest was to be a coward’. (185)

Jasmine uproots herself, and marches on without remorse. USA Today’ reviewed the novel as ‘Engrossing [...] Mukherjee once again presents all the shock, pain and liberation and transformation [...] with the uncanny third eye of the artist, Mukherjee forces us to see our country anew’.

The novel presents Jasmine as a pioneer, who hopes to find complete assimilation into the melting pot of culture. Jasmine is
the tale of the representative immigrant. Bharati Mukherjee has created a heroine as exotic as the many worlds in which she lives. Mukherjee suggests that the only way to survive in the new land is to be like Jasmine and not an 'attempt to preserve the fragile identity as an Indian', and she believes in fusion; 'Immigration was a two way process and both the whites and immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience'.

*Jasmine* is the story of a girl, hailing from an oppressive family in India, the remote village of Hasnapur in Punjab. Her life in Hasnapur, like that of other heroines of Bharati Mukherjee, was controlled and dominated by patriarchal values. She was the dutiful daughter, who adhered to traditional Hindu customs. Jasmine is first given the name ‘Jyoti’ or ‘light’, by her grand mother. Jyoti does not suit her for she was not the bright spot in her parent’s lives; ‘If I had been a boy, my birth in a bountiful year would have marked me as lucky, a child with a special destiny to fulfil. But daughters were curses’. (39) Jasmine is raised in a family that does not feel affection for her. Her mother tries to strangle her at birth, not out of hate, but of love. ‘My mother was a sniper. She wanted to spare me the pain of a dowryless bride. My mother wanted a happy life for me’. (40)

Bharati Mukherjee very skillfully portrays the joys and sorrows of Jyoti, throughout her gradual transformation and
adjustment to the New World. The novel traces the Americanization of an Indian village girl, whose grandmother had wanted to marry her off at the age of eleven. Jyoti rebels against fate. Seven year old Jyoti rejects the prediction of the astrologer; ‘widowhood and exile’. She feels that she can cheat fate, ‘My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter.’ (40) The scar on her forehead is ‘a third eye’ to her. She refuses to marry one who doesn’t speak English. She falls in love with a young engineer who, too, dreams ‘[...] to make something more of his life than fate intended’ (85). Marriage to Prakash gives her a new identity. She begins the journey of realising her self and potential. Their marriage is based on love; ‘For Prakash love was letting go. Independence, self-reliance: I learned the litany by heart’. (76) Prakash is a disrupter, rebuildor and an idealist. ‘I want for us to go away and have a real life’. (81) In Hasnapur, wives used only pronouns to address their husbands. He wants Jasmine to call him by his first name. He claims ‘Only in feudal societies is the woman still a vassal’. (77) She had to practice ‘Prakash’ in the bathroom and in the kitchen so that she could say the name without gagging and blushing in front of his friends. Prakash wants to recast Jyoti and make her a new kind of city woman. ‘To break off the Past, he gave me a new name: Jasmine’ (77) and ‘you are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You’ll quicken the whole world with your
At the age of fourteen Jyoti wants to be a mother, because she is afraid of the women in the village who have started gossiping. Prakash fights back, 'I honor the instinct, and there is nothing more inevitable than a fourteen-year old married woman becoming a mother'. Prakash makes no sexual demands and against her wishes and firmly refuses to let her become a mother at the tender age of fifteen. Prakash is educated and broad-minded.

Like Dimple, Jasmine too is a rebel but for different reasons. Her husband Prakash is shot to death by terrorists. Jasmine resolves to avenge his death and to complete his mission. 'Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash Vijh & Wife'. Jasmine is engulfed by her new life and moves farther away from her old self, resulting in a fluid state of identity. With Prakash’s murder she plunges into next identity 'Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled between identities' Jasmine becomes Jase, instead of leading the life of a widow desiring to perform sati, she chooses yet another path. 'It was the murkiness of the mirror and a sudden sense of mission that stopped me.'

Prakash’s urges inspire her once again:

Prakash exhorted me from every corner of our grief-darkened rooms. There is no dying, there is only on ascending or a descending, a moving on to other
planes. Don’t crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism. That Jyoti is dead. (96)

It is a Hindu belief that spirits of the dead communicate with the living. The spirit of Prakash returned to guide her. Marriage in Hinduism means marriage for eternity. Her faith comes to her rescue and prevents her from returning to Hasnapur.

Jasmine is the most intelligent amongst all her brothers and sisters. ‘I was the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children’. (39) Masterji, the village teacher, is of the opinion that, ‘you are a lotus blooming in cow dung’. (46) She insisted on continuing her education much further than any girl in her village, rather than getting married. Masterji considered her, ‘the first likely female candidate for English instruction he’d ever had’. (46)

*Jasmine* is an account of the changing identities of a young Indian woman, who migrates from India to America after the death of her husband. The novel can also be read, as a study of the desire of a young girl to lead a full life. ‘I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die’. (118)

She has learnt to live not just for her husband or for her children, but for herself. She achieves a new identity. Jase flees to Iowa illegally to begin a new life with a new identity. She tried to define her identity through relationships with different men. Each
man in *Jasmine* brings out a new identity in her. During the course of the novel sometimes we find a conflict between Jasmine’s two selves, one clings to traditional Indian values and the other experiments with the capitalist culture. ‘For every Jasmine, the reliable caregiver, there is a Jase the prowling adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces’. (176) And ‘I was spiraling into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness’. (148)

Shaken, she asks herself, ‘how many more shapes are in me, how many more-selves, how many more husbands?’ (215)

With Prakash, she learns the modern values of a city woman. Prakash renames Jyoti as Jasmine. Prakash begins the process of her transformation and training. Jasmine is trained by Prakash, to argue and fight if the need arises. ‘We aren’t going to spawn’! We aren’t ignorant Peasants’! (77) With Prakash’s death at the hands of fundamentalists, begins Jasmine’s life of struggle for survival and transformation. Her grandmother, Dida had her own opinion.

If you had married the widower in Ludhiana that was all arranged. If you had checked the boys’ horoscope and not married like a Christian in some government office. If you had waited for a man I picked.... None of this would have happened. (98)

And ‘I am told you called him by his proper name’. (98) As Jasmine repudiated the centuries-old ugly Indian tradition of marrying after checking the boy’s horoscope. ‘Dida, I said, if God
sent Sukhi to kill my husband then I renounce God. I spit on God’. (98) Struggling between two cultures, Jasmine experiences an intellectual awakening. She exercises self-awareness. On her illegal entry to Wylie’s house, she is surrounded by doubts and questions, and puzzled by some other aspect of American culture. Gradually, she chooses independence and self-reliance. For instance, when suddenly Wylie decides to leave Taylor and Duff and to live with Stuart, Jasmine is shocked. Later, she admires the American woman for deliberately choosing to leave. Here the modern value system opens gates for Jasmine.

She spent five depressing months at Professor Vadhera’s house. Professor Vadhera was a Punjabi immigrant. ‘I would find myself in the bathroom with the light off, head down on the cold cracked rim of the sink, sobbing from unnamed, unfulfilled wants’. (148) At last, when disappointment tumbled out of her, she told him, ‘I wanted a green card more than any thing else in the world, that a green card was freedom.’ (149) All third world immigrants do not necessarily change. Professor’s wife Nirmala, is not transformed since she maintains the traditional Indian role. Jasmine eventually escapes from the immigrant community in Flushing, and does not want to identify with any such group. She prefers to build new relations to suit her changing desires. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa, and the change of her name to Jane, is indicative, of her immersion into the melting pot culture of
America. Jasmine journeys from place to place, and person to person trying to find her real place in life. According to Indira Bhatt:

The woman who surrendered to Prakash to be molded according to his ideas is the person who wants to be shaped according to the American way of life, and secure a place as a legal wife to an all-white American.¹⁰

Bharati Mukherjee seems to consider marriage, to a white person, as one way of assimilation to American life. Through her marriage to Taylor, she identifies herself with the American way of life. She feels that ‘she had landed and was getting rooted’ (179). Her life had ‘a new fullness and chargedness to it’. (184) She changes because she wants to think for herself ‘I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of American and old-world dutifulness.’ (240)

The character of Jasmine according to Fakrul Alam, ‘has been created to depict Mukherjee’s belief in the necessity of inventing and re-inventing one’s self by going beyond what is given and by transcending one’s origins’.¹⁰

Jasmine goes beyond conventional boundaries, and discloses her ambition in the beginning of the novel. ‘I said, I want to be doctor, and set up my own clinic in a big town. Like the mustached doctor in the bazaar clinic. I wanted to scrape off cataracts, fit plastic legs on stumps, work miracles’. (51) My father gasped, ‘the
girl is mad! I'll write in the back of the dictionary: The girl is mad!' (51)

Bharati Mukherjee is trying to depict transition as a positive act. Jasmine wants to create a New World consisting of new ideas and values. She tries to establish a new identity, by incorporating new desires, skills and habits.

Ultimately Jasmine triumphs in America:

We’re all quick studies [...] once we start letting go-let go just me thing, like not wearing our normal clothes, or a turban or not wearing a tika on the forehead – the rest goes on its way down a sink hole. (29)

She proves herself to be the anti-thesis of village girls; ‘village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go’. (46)

By depicting Jyoti’s triumph, Bharati Mukherjee is making a feminist statement that women can make a difference to their lives. India traditionally is a land where women are subordinate to men who prefer wives who have no brains and rationale of their own, and who are content to look after the house, and to give birth to children. In the depiction of Prakash, Mukherjee tries to show that in the late nineteen seventies, Indian men like Prakash had begun thinking about the rights of a woman.
Fakrul Alam quotes 'Jasmine is the climax of the literary voyage that has transformed her from a chronicler of exile to a champion of immigration'. Alam gives credit to Mukherjee for ‘giving Jasmine a voice that conveys something of the “scabrous” quality of her experience as well as the energy and hope that carries her forward through her eventful life’.11

Jasmine is proficient in English, and tries to read novels written in the English language. She tries to read ‘Shane’, ‘Alice in Wonderland’, ‘Great Expectations and ‘Jane Eyre’, but these books proved to be too difficult for a seven year old child. Even as a child Jyoti seems to enjoy having a sense of power. When their neighbor Vimla, gets an electricity connection, her favorite job is to switch on and off the electricity because it made her feel; ‘totally in control’. (44) All this reflects her potential, and her confidence to progress towards the realization of her total capacity.

The theme of Jasmine is an Indian immigrant’s encounter with the New World, and her gradual transformation as she steps into unfamiliar culture. C. Sengupta takes a feminist view, ‘Jasmine can be read as a feminist novel, where the protagonist rebels not only against age-old superstions and tradition, but also effects a proper balance between tradition and modernity’.12

Bharati Mukherjee gives her observation on Jasmine:
I want to think that Jasmine is a very real feminist. Like the feminist that my mother was, who didn’t know the word feminist but who managed to give me, at great physical expense, she really had to put her body on the line in order to get me into English medium schools, guarantee me the best education so that I would not end up.\textsuperscript{13}

C. Sengupta discusses the philosophical aspect that \textit{Jasmine} is ‘an attempt to synthesize in the protagonist the essence of two cultures, Indian and American.’ \textsuperscript{14} \textit{The New York Times} reviewed \textit{Jasmine} as ‘a kind of impressionistic prose-poem, about being an exile, a refugee, spiritual vagabond in the world today’. While Bharati Mukherjee has claimed that \textit{Jasmine} is not ‘a realistic novel’ and was meant ‘to be a fable’.\textsuperscript{15} Mukherjee has realistically staged scenes; some critics have objected to her presentation of Indian life, and accused her of misrepresentation. Gurleen Grewal can not perceive the depth of the novel and accuses Mukherjee of ‘writing a willed narrative and erasing the history and ethnic identity of the immigrant woman’\textsuperscript{16} and ignoring the realities of race and class distinction in American society. \textit{Jasmine}, at the same time, has drawn favorable criticism and was widely praised when it was first published. The novel was selected in the list of the year’s recommended fiction in the very year of its publication.

Fakrul Alam remarks that ‘Mukherjee captures the fluidity of oral narratives, where events are foretold and told and where past, present and the future intermingle’.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, as Pushpa N. Parekh stressed that Mukherjee:
[...] oscillates skillfully between the fluidity of voicing through self-reflection, interior monologue and figurative language, mythologizing her new experience through the oral medium of creating "new proverbs" to the strain of invoicing through narrative pauses, mental blocks and silences by volition.\textsuperscript{18}

Crane approaches the novel as a female bildungroman – that is, 'as a novel which specifically traces the development of a female protagonist through various experiences and crises, into maturity and more importantly, her self identity and place in the world'.\textsuperscript{19}

Mukherjee depicts Jasmine as a pioneer, who although rejected by her ethnicity, will eventually be assimilated into the American culture and become a true American. \textit{The New York Times Book Review} called \textit{Jasmine} 'one of the most suggestive novels we have about what it is to become American'.

Jasmine is introduced to us as a sixth standard school going girl, who belongs to a village of Punjab, and in the course of the novel undergoes complex transformation in order to survive and blossom into Jase. Jyoti rebels against the social order of submission to the patriarchy. Jyoti's mother fights to keep Jyoti in school for six years, against the social order of that time, which demands limited education for girls, arranged marriages and incessant childbirths. Her mother prevents her from being married at the age of eleven to a widowed landlord.
Jyoti marries Prakash Vijh rather than the other traditional and richer men. According to Rupple F. Timothy, ‘Prakash does not see marriage as the cultural sanctioning of patriarchal control and enforced obedience. He renames Jyoti as Jasmine, a symbolic break with her feudal past’.  

Bharati Mukherjee defines the role of Prakash in accordance with her concept of feminism. Mukherjee equates feminism with humanism, where men share the lives of women and gain empowerment along with their women. Prakash takes immense pleasure in freeing Jasmine from the shackles of patriarchy and in helping her to evolve as a new woman. As a traditional village girl, she wants to have a baby after her marriage to prove her worth. She confesses that, ‘I felt eclipsed by the Mazbi maid’s daughter, who had been married off at eleven, just after me, and already had a miscarriage’. (78) Prakash tells her that he does not want to burden her with motherhood until she is settled in, what he believes to be, her new identity. Unlike traditional Indian men, Prakash is sensitive to her need to be a complete woman and not just fulfil roles as wife and mother.  

One day, when Jasmine and Prakash are out shopping, they are caught in a sudden violent explosion in the city. A bomb planted by the Khalsa lions kills Prakash. Jasmine’s new found hopes and dreams are tragically terminated. She now decided to
go to America. She decides to leave India because she does not want to lead the only life open to her, that of widowhood. Her brothers, not knowing any better, arrange an illegal passage for her. After a nightmarish journey, Jasmine comes to America with the idea of erecting a funeral pyre for her dead husband’s clothes in the university campus and committing sati.

Sati is a Sanskrit term meaning ‘chaste wife’ and it is also the name of a Hindu Goddess. Sati is an Indian custom of a widow burning herself either on the funeral pyre of her dead husband or soon after his death. The custom has possible links with the ancient belief that a man needs his companion in the after life as well as in this world.

Now the question is why she does not commit sati when she reaches there? She drops this idea and dreams of a new life. Sati means sacrifice of her own self. She denies death, and welcomes the prospect of a new life.

America holds the promise of a new selfhood. ‘American clothes disguised my widowhood. In a T-shirt and cords, I was taken for a student. In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianess, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like.’ (145)
Jasmine has no desire to go back to her hometown. Bharati Mukherjee has portrayed the spirit of the true immigrant. America gave her the power to change her fate.

Jasmine arrives in America illegally by stowing in a boat captained by Half Face. After landing in America, Half Face demands his price. As he knew she had no money, he asks her to satisfy his carnal desires. Jasmine decides to kill this devil, and Mukherjee uses an archetypal image of Kali to define Jasmine’s reaction. Kali, in Hindu mythology, is the Goddess of destruction. Mukherjee is very fond of blending traditional and modern methods of narrating incidents. ‘As a Hindu, I was brought up on oral tradition and epic literature [...] I believe in the existence of alternative realities, and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction’.\(^{21}\)

When the captain rapes Jasmine, she opts for rebirth, rather than suicide. She lives on to avenge herself on the devil. As Mukherjee has explained, she herself becomes Kali in the process, ‘a destroyer of evil so that the world can be renewed’.\(^{22}\)

Kali is the feminine form of the word ‘kala’ meaning ‘time’, the all producing, and all annihilating principle. The Goddess represents through her feminine nature the life bearing, life nourishing maternal principle.
In Hindu mythology Kali is an incarnation of Durga, the Goddess of strength. Here a parallel is drawn between Kali and the strength of a grief-stricken Jasmine. Kali symbolize the icons of a woman’s inner strength to be her own guide and savior. Jasmine committed herself on a dangerous journey to carry out her husband’s unfulfilled wishes. After Half-face has raped her, she wants to commit suicide, but resists because she feels her mission is not over yet, ‘there would be plenty of time to die [...] I extended my tongue and sliced it’. (117) Then she turns into death incarnate and kills Half Face. ‘My mouth had filled with blood. I could feel it on my chin’. (118)

This terrible incident of cutting her tongue symbolizes the evolution of a new woman. ‘With my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out.’ (118)

She reflects:

What a monstrous thing, what an infinitesimal thing, is the taking of a human life; for second time in three months. I was in a room with a slain man, my body bloodied. I was walking death. Death incarnate. (119)

Mukherjee is inverting the Kali myth. Kali is one of several names of the female consort of Shiva. Jasmine, in the course of the novel, goes from one man to another. Related to the same incident Bharati Mukherjee uses another popular Greek myth of the legendary bird ‘Phoenix’ who turns to ashes and rises again.
Jasmine acts as a kind of phoenix. She burns her dishonored clothes and out of the ashes rises phoenix-like in a new self. The phoenix represents this higher, spiritual principle of release from the bondage of matter and soaring high to the supreme divine.

Jasmine undergoes re-birth and begins her journey into the U.S. marching on for a new identity. ‘I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die; I had not yet burned my husband’s suit. I had not stood under the palm trees of the college campus’. (118)

Mukherjee believes that, ‘our souls can be reborn in another body, so the perspective I have about a single character’s life is different from that of an American writer who believes that he has only life.’

Jasmine denied death and march on:

I buttoned up the jacket and sat by the fire. With the first streaks of dawn, my first full American day, I walked out the front drive of the motel to the highway and began my journey, traveling light. (121)

With Prakash’s death, the astrologer’s prediction of widowhood and exile come true. Instead of leading a life of a widow she aims for America. America gives her the power to change her fate. She is no longer confined to the social order and cultural patterns of her forefathers. Jasmine shapes a new identity for herself. With each phase of her life, she matures as a woman.
After her husband’s death she does not seal her life, she continues living in all circumstances in order to survive. At the end of the novel, Mukherjee’s approach is feminist. Her heroine is very optimistic at the end when she moves in with Taylor Hayes – a Columbia physicist, whom she thinks, she actually loves. She is the mother of seventeen year old Du– an immigrant like herself. Out of sympathy she decides to have the baby of Bud–a local banker who is paralysed. When Taylor asks her to join them as they resettled in California, she is pregnant and she agrees to go along. She identifies herself as someone, ‘greedy with want and reckless from hope’. (241)

Mukherjee is defining a modern woman. She is actually trying to convey her message through her mouthpiece Jasmine that, ‘change and adaptability are the key to survival, and that the successful immigrant has the instinct.’

Some critics are of the view that, in order to seek fulfillment of her dreams and to survive Jasmine crosses all barriers of set rules of conventional morality, but Mukherjee contradicts and says that she has portrayed Jasmine; ‘lovable, but [...] not moral in the conventional sense. She’s moral in her own way. She knows what’s right and wrong for her. But she does end up being a tornado who leaves a lot of debris behind’.
The Holder of the World was published in 1993. Like other novels of Bharati Mukherjee, The Holder of the World, too, is heroine-oriented. Once again Mukherjee talks about socio-cultural experiences of characters in India and America. Unlike the other novels, Bharati Mukherjee reverses her plot. Her earlier novels highlight the plight of Asian immigrants, who come to America in the hope of a materially better life and try to adjust and survive in the alien culture. Earlier, it was always the journey from East to West. Here it is the same trip but in the opposite direction.

The Holder of the World is the story of an immigrant from America who came to India in the 17\(^{th}\) century and imbibed the Indian culture. It is the story of Hannah Easton, born in the American colony, Massachusetts in 1670. She is a white Puritan woman from Salem, who makes a journey to the exotic Coromandel Shores in the late 17\(^{th}\) century and finally becomes the mistress of the Indian ruler Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad. The novel represents the meeting of two worlds, the Puritan American and the Mughal India.

Mukherjee discusses the transformation that results from the meeting of different cultures. Mukherjee chose Hannah as her subject after she came across a seventeenth century Indian
miniature painting in a 1989 pre-auction viewing in New York. According to Mukherjee, she identified in the painting, a blonde-Caucasian woman ‘in ornate’ Mughal court dress holding a lotus bloom. This served as the inspiration for the novel. Mukherjee questions herself then ‘who is this very confident looking woman who sailed in some clumsy wooden boat across dangerous seas and then stayed there? She had transplanted herself in what must have been a traumatically different culture. How did she survive’? As the answer to such questions Mukherjee wrote this novel with a message that there could have been an age-old connection between America and India. Through this novel she tries to reconcile the two cultures. The essence of writing this novel is to display the collision of values that occur when the New World meets the old; ‘hurly burly of the unsettled magma between two worlds’ (26)

Appiah maintains that Mukherjee’s novel, The Holder of the World, ‘offers us a model cultural-pollination – a model that is built not on a ‘gentle melding’ but on a vehement interconnectedness, on a more vigorous, and a more bitter fusion’.28

The Holder of the World consists of two parallel stories about cross-cultural connections woven together across centuries. It has a main plot and a subplot. The main plot of the novel deals with
the adventurous life of Hannah Easton. The subplot, however, tells
the story of Beigh Masters, the novel's narrator. She is very
modern, thirty-two years old, making a living as an 'asset hunter',
reads *Auctions and Acquisition* and ferrets around, for antiques
and precious stones. Beigh even has a lover, a brilliant South
Indian computer scientist named Venn Iyer, whose family came to
the United States from South India, and settled in the Boston
Area. Venn works in a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
lab for a virtual reality project, which involves feeding data into
computers to re-create a segment of time that has passed.

Bharati Mukherjee uses Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' as an
opening for each of the four parts of the novel. The Ode sums up
the enriched perception of reality. Mukherjee is in fact,
emphasizing the role the creative imagination plays in creating
characters full of life.

When Bharati Mukherjee wrote *The Holder of the World*, the
'Ode on a Grecian Urn' was very much on her mind because:

Like Keats, I was playing with history and imagination. That's the marvelous thing about the writing process: you
don't know when and how a memory, a scrap of
conversation over heard, an allusion or image, is suddenly
going to surface and work itself into your story. That Ode
came to me, I didn't seek it out. That's the way the creative
process works for me. I knew right away that I would use
the Keats references to control and ironize what my
characters had to make authorial meta-statements about
writing.
When John Keats pondered over the inscription on the Grecian Urn, he found that beauty is the truth the Urn would continue to reveal centuries after its creation. All historians however share Keats’s yearning. This longing to resurrect the past is shared by two central characters in *The Holder of the World* namely Beigh Masters, a young woman, trained as a historian, who works as an asset researcher, finding antique precious objects for wealthy clients and Venn Iyer ‘father of fractals’ and designer of inner space, a computer scientist from India working at MIT on an unusual historical project, a programme called X-2989. He animates information. He is working with virtual reality, re-creating the universe.

Bharati Mukherjee has given new meaning to Keats’s Ode in the novel, ‘no two travelers will be able to retrieve the same reality, or even fraction of the available realities. History’s a big savings bank, says Venn, we can all make infinite reality withdrawals’. (6)

Hannah’s story is told through the eyes of Beigh, the narrator of the novel, who manages to virtually participate in Hannah’s life. Venn and his colleagues have decided to research October 29, 1989, in order to restore a single ordinary day to virtual reality through research.
With a thousand possible answers we can each create infinity of possible characters. And so we contain a thousand variables, and history is a billion separate information bytes. Mathematically, the permutations do begin to resemble the randomness of life. (7)

Bharati Mukherjee is a very calculating and scientific realist. She links Keats’s philosophy by making a virtual reality and Urn nexus. She makes a contrast between virtual reality and the Urn. The Urn is still and one can only observe it Bharati Mukherjee believes that action stuck in time cannot be redone.

The people are always going to have their hands and fit in one particular posture. Whereas with interactive technology you’re changing the narrative by inputting new information according to your new mood. The ways virtual technology will be used for therapy to help autistic children or to enable people to overcome their fears, is very close to what I’m talking about. The individual experiencing the image, not simply the image itself – both are going to be transformed by interaction.30

The theme of the novel is brilliantly linked with the idea of virtual reality. Venn, Beigh’s lover, is developing a computer program that would allow an individual to experience few moments in the past, set to specific time, with pertinent information entered into the program. Beigh provides the facts, creating the opportunity to really participate in real time. This is, of course, not real time travel, but virtual participation in real time.
The term ‘virtual reality’ is based on technological systems such as hardware head mounted goggles, gloves etc. Virtual reality is the output that we perceive from these machines.

Steuer proposed that virtual reality should be defined in terms of presence and telepresence. Presence is the sense of being in an environment. Telepresence is defined as the experience of presence in an environment and by means of a communication medium.

Greenbaum, in 1992, defined virtual reality as ‘an alternate world filled with computer-generated images that respond to human movements. These simulated environments are usually visited with the aid of an experience data suit which features stereophonic video goggles and fiber optic data gloves’.

*The Holder of the World* makes much use of Virtual Reality. Mukherjee says that:

[... the novel was also about 17th century Massachusetts and various trading companies that established themselves in 17th century India, which meant eleven years of uncontrolled and immensely pleasurable research. I love history as stories, and the details of customs. Manners and social structure, the way that people thought and behaved.]

and also, ‘orality, as they say these days, is a complex narrative tradition’ (176) In the novel *The Holder of the World*, Bharati Mukherjee has used all kinds of narration. It can also be read as a
quest narrative dealing with themes of hunger for connectedness, and of immigration. Mukherjee does not treat the narrative in the traditional way, as a fictional representation of life; but as a systematic formal construction. Mukherjee is also trying to fit her novel in the tradition of American romance.

Hayden White is a historian, who sets out to demonstrate that the narratives written by historians are not simple representation of facts, nor the revelation of a design inherent in events. Mukherjee has given the novel a historical dimension. As Claire Messud has noted in her shrewd Times Literary Supplement review of the novel ‘this is an alternative history which could revise forever the imaginative relations between immigrants and “natives” in Mukherjee’s America’. Mukherjee is developing clues from history and allows events to link America and India over the centuries.

Hayden White analyses historical narratives, as shaped by the imposition of events of cultural patterns, similar to the narratological, archetypal and other structural concepts that have been applied to the criticism of literature.

The opening of the novel is set in America. Bharati Mukherjee has used the concept of going back to the future. ‘I live in three zones simultaneously, and I do not mean Eastern, Central and pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future’. (5)
Venn Iyer, the narrator’s lover, is introduced as a computer scientist. ‘He animates information. He’s out there beyond virtual reality, recreating the universe, one nano second, one minute at a time’. (5) Venn Iyer along with his colleagues works in a MIT lab for a virtual reality project, which involves feeding data into a computer to recreate a segment of time that has passed. Beigh master, the narrator of the novel, travels from Boston to India and back again in pursuit of a client’s order, for what she claims is the most perfect diamond in the world – The Emperor’s Tear.’ She also desires to trace out Salem Bibi – a mysterious white- woman from Salem, ‘I know where she came from and where she went. I couldn’t care less about the Emperor’s Tear, by now. I care only about the Salem Bibi’. (19)

Keats’s use of the phrase ‘The Unravished Bride’ in the first couplet of the ode is applied, to Salem Bibi ‘The Unravished Bride – beautiful Salem Bibi stands on the cannon-breached rampart of a Hindu fort’ (17). Mukherjee uses the phrase ironically for the Raja’s mistress.

In a portrait housed in the Maritime Museum, she is seen posing:

Her hips are thrust forward, muscle readied to wade into deeper, indigo water. But her arms are clasped high above her head, her chest is taut with audacious yearnings. Her
neck, sinewy as a crane’s, strains skywards. And across that sky, which is marigold yellow with a summer afternoon’s light, her restlessness shapes itself into a rose-legged, scarlet-crested crane and takes flight (16).

Beigh Masters figured out the secret life of a puritan woman, ‘whom an Emperor honored as precious as pearl, the Healer of the world.’ (20)

The narrator asserts that:

I felt the same psychic bond with Edward Easton that Keats did with the revelers on the Grecian Urn. He became footnote in my thesis, but an assurance to me that my research in that era was somehow blessed. (25)

Hannah Easton is born to the devout Puritans. Edward and Rebecca. Edward Easton died of a bee sting after a year, and her mother Rebecca Easton ran off with a lover from the Nipmuc tribe, when the girl was five years old, and she left Hannah with her neighbors, Robert and Susannah Fitch. The couple brought her up in an orthodox manner. She learnt the art of housekeeping, conventional wisdom and love for embroidery, through which she often depicted her confusion after her mother’s disappearance. Hannah discovered in herself, an obsessive love of needle-work, which was, she suspected, an over flow of a nascent fascination with – or failing for – finer things. (41)
Her embroidery gave away the conflict she tried so hard to deny or suppress.

She knew she must deny all she seen the night of her mother’s disappearance and all she felt, for she, worthless sinner and daughter of Satan’s lover, had been taken, in and raised by decent souls. Instead her needle spoke, it celebrated the trees, flowers, birds, fish of her infant days. (42)

Like her mother Rebecca Easton, Hannah longed to escape and she found Gabriel Legge to help her mainly because he appeared to be the type who would feed her fantasy.

Why would a self possessed, intelligent, desirable woman like Hannah Easton suddenly marry a man she recognized as inappropriate and untrustworthy? Why would she accept Hester Manning’s castoff, or betrayer? Guilt, perhaps a need to punish herself for the secret she was forced to carry? Unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by running off with a treacherous alien Gabriel Legge with his tales of exotic adventure was as close to the Nipmuc lover as any man in Salem; she sought to neutralize her shame by emulating her mother’s behavior. (69)

Gabriel was obviously on a wife-hunting mission, so they got married. Gabriel took her first to England and then to India, where he joined the East India Company. While he pursued his own journeys, as an official, he turned pirate and abandoned Hannah.

Gabriel Legge had left her sufficient money to remain independent, for several years. ‘She was tired of waiting at home, of not bestirring herself in the rich new world opening out at every
hand. Even pouches of diamond did not seem sufficient compensation for idleness’. (86)

Hannah arrives in India in search of a romantic life. She longed to immerse herself in the new culture and keeps looking for opportunities to transform herself. She even has a vision of her mother, transforming herself by mingling with the Indians. ‘And she needed time to sort out her errands – oh, so many errands! – in this vast new jungle’. (105)

Hannah takes sheer pleasure in the world’s variety.

She was alert to novelty, but her voyage was mental, interior. Getting there was important, but savoring the comparison with London or Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure. She did not hold India up to inspection by the lamp of England, or of Christianity, nor did she aspire to return to England upon the completion of Gabriel’s tour. (104)

The two plots are linked through Beigh Masters, who in her quest for the Emperor’s Tear has come across a series of Mughal miniature paintings in a maritime trade museum in Massachusetts. Beigh tries to investigate events that transformed Hannah Easton into Salem Bibi.

Mukherjee creates the incredible world of Hannah Easton. She gathers together the mysticism of the East, and practicality of the west. Part two of the novel deals with Hannah’s intimacy with her Indian friend Bhagmati – a maidservant in Raja Jadav Singh’s
Court. Bhagmati was Hannah’s only link to the outside world. She brings to light the old Indian civilization. There is a language problem between the two but ‘through her eyes, and her body, Bhagmati communicated’. (136)

She recites and narrates fragments from ‘the Ramayana’. Hannah is attracted to the events of Sita’s life. ‘Heard melodies’ are Bhagmati’s recitation of verses from Ramayana. And the ‘unheard melodies’ find echoes in Hannah’s heart. Mukherjee emphasizes how the ending of Sita’s story always changes to match the mood of the times. Mukherjee’s focus continues to be on immigrant women and their freedom from conservative, shackled relationships to become individuals. Like in her other novels, she has dealt with her favorite theme of seeking fulfillment in a relationship with a man from another race.

Nalini Iyer notes the points of difference both between the two characters, and mythical Sita and also between Hannah and Bhagmati. ‘An important distinction between Sita and Hannah and Bhagmati is that neither Hannah nor Bhagmati abstained from forbidden sexual relationship, whereas the mythical Sita’s chastity is a dominant cultural trope in the patriarchal Hindu culture’.33

The story of Sita’s ordeal evokes memories of the life of Mary Rowlandsons, as well as that of her mother Rebecca. Hannah
tries to locate Sita in her own image. ‘a woman impatient to test herself, to explore and survive in an alien world’. (174).

Sita when asked to undergo a second trial by fire by her husband, refused to comply:

This time she stands up to Rama and the unfair institutions of Ayodhya. She flings herself to the ground. And miraculously the Mother earth that had given her birth now swallows her whole, leaving no trace of Sita the mortal. (177)

As the story proceeds, Gabriel joins a gang of pirates and during one of his trips with Haj Pilgrims, he is drowned. In December 1700, Hannah became, to her satisfaction, husbandless. (207) Hannah hesitates to return to Salem, for the fear of becoming a governess as was considered suitable for a widow:

This is no country for Christians! She cried. This was not the place she wished to be entombed. But where could she run to? She saw the folly of a governess’s job in Cambridge. There would surely be no welcome there for a pirate’s widow, and no place in old Salem for an Indian lover’s daughter. (215)

Hannah escapes with Bhagmati to Panpur under the protection of Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad, and becomes the guest of the Raja. She agrees to be the ‘Bibi’ of Raja Jadav Singh. ‘Bibi’ in the historical context refers to a mistress. The mistress is rated lower than the wife, and is permitted gifts but not entitled to any
Hannah develops new roots due to her fine quality of adaptability. Now, she steps into another new world, and also a new religion i.e. Hinduism. ‘And now she was in a totally Hindu world. Bhagmati seemed no longer a servant. Perhaps she, Hannah, was about to become one’. (220)

Hannah and Raja Jadav Singh wooed each other, and she converted herself, into Salem Bibi, the Raja’s new favorite.

For fourteen days and thirteen nights the lovers abandoned themselves to pleasure. Attendants fed them pomegranates, sprinkled them with attar of roses and lit his huqqa. Musicians serenaded them with flutes, drums and stringed instruments from the courtyard below. For fourteen days the king mounted his lady without surcease. (234)

Bharati Mukherjee delineates, through the series of cultural transplants Hannah’s discovery of her own feminine identity.

Hannah’s whole life is transformed once again, and she experiences the high tide of love, and she discovers, ‘her own passionate nature for the first time, the first hint that a world beyond duty and patience and wifely service was possible, then desirable, then irresistible’. (237) Hannah loses herself in the world of high romance and mystique, and experiences total happiness for the first time in her life.

Both Hannah and Raja came out of their dream world when the Nawab Haider Beg, the Governor of Aurangzeb’s state sends his commander, Morad Farah to arrest the Raja and Hannah, the
Firangi lady, and to usurp the diamond, the Emperor’s Tear. Jadav Singh:

Bundled Hannah and Bhagmati into one Planquin, and a servant, disguised in royal jama, turban and jewels as Devgad’s Lion King, into another, and set off for distant Devgad at the head of an army of six hundred-foot soldiers and three hundred horsemen. (240)

On their way, the Raja attacks the Mughal army. In the battlefield Hannah displays tremendous courage, and is not even afraid of death. The new experiences add new aspects to her personality.

She would agree to die, but not in the way of some simple ant, some worm on the ground. If I lie here it will crush me. And so she sat up, and then she stood, the only human left standing, the only human with a face not obliterated (246)

Hannah’s amazing inners strength propels her to attack and kill Morad Farah.

Hannah thrust the long dagger she’d hidden in the folds of her sari into the exposed flesh under Morad Farah’s battle tunic, through the muscle and organs, back across to the spine itself. Even his scream was cut short, barely an in-suck of breath, barely the registering of pain and death from an unexpected sources. (249)

Hannah saves the Raja’s life, and brings him back to Panpur. She brings him to Mother Queen’s Palace. The Raja’s mother screams accusingly; she suggests that, ‘Hannah had brought bad
luck. The Raja had left the fort healthy and ready for battle, he met the *firangi* and a spear had found his heart’. (251)

And ‘the witch has weakened him, this women has taken his manhood’. (251) The juxtapositioning of two women, from two races, presents a quaint picture. The mother refuses to acknowledge the services of Hannah because she was a disturbed ‘*firangi*’. The immigrant was always made to feel alien. Hannah exhibits tenderness and efficiency as she nurses him, and gives a new lease of life to the fatally wounded Raja. Meanwhile she discloses that, ‘I am with child for the usual reasons’. (256)

Usual has the poetic connotations of much more than the usual. This child is representative of a fulfilled union. In contrast to Dimple and Jasmine, Hannah finds complete happiness with her lover. Hannah’s decision to negotiate with the Emperor to end the war, brings to notice her extraordinary diplomacy.

She would offer her life, if necessary, to end the war. Only a person outside the pale of the two civilizations could do it. Only a woman, a pregnant woman, a pregnant white woman, had the confidence or audacity to try it. (259)

Hannah argues with the Emperor and asks him why he wants to destroy the Raja. The Emperor replies, ‘a skillful ruler trusts no friend, no family member. Trust only the hunting tiger or the vengeful enemy. The survivor is he who distrusts his own shadow. He destroys himself who does not submit’. (265)
The Emperor believes that there is no escaping the judgment of Allah and the duty of the Emperor is to bring the infidel before the throne of judgment. Hannah disdains the Emperor.

Duty! Duty, judgement! I have heard enough of duty. And of judgement. You cloak your lust for vengeance and for gold and diamonds in the noble words of duty and judgment and protection and sacrifice. But it is the weakest and the poorest and the most innocent who suffer, who sacrifice, whose every minute of every day is obedience to duty. (269)

The Emperor lifts the diamond off from his crown and says:

I do no fight for treasure and glory in this life. This diamond is the tear I shed as I discharge my duty. That is why it is called the Emperor’s tear. The dutiful and the innocent, if they are pure and if they submit, will be judged by all-seeing, all-merciful Allah. The sum of their lives will be weighed in the scales of judgement. (269)

Hannah fails to bring peace between the Raja and the Emperor. She visualizes Aurangzeb as Ravana, the demon King of Lanka, in a Muslim disguise. Hannah absorbs the mythological environment, and it flows into her thought processes, her conversations and affects her beliefs. In the war, Raja Jadav Singh dies with the promise that ‘You and Your child will always have a place. As I promised.’(256)

The Emperor asks Hannah to go back to her native place ‘as woman serves man, man serves the will of God. You have placed
yourself, where no woman has a right to be. I have decided to be merciful and return you to your people.’ (267)

At night Hannah somehow manages to steal the diamond, the Emperor’s Tear, from Aurangzeb’s war-tent and runs away with Bhagmati. Bhagmati is wounded in the war. Hannah pays her a final tribute by thrusting the world’s, most precious diamond into her gaping womb.

Hannah, my pearl, is no longer visible. Light is spreading but it is not the light of dawn, it is the light of extinguishments. I plunge the knife deep in my belly, watch with satisfaction, and now with the mastery of my pain, the blood bubble from my beautiful brown flesh. More, I think, and plunge the knife deeper, plunge it as Hannah had into the back of Morad Farah, and make a burrow inside me. I feel the organs, feel the flesh, the bowels of history, and with my dying breath I plunge the diamond into the deepest part of me. (283)

So, the world’s most perfect diamond lay in the remains of Bhagmati. After her death, Hannah makes a move towards Salem, giving birth to a black-haired, and black-eyed daughter called ‘Pearl Singh’, somewhere in the South Atlantic on the long voyage home. The expanses of the Atlantic provide a suitable birthplace for the child of Hannah and Raja Jadav Singh.

In Salem, the town people named the mother and daughter White Pearl and Black Pearl. Finally, Hannah is able to locate her mother Rebecca Easton, and they find a place for themselves in the margins of the puritan community. Not disturbed by the
sarcastic comments of the people, of the community, she is happy to keep alive, in her memory, her Indian lover.

Hannah goes back to, the English people. She feels safer in her own community America is the only place where she can get her true identity and also the only place where she can survive by herself. In contrast to this, Jasmine, the heroine of the novel by the same name, chooses not to return to the country of her birth. ‘We are Americans to freedom born!’ (285) Certain critics like Banerjee make a point here, that Mukherjee considers India as a land without hope or a future.

Beigh Masters enters into Bhagmati’s experience for ten seconds through virtual reality. Beigh tries to penetrate the barrier of time, space and personality, by dipping herself into the world of virtual reality recreated in the computer. ‘My shoulder still throbbed, and it continues to ache at night; and sometimes I feel in my gut that I really am incubating an enormous diamond’. (283)

The mystery of the missing Emperor’s Tear is, fascinatingly enough, solved through virtual reality. Hannah, cleverly, had Bhagmati’s body shipped to the west, and given a Christian burial. Bhagmati’s tomb entombed the priceless diamond.

Issues related to women are central to the writings of Bharati Mukherjee as visible in her novels like *Wife, Jasmine, The*
Tiger’s Daughter, and collection of short stories like Darkness and The Middleman and Other Stories. The Holder of the World can be read at two levels. Firstly, it is a feminist novel. Secondly, it can be read on the historical plane also. The Holder of the World, Caroll Smith Rosenberg argues, is ‘the emotional segregation of woman and man, which brought about, led to the development of a specifically female world’.

In Bhagmati’s honey-toned recitation Sita is the self-sacrificing ideal Hindu wife. The stories of Bhagmati ignite the memories, Hannah has tried to suppress namely, a abduction, betrayal, vengeance. Mukherjee digresses from her narrative to comment on how contemporary Indians will appropriate Indian tradition and refashion it to suit their times.

Mukherjee’s ambition as a writer now appears to include rewriting Indian narrative traditions as well as American ones. Fakrul Alam appreciates Mukherjee’s work and says that ‘the wide variety of Prose style used in The Holder of the World also testifies to Mukherjee’s ambition to make it the most technically dazzling of her novels’.

Mukherjee express her purpose in writing the novel:

I did not want The Holder of the World to be a traditional historical novel, a period piece. I love history and I am fascinated by the handling of data, what is called information management. As the novel grew, draft by draft,
I saw a way to bring these together [...] To me this was an experiment in virtual reality, a way of revising reliving history instead of rewriting it. I wanted to set up for American and Indian audiences how much Asia contributed to the notion of an American or European identity.\textsuperscript{36}

The novel is about Hannah, told by Beigh with an emphasis on certain themes like the merits of attempts to recapture the past, the collision of values that inevitably occurs when New World meets the old. Winston Barclay approaches the novel, as ‘The Holder of the World is a sprawling wide screen historical epic painted in miniature with one-hair brush.’\textsuperscript{37}

Pradeep Trikha comments that ‘Mukherjee moves in Yeats-like Gyres of time in order to reconstruct and provide organic unity to the events of Hannah Easton’s life.’\textsuperscript{38}

Mukherjee moves, in three time-zones simultaneously- the past, the present and the future. In the novel from America to India, worlds collide with one another ‘the tide is reversed, the so-called American dream lies in the Orient and American seeks it’\textsuperscript{39} says Manju Kak.

Laxmi Parasuram points out that the novel is:

\textit{An attempt to turn the tables on the familiar situation of an Indian in America to one of an American in India so that we may discover an approach to cross-cultural consciousness that has a universal relevance. The book releases consciousness from the shackles of Time and space and brings a sense of global connectedness beyond the barriers of time and geography.}\textsuperscript{40}
Bharati Mukherjee describes *The Holder of the World* as a 'postmodern historical novel'\(^1\).

Laxmi Parasuram says:

> Mukherjee seems totally engaged in the book to explore and discover how Hannah could cross the cultural barriers and hold together the colliding words in which she found herself. The world in the Holder is one in which the metaphoric freely merges with the literal and India becomes there a supreme example for such merging of realities to assume the status of a work of art.\(^2\)

Stephanie Gillian approaches the novel; 'as a rewrite of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s, *The Scarlet Letter.* Its simply another version of Hawthorne’s work but rather a blending of elements of history, romance, time, travel and adventure.'\(^3\)

Rubenstein evaluates, *The Holder of the World* as ‘a different kind of multicultural story, one that imaginatively links the 17th Century Colonial New World. (Puritan New England) with the old world (England and Mughal India)’.\(^4\)

Rebenstien contends that it brings to like ‘A plucky, adventurous woman who challenges the norms of both her era, and her gender to become a full citizen of the world’.\(^5\)

*The Holder of the World* is a tale about dislocation and transformation arising when two cultures come into contact with each other. Hannah’s life succeeds in questioning and discovering
new ways of defining identity. Hema Nair is assertive in her comment; '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.'

Bharati Mukherjee creates female characters who break through the boundaries imposed on them by the culture, gender and also by their race. Despite the differences in race, class and culture among Jasmine, Bhagmati and Hannah, they all share the same fluidity of identities, rather than maintaining fixed identity imposed on them by their patriarchy. All of them cross barriers, jump beyond the protective 'white circles' made by their elders. All of them seem to want fulfillment in love, and in order to gratify their physical needs they use both sexuality and violence to get power, and in return gain individual identities. They move beyond restrictions that would stagnate them. Jasmine, Hannah, Bhagmati all, like Sita, cross the border and step outside the white circle, (Sita's circle of protection drawn by Lakshman, her husband's young brother) and become involved with men outside their culture. Bhagmati tells the story of Sita to Hannah. Ravana abducted Sita. Ravana, in Hindu mythology, is the ten-head king of the demons. His abduction of Sita and eventual defeat by Sita's husband Rama is the one of the greatest Hindu myths. Sita was kidnapped by Ravana because she strayed outside the white circle of protection. At this point in the story, Hannah thinks, 'white
circle, white town’. (175) Beigh Masters—the narrator—deliberately, chose a man from another race:

My twenties passed in grad school and in travel and in short-term grants and short term affairs that took me wherever I wanted to go. Past success became my credentials, and I picked up other-men—Other-men—meaning the natives of other countries whose immediate attractiveness I could judge, but nothing else about them; the codes were different. (33)

Bhagmati becomes the mistress of Henry Hedges; Hannah becomes the ‘White Bibi’ of Jadav Singh. Hannah, like her mother, Rebecca finds a lover from another culture and crosses racial boundaries. For Hannah sexuality becomes a means of identification, and she uses sex as a channel to amuse herself. As mentioned above, Mukherjee respects women’s physical needs. In her novels Mukherjee uses sexual relationships with men from other races as a means of erasing boundaries between black and white, self and, other and of course, young and old.

Bhagmati, as a child “Bindu Bashini”, lived in a large mud hut, crowded with grandparents, parents widowed great aunts, uncles and aunts-in-law. She is renamed after she refuses to die, when she is raped and thrown into the river.

The women robbed, and Bindu Bashini herself violated and thrown into the river. She’d been meant to drown. A dishonored Hindu girl couldn’t go back home. To have been abused was to have brought shame to the family for its failure to protect her. (223)
She had swum against the river and survived. On her survival her relatives disowned her.

Individual effort thwarted divine fate. She had neither wanted to, nor known how to, drown. So her relatives—all of them decent, affectionate men and women in untested times—had done the disowning in accordance with neighbourly pressure and Hindu custom. Only cowards chose shameful life over honorable death. (223)

Bindu, a victim twice over, chooses to run away from her family and from all traditions. She now supports herself by taking up menial jobs. ‘She’d staved off starvation in a hundred shameful ways’ (224)

At the age of twelve, she becomes a kitchen worker for an English man in Hughli. Henry Hedges, her employer, renames her Bhagmati.

He treated her like a slave, and then he treated her like a queen. He’d craved her with the urgency of an addiction. And when he’d been moved from Hughli to Kasimbazar, he’d taken Bhagmati—his name for her for her, reborn with him. (224)

Bhagmati cannot choose, as Hannah does, to step beyond the boundaries set by patriarchy. She is more dependent upon the protection of others. She accepts confinement at some stages. For instance, she refuses to leave India with Hannah, because she cannot conceive of life in England without Henry Hedges. He could have kept ‘Foreignness at bay’. (224) Similarly, she trusted Raja
Singh to keep her safe. Nalini Iyer points out differences between Hannah and Bhagmati’s experiences. ‘Identity formation for a native woman and an immigrant woman are different because of cultural location and racial identity rather than similar because of their shared identity as women’.47

Hannah makes choices throughout the novel. She marries Gabriel so that she may leave Salem. This marriage links her with a man who belongs to another race. Beigh Masters explains this as; ‘unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by running off with a treacherous alien?’ (69) At another point she says ‘she had traveled the world, a witness to unimagined vision, merely to repeat her mother’s folly and to live her mother’s life over.’ (238)

Hannah proves herself to be ‘a product of her time and place, her marriage and her training, exposed to range of experience that would be extreme even in today’s world, but none of it, consciously, had sunk in or affected her outer behavior. (220)

Hannah chooses to have an affair with Jadav Singh and seems pleased with the change. ‘I was once a respectable married English Lady and look at me now- a bibi in a sari. We can all change.’ (256) As a Bibi she realizes ‘She was no longer the woman she’d been in Salem and London’ (234)
Her faith in her white (firangi) identity both limits, and at the same time, empowers her. She challenges the Great Mughal Emperor but she fails to have power over him. She thinks of stopping the war. ‘Only a person outside the pale of the two civilization could do it. Only a woman, a pregnant woman, a pregnant white woman, had the confidence or audacity to try it.’ (259)

An analysis of the kind of clothes worn, dealt by Bharati Mukherjee, provides more depth into the shaping of the new identity. There is a description of Rebecca. She ‘peels her white, radiant body out of the Puritan widow’s somber bodice and skirts as a viper sheds skin before wriggling into the brush’ (29) and putting on ‘something new and Indian and clean to wear’. (29)

Hannah’s adoption of the sari, while she was in the palace of Raja Jadav Singh and her patronage of ‘modest clothing’ in the court to the Great Mughal Emperor serve as concrete marks of her new identity. Jasmine and Dimple too associate different clothing with different identities.

Hannah also takes on different names and identities. Her name changes from Hannah Easton to Salem Bibi. This is suggestive of a quest of a vital life of feeling and emotions. Bharati Mukherjee again is trying to reinforce this idea that like Jasmine, Hannah too is a woman of boundless hope. The novel explores how
Hannah could cross the cultural barrier and hold together the world she found herself in. Her own mother, she realized, when she was with Jadav Singh, ‘must have taken a Nipmuc name. A new name for a new incarnation. Rebecca Easton was dead. Hannah Easton Fitch Legge was dying’. (222)

While living in the palace of Jadav Singh, both Hannah and Bhagmati give each other new name. Hannah becomes ‘Mukta, Bhagmati’s word for ‘Pearl.’(271)

Mukherjee creates a complex tale about the dislocation and transformation that arises when different cultures collide each other. Mukherjee emphasizes the multiple planes of Hannah’s identity who has a Christian Hindu, Muslim, and an American Indian English self.

The novel is a meeting place of three cultures i.e. Christian, Muslim and Hindu. Hannah changed lovers and religions. Her inclination to each religion is different. She practices Hinduism and Islam for a while and gives Bhagmati a Christian name and a Christian burial. Hannah believed at the outset that Hinduisms was for her a series of barbaric attitudes like burying young widows, denying humanity to the untouchables and worshipping various images. In the Hindu household she learned to believe in a cosmic energy that governed the Universe. Hannah finds Muslims similar to devout Christians, because, ‘they had a heaven, a hell, a book,
a leader, a single God; they knew sin and tried to repent. Their dialectic codes were harsh, but logical.’ (219)

All along, Hannah maintained the Christian skepticism about the other face of religions. She wanted to embrace this world only to sacrifice herself at the altar of true love. ‘She wanted the Raja and nothing else, she would sacrifice anything for his touch and the love they made.’ (229)

*The Holder of the World,* is also the story of Beigh Masters born in England in the mid-twentieth Century. She is a modern twenty-first century woman. She incorporates the attitudes of an educated, empowered, modern woman. Beigh Masters as an asset researcher traces the history of a jewel, ‘The Emperor’s Tear’ that once belonged to an American puritan who became the Salem Bibi in the court of the Indian Emperor. As she digs deeper, she uses historical data to enter the past and find out what happened. She provides a logical corollary to Hannah’s life. Hannah’s mother was the cousin of Beigh Master’s own ancestor. Fascinated by her own familial ties, Beigh traces Hannah’s life from New England to the Coramandel Coast. Beigh begins to realize their genetic connection. It was her belief that ‘with sufficient passion and intelligence, we can deconstruct the barriers of time and geography.’ (11) Hannah’s genes are similar to Beigh Masters’s.
Beigh has inherited this trait. She observes Hannah’s character and feels that:

Hannah Legge might have lived out her life in India, in the new palace Gabriel was building in New Salem. Her bones might be resting in St. Mary’s Cemetery of Fort St. George. Wherever she stayed, I am convinced she would have changed history, for she was one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway. (189)

Beigh Masters symbolically presents a perspective on history like Keats’s Grecian Urn. She is not a ‘cold pastoral.’ She adds to history. She enlightens and clarifies and informs. In Keats’s ode, the Urn has been a preserver of secrets. Beigh Masters ravishes the ‘unravished’ and exposes the truth. In making sense of Hannah’s life, Beigh is striving to make sense of her own life too. Hannah teaches her, to go beyond her ‘cynical self, my well trained feminist self’. (60)

Beigh learns to value life, which she thinks led Hannah to accompany Gabriel to India. ‘Her curiosity, the awakening of her mind and her own sense of self and purpose’. (89) It will help her and her lover Venn to ‘predict what will happen to us within our life time’. (91) Beigh finds out, ‘I’m part of this story, the Salem Bibi is part of the tissue of my life’. (21)

Ravi Shankar comments, ‘the transformation of the Salem Bibi’s soul through time and space becomes an allegory of Beigh Masters’s personal discovery’.48
Beigh Masters unravels the mystery, surrounding the life of the Salem Bibi and the diamond. Mukherjee seems to agree with Elizabeth Long’s view that ‘people are continually remaking their culture, and in doing so redefining the past, reconstituting the present, and reconceptualizing what they desire from future.’

**Notes and References**


5. Samir Dayal, op.cit p.71.


18. Pushpa N.Parekh, op.cit, p 111.
22. *Iowa Review,* op.cit, p.21.
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35. Fakrul Alam, op.cit, p.137.


37. Winston Barclay, paper back edition Iowa city, I.A. p.II


42. Laxmi Parasuram, op.cit p .199.

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45. *Ibid*, p.11.


Chapter 4

Quest for Roots: Analysis of Leave It to Me and Desirable Daughters
The sixties saw the formation of the hippie cult. Hippies did not want to conform to society and, therefore, created their own world in an attempt to escape reality. They were considered not only as a subculture but also as a counter culture that had a disrupting effect on society. It was their ambition to establish another kind of hierarchy to make sure that people were no longer judged by their race, gender, religion or social class. It was a very revolutionary attitude for that time.

The bohemians and hippies left permanent marks on the world. Bohemians and hippies, alike, did not agree with most of the ideas of mainstream society and through their writing, music and clothes expressed their iconoclastic ideas. Both hippies and bohemians resisted bourgeois definitions and chose to lead lives of poverty and idleness, exploring interiority of the mind and the soul. Bohemians in the Latin Quarter of Paris and hippies in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco all lived similarly, sharing ideas and cultivating distinct counter-cultures. Both hippies and Bohemians wore clothing that mocked mainstream culture. Both wore clothes of different styles with bright colors in order to stand out and mock the bourgeois. This life
style originated not only with the Parisian Bohemian but also with the gypsies of the Czech Republic. The styles they developed were true to this philosophy. Drugs, hair-beads, easy sex, all that might have started as a teenage deviance, were fast transformed into signs of cultural dissidence. Boys with long unkempt hair, ponytails and beards, girls with unpermed hair, free of make-up and restrictive inner or outer wear were a common sight.

Hippies persuaded a 'make love not war' policy. They abandoned their families, dropped out of school, lived in filthy, crowded, lodgings and experimented in sexual orgies. They adapted the mythological love-traditions of paganism to lay the foundations of a new cult. They were generally viewed as the errant segment of youngsters.

There was exploration of sexual freedom and drugs were considered essential to the development of consciousness. The use of illegal drugs increased in an effort to free the mind from past restraints. They also believed that drug enhances the ability to perceive truth.

This decade of the sixties was a time of revolution. Young people were breaking out of the moulds that were cast by their parent's era. This revolution of the baby boomer generation found effective outlets for their ideas was love
music etc. As the children of the baby boom became young adults, they found more discontent with the world around them, and this lead to subcultures. These people were upset about the war in Vietnam, skeptical of the present government and its associated authority, and searching for ways to free themselves from society’s current norms. No movement in our history defines a cultural change more accurately than the hippie movement in the sixties.

Every culture has its own peculiarities and affinities, which evoke a mixed response in one from a different cultural milieu. In order to understand the novel Leave It to Me, it is essential to understand hippie culture. Bharati Mukherjee as a writer, moved from one geographical and cultural space to another. Her novels depict the changes involved in such transition. There is a questioning of biases, a deconstruction of social, cultural and national stereotypes.

Mukherjee’s fifth novel, Leave It to Me, is a story of a child born to a hippie from California, on a love-and-peace flower trip to India and a ‘guru’ who is known for leaving behind a trail of used and abused women, illegitimate children, rapes and murders across the Indian subcontinent. An unwanted child is dropped at the nearest orphanage,
where she is called ‘Faustine’. ‘One of the nuns had renamed me Faustine after a typhoon’. (41)

The offspring of this liaison, presumed dead, is saved by nuns and shipped abroad to America where she is brought up by strict conservative foster parents Manfred and Serena DiMartinos of Schenectady, New York.

Her foster parents, an Italian-American family christened Debby DiMartino and raised her decently. Twenty-three years later, having graduated from Suny Albany, she set out to seek her bio-parents in off-beat California. She heads to California, in an endeavor to connect with her unknown past. ‘Who but a foundling has a moral right to seize not just a city, but a neighborhood, and fashion a block or two of it into home? When you inherit nothing, you are entitled to everything’. (67) This is Debby Dee’s philosophy and her motto.

The theme introduced in the novel’s prologue resonates throughout the story of Debby DiMartino. She is an orphan who drops both her names - Faustine and Debby-and adopts the name Devi that she randomly picks up from Alfa Romeo’s license plate. Myra Shah says:

The Story of the Goddess Devi is the prologue to the book because while Debby DiMartino thinks that events that she indulges in are out of her own vision of
synchronicity that says that there are really larger forces at work. It may not be a total accident that she sees a vanity license plate that says Devi – so that she is not just a crazy serial killer full of rage. Even though she is unaware of it, she has been turned into a justice-dealing machine [by the Gods].

The novel is the cross section of the psychology of an abandoned child. It is a story of revenge and fury. Mukherjee calls her protagonist Devi, the ‘dispenser of Divine justice’ of Hindu mythology. The myth she uses as a framework for her novel has been altered to match the present period. The prologue provides a guide for reading the novel. The cosmic spirits make Goddess Devi their agent for ridding the world of evil. Mukherjee says:

I intended for all of Debby/Devi’s experiences to be interpreted by the reader as visitations from God. Characters like Wyatt, Frankie Fong, the blond in the spider veloce, and Ham operate in a larger than real way. They are guardian-corrupters, they are demigods innocent as Greek gods, untouched by the suffering they cause. They operate outside normal laws. They don’t consider the consequences that their actions have on other people’s lives. Jess, Debby’s biological mother, is villainous on a pettier, more human scale. She is just a flower child gone nasty.

Mukherjee weaves together the Devi myth with the Electra Myth. The Greek myth of Electra is about a teenage girl, Electra, devastated by the death of her father Agamemon whom her mother Clytemnestra murdered with her lover Aegisthus’s help. Unable to stop mourning for her father and
hating her mother and Aegisthus, Electra and her brother Orestes kill them. This study offers a psychological profile of modern Electras, those young girls and women today who live out various aspects of the Electra Myth. The Electra myth stands for endless revenge, in-family adultery, cuckolding, betrayal, and murder, the dismembering of little children and even a bit of cannibalism. New York Daily News reviewed the novel:

This is the Electra story updated. The apocalyptic bloodbaths in which Devi consummates her furious revenge on her parents are every bit as vicious as those that befall the Mouse of Atreus. But Mukherjee's singular achievement is to suffuse them with an almost slapstick, cartoon sensibility that is disturbingly contemporary in its detachment from both reality and morality.⁴

Greek mythic tales are full of violence. In the novel the mother-father-daughter triangle underlines the original myth. Mukherjee says:

In my novel, I found myself working with three separate such triangles, because Debby has a biological father, an adoptive father, and, in Ham, a lover who she wishes had married her mother and so had become her natural father.⁵

Devi watches Ham, who is also her lover, making love to her mother Jess.

I didn't have to watch my mother and my lover make love in the cramped loo of a houseboat in Marin. I saw her legs straight out, a flash of Ham's blue Jockeys.
We see in the novel Devi and her generation represented as the unacknowledged victims of the war. Ham and Jess acted without much regard for consequences. Devi suffers the consequences of their actions. Devi asks, filled with resentment, '[...]' but what about us, Vietnam’s war – bastards and democracy’s love children? (141) The novel makes us aware of how the Loco Larry was victimized by the war. Devi suggests that:

Vietnam wasn’t a war; it was a divide. On one side, the self-involved idealists; on the other, we the napalm scarred kids. In between, a country that elected leaders, who got boys like Larry to pull the trigger (167)

And Devi becomes both witness to and apologist for:

[...]those who had survived and owned up to what the ward really done for them, how it’d freed them to be themselves, to curse and fuck and burn and loot, to kill or die, to feel superior while having fun.(153)

At the novel’s core, Mukherjee says, is ‘Vietnamization of America,’ by which she means that the war has continued to have an impact on the lives of those, now middle aged, who fought in it and who protested against it.
Vietnam was the central experience of the America that Mukherjee was first exposed to when she went there in 1961. She uses characters such as Loco Larry, who have been affected by that war. ‘The war Ham had protested wasn’t the war that Larry had fought.’ (139)

Thus when Debby hits San Francisco she encounters a lot of people who seem to be the inheritors of the Vietnam War. Larry narrated his Vietnam stories to Debby. ‘His war poems made me mourn the major job Vietnam had done on boys like him.’(136)

The novel begins where it ends. The same paragraph serves as the introduction and as the conclusion. ‘Tonight, in the cabin of this houseboat off Sausalito, as curtains of flame dance in the distance and a million flash bulbs burn and fizzle, and I sit with head of a lover on my lap.’(10)

Bharati Mukherjee has used the flashback technique in her narrative. The interpolated narrative has been naturalized as a reverie by the central character Devi, which represents events that happened before the novel began. Mukherjee has made persistent and skillful use of this device in the novel.

As the understructure of the novel Leave It to Me, lies the age old mythological tale of the village of Devigaon. Apparently, Devigaon got its name from the female deity
Devi, created by the cosmic spirit with the mission of slaying the Buffalo Demon, who had usurped the throne in the Kingdom of heavenly beings. Having accomplished her mission after a fierce battle, Devi (Earth Mother and warrior Goddess) wipes the blood off the weapons and stores them, ready for use.

From thereon, in *Leave It to Me*, we enter the modern day world of Debby DiMartino. She grows up in a middle-class, Italian-American family in Schenectady, New York. Debby recalls her past.

I have no clear memory of my birthplace, only of the whiteness of its sun, the harshness of its hills, the raspy moan of its desert winds, the desperate suddenness of its twilight: these I see like the pattern of veins on the insides of my eyelids. (9)

Debby was adopted, '[...] for all official purposes, like social security cards and unemployment benefits, I am, or was, Debby DiMartino, a fun-loving twenty-three-year-old American girl. I was adopted into a decent Italian American family in the Hudson Valley. (10)

She was abandoned as a baby, by her American hippie mother and Eurasian father outside an Indian orphanage where she was placed in the care of Catholic nuns until the DiMartinos took her in. That is the upside of Debby's life. She
lived the perfect phase of her life with the DiMartinos. Debby grew up as a tall and beautiful girl in a plain family, an exotic girl in a very American town. She mature before time and early in life showed poetic talent. Mr. Bullock, an English teacher, spotted her gift of poetic talent and complemented her. The downside of Debby’s life is:

The downside is knowing that the other two I owe my short life to were lousy people who’d considered me lousier still and who’d left me to be sniffed at by wild dogs, like a carcass in the mangy shade. (10)

The upside and downside does not reconcile and leaves her restless. She needs to carve an identity for herself. ‘If I was some one special or just another misfit.’ (16)

Mukherjee offers pertinent insight into the now dominant age group i.e. the baby boomers that came of age in 1960s. At the age of 23, with a degree in marketing with options for a career in Manhattan, Debby suddenly decides to trace out her biological parents. She recognizes within herself the need to be something special to satisfy the monstrous cravings to meet the other Debby hiding inside. ‘All I’d have to do was be beautiful, be available, and my other life, my real life, would find me.’(18)

In search for her natural parents, she heads to San Francisco where she picks up a new name off a vanity license
plate and begins a new life as Devi Dee. 'I was quicker, stronger as Devi, my intuitions were sharper, my impulsiveness rowdier. As Devi, I came into possession of my mystery genes.'(64)

Her job in telemarketing introduced her to the power of her voice. 'My callers were romantics. They believed in me not in salvation through Elastonomics.'(21) So sensational is her sales record that Frankie Fong, the Chinese owner of Elastonomics becomes her lover. He was an ex-movie star. Frankie Fong is her first mature lover. As a child of thirteen years she had fallen in love with Wyatt. 'The charm of Frankie Fong started out as the Charm of foreignness, of a continent I couldn’t claim but which threatened to claim me.'(36)

Soon Devi leaves this rich and spell-binding storyteller. Devi ends up living in her car in the Haight Ashbury.

'It was the Haight I finally picked as my space. My space, my turf, my homeland. It was where I should have been born if the Fresno flower child had strayed no farther from home than Ashbury and Haight. But then I’d have had a different look and less curiosity about sex and transcendence. I’d have inherited the Haight Street I’ll-cross-when-and-where-I-want-and-at-my-speed posture of entitlement. (68)

Haight Ashbury, San Francisco district, is regarded as the centre of hippie activities. The choice of using Haight Ashbury as the setting is a deliberate ploy by Mukherjee. She
claims, 'Debby, as Devi, brings moral accountability to these places. I live in the Haight and I teach at Berkeley. I know the geography and the mentality of these places at a gut level.'

While scouting the city on her own for her bio-mom, Devi becomes friendly with Stoop Man but soon she gives him up when she finds Ham Cohan. ‘When I thought of sex, I was attracted to Ham.’ (82) Devi is soon involved in a relationship with this film producer just to get some clue of her bio-mom. ‘I had to understand Ham and Bio-mom and their Berkeley times. The girls of Ham’s youth. That’s when I made up my mind to let Ham seduce me.’ (89)

Ham remarks that there is ‘no force in nature stronger than a child trying to find her mother.’(88)

When she signed on as a client with Finders/Keepers, a family-reuniting service she phones her foster-mother, who is pained to hear about her current pursuits. ‘We’re your family. Aren’t we your family Debby’? (49).

When Debby starts her search, her foster mother tells her that her biological father had a police record. Debby, recognizes that a police record will help her find her bio-parents. ‘That’s a break for me, Mama. If they had a police record that’s something to go on.’ (51)
She hires a detective. Ham introduced Fred Pointer to her. He works on the case and brings to her the information that her biological father is a sex-guru and a serial killer. Pointer suggests that, ‘Your mother could be Jess Dupree of this city, currently doing million-dollar-plus business as CEO of a hot, author escorting agency.’ (146) This woman, Jess, runs a media escort agency, Leave It to Me. Devi is able to get Jess and Ham’s story, ‘They’d been lovers in Berkeley. They’d co-protested McNamara’s Vietnam, they’d co-organized a takeover rotting fruit at a motorcade that should have been escorting President Yankee-Stooge Nguyen Slime, and for a while they’d cohabited in a commune.’ (114)

Jess is the girl friend of a 1960’s survivor Ham:

He, Jess and Fred had marched for peace, for civil rights, for women, gays, migrants, had gone to jail, signed petitions, run for city councils, run radical campaigns, And now they also drove big cars, lived large lives, flew business class, ate at the best restaurants, drank the best wines, took massages, ski trips, private cruises. They climbed together deep-sea dove and white-water rafted together. It was the community hedonist-thing. Food, revolution, sex, art, ecology, drugs music, books, writer’s films. Epicures. Sensualists. (166)

It is Jess who gives Devi her motto, Leave It to Me, which is the name of her media escort agency. Mukherjee talks of an orphaned child of the 70’s born out of wedlock to a Haight Ashbury hippie and an Asian serial killer. Devi
encounters various colorful ex-hippies personalities who, having given up flower trial, have now settled down to middle age respectability. Mukherjee is assessing the psychology of an abandoned 23 years adoptee. The hippies stood for freedom peace and love. For them the only way to establish peace in the world was through love and tolerance.

Devi discovers that her father is in an Indian prison. She goes beyond to discover that he is as bad as the devil. It is a horrible revelation for her. 'Bio-dad killed at first to be admired, then kept killing to be noticed.' (122-123)

Fred Pointer reveals to her that 'Your father is one of the most notorious serial murderers in modern history. He’s rotting in an Indian jail even as we speak.' (121)

Devi believed that 'I got my good looks from him, and my fantastic good luck.' (424) Inverting every aspect of traditional paternity, her bio father Romeo Hawk, enters Devi’s life dressed as woman. 'Ruddy, roused male genitalia and silver heels mocked me.' (212) He undresses himself in front of Devi, 'You find me irresistible?' (213) She replies 'Every women does'. (213) She admires his Karate-hardened killer hands. 'He had the widest, surest hands I had ever seen.' (216)

As Devi gets closer to identifying bio-mom, people around her begin to die. 'Haq kill a total of seventeen men

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and women, nearly choke to death a no-name baby of no fixed address, bump off Fred.’ (226).

Romeo had come to San Francisco to murder Jess, ‘I got a score to settle with that bitch.’ (213) Devi drives Hawk to Jess and Ham’s boat willingly because, ‘He was the scatterer of seeds from which I’d sprouted. I drove him because he was that place, the over there, he was my poem of night, light and leave. Nature has no prodigality, no psychology, no sympathy.’ (216)

She believes ultimately, ‘genes will win out’. (217) Devi reveals the fact before Jess that she is her biological mother while Jess denies the fact, ‘I’ve never been pregnant.’ (224)

Devi expresses anger towards Jess and desires to know why she had abandoned her.

They brought me to see you. The Gray Nuns. It was a long, nasty ride. The bus was packed. Why didn’t you want me? I need to know. Why didn’t you keep me? Why didn’t you want to see me again? It always came back to needs and wants. (223)

Devi gets no answer. Romeo shoves and drags Jess. Jess curses Romeo all the way. Devi claims ‘I couldn’t have stopped them even if I’d wanted to. Dad had the 9mm, the cuffs, the strangler’s hands. May be Mom’s time had come.’ (225)
Romeo murders Jess and after witnessing her murder, Debby contemplates, ‘better that I had been the fetus Jess aborted.’ (231)

Devi wishes desperately that Ham had married Jess so that he could have been her natural father. She questions him. ‘Why didn’t you ask Jess to marry you? You should have married her.’ (231)

Ham replies. ‘The times, love, marriage and commitment were for bourgeois’ (231). Hippies did not believe in the institution of marriage. These tribes grouped together in ‘love ins’ ‘sit ins’ and simple ‘be ins’. Indulging in sexual activities they tried to enter higher spheres and the sub-conscious.

Had Ham been her natural father, ‘you’d have spared me my [...] my violent propensities’. (232)

While they were talking, Romeo entered and kills Ham. ‘Ham’s eyes bulged, his knees sagged, his voice box let out gapsy, growly sounds. When Romeo finally let go, the body thudded to the floor’. (233)

In return Devi assumes a fearful form to destroy the wicked elements. She slays the demon and calls the police. The end is extremely violent and shocking. The novel comes
to an abrupt ending. We as readers expected a touching reunion of a family; touching reunion is certainly not in Mukherjee’s mind. Her intention in the novel is to deal with emotions of anger and hate and to delineate the true psychology of a woman oscillating between continents to find her identity.

*Leave It to Me*, is the story of an abandoned daughter of an American hippie and an Asian pseudo-cult leader. She commences the search for her true identity in the Bay Area of California. *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewed the novel:

In *Leave It to Me*, Mukherjee takes the themes she had previously explored, a step further. Destroying the concept of ethnicity altogether, she creates a complex new, transnational definition of self [...] Devi will know who she is no matter what or whom she has to destroy. But the discovery does not prove to be easy in a region where ethnic boundaries slide over each other like snakes in a basket and many people have discarded the names they were born with [...] The novel becomes a meditation on the Indian concept of karma and the Greek idea of destiny.

In the novel, Mukherjee explores issues of religion, immigration and identity crisis. She calls it as the ‘Vietnamisation of America’. Myra Shah comments on the fast pace of the novel:

*Leave It to Me* is an excellent work of fiction. It is an adventure that never stops one that continues in the reader’s mind long after the book is closed. Introducing new ideas in a wonderful setting of romance, intrigue, mystery and murder, Mukherjee has created an
enlightening and entertaining novel for the next millennium. The world is a rapidly changing place, I'm glad that there are authors who can take the edge off of our sometimes harsh reality, with a laugh and may be a crackle.⁸

Publishers Weekly reviewed the novel as:

Mukherjee is inspired here in connecting the residues of 1960's culture, the self described idealists who used civil disobedience as a road to selfish excess; the scarred veterans of Vietnam; and between them, the damaged children of that generation. She's especially adroit in recalling the Berkeley counter culture and capturing its later expression in the alternative lifestyles and self serving rationales with which ex-hippies defend their current lives. Her most impressive fact, however, is in rendering her self-destructive heroine with brilliantly fidelity to the American vernacular. Profane, brash and amoral, Debby/Devi is not likable, but she is recognizable and true.⁹

Mukherjee uses the myth of Goddess Devi as a framework for her novel. In the novel, Devi functions through archetypes. This is the modern use of myth. Mukherjee calls her heroine Devi, invoking the eight-armed Goddess of Divine justice of Hindu mythology. Manju Jaidka claims that Mukherjee's goddess is not authentic:

And If Debby/Devi is, indeed, the Goddess incarnate, how does one reconcile this divine image with the protagonist's total lack of spiritual depth, her very pragmatic/ materialistic approach to life, and her many liaison with the men who come her way? No, the mythical frame chosen for the story does not fit the bill.¹⁰
Devi does her job remarkably well. She makes use of her sexy, kittenish voice. She talks erotically on the telephone to sell her products. 'Some nights I tried out thirty personas. My lies paid off.' (21) Devi is the product of two subcultures, '[...] two continents went into your making'. (105)

She remains rootless, though aspiring eagerly for assimilation. She grapples with different cultures around the globe to find her real identity. Shalini Gupta observes:

A kæleidoscopic wheel of a book, Leave It to Me reveals the scars of the beat generation, whose legacy to its survivors is as dangerous as shifting continental plates. Mukherjee shuttles between time and space zones to create a dichotomy "as wise as the San Andreas fault". The novel’s sex and violence rip from the grandstands to centre-stage and the maelstrom from engulf all.11

Some critics assess her as an utterly unsympathetic character while Mukherjee claims:

I hope she is sympathetic. She’s tough and vulnerable. I don’t have any control over my characters yelling at each other, yelling at me, inside my head. Some of them sort of take over, and I become totally intrigued or mesmerized by them. Devi came to me as the opposite of a character I’d written earlier, Jasmine from the novel ‘Jasmine’ Draft by draft I came to understand Devi better, and the most important idea that wrote itself in the second or third draft was that she prizes clarity over everything else.12
Farhad pays tribute to Mukherjee:

With *Leave It to Me*, Bharati Mukherjee has masterfully portrayed the angst-ridden life of an abandoned child, carefully interweaving the residue of the 60's the road of selfish excess and the damaged children of that generation. Ballsy, with incisiveness that cuts to the bone, *Leave It to Me* is full of brutal rawness; full of life.\(^{13}\)

An Indian born novelist, based in the United States, has received extensive applause for her rendering of complex culture shocks experienced by immigrants to North America who find themselves strangely out of place in unfamiliar settings. Living in the melting pot of cultures, rootlessness and questions of identity add much to Mukherjee's work. Manju Jaidka, asses Bharati Mukherjee; '[...] as a writer who has moved from one geographical and cultural space to another, from India to the American continent (first Canada, then U.S.A.), her writing speaks of the inevitable changes involved in such transitions.'\(^{14}\)

*Leave It to Me*, is a tale about a young woman's search for her origins. The novel dictates the compelling story of a young woman's desire to break away from her adoptive family to seek her bio parents, who abandoned her as an infant in India. All she knows of her biological parents is that her father was Asian and that her mother was listed on the orphanage records as Clear Water Iris-Daughter, a Californian
hippie of the 60's. At one level this is a quest novel, which centers around the protagonist’s search for her roots and for her biological parents. Mukherjee’s first heroine Tara Banerjee in *The Tiger’s Daughter* comes to India to ascertain her identity. Similarly, Devi leaves America for India on a similar mission. Bharati Mukherjee, uses fiction to explore issues of identity crisis and cultural transplant through her characters-Indian coming to west like Jasmine or Westerners heading to India like Hannah Easton. In *Leave It to Me*, Mukherjee approaches the same issues from a fresh perspective. Mukherjee deals with current problems. The Identity quest enriches the plot of *Leave It to Me* in which twenty-three years old mixed race adoptee, Debby Dimartino, leaves her decent conservative Italian family in search of ‘Bio-mom’ and ‘Bio-dad’ as she calls them. Her mother is a hippie who spent several years wandering in India and the far East. Says Debby, ‘I could only picture her as a teenager in batik and bell-bottoms. She existed outside time.’ (97)

Bio-dad is a part-South Indian, part Eurasian serial killer. Debby changes her name to Devi metaphorically reincarnating herself as Devi, the death-dealing Indian goddess. The former hippies did not care about the consequences of their actions. Mukherjee has used Devi as a
tool, which represents those consequences and rebounding forcing the issue. Mukherjee says:

As a professor and workshop leader, I’m constantly working with young people for whom Vietnam, the Kennedy assassination, and so on mean nothing. They’re simple statistics. But Devi’s generation is still a victim of those events; they’re formed by Post-Vietnam America. I’ve come to realize that one of the themes throughout my fiction is the change in the way America thinks of itself and is seen by the rest of the world as a result of Vietnam.¹⁵

Devi moves to San Francisco in an endeavor to connect with her unknown past. ‘Debby DiMartino died and Devi Dee birthed herself on the Donner Pass at the precise moment a top-down spider Veloce with DEVI vanities’. (62)

The choice of her name is also an echo of her ethnic origin. She is in an identity flux. In the multi-voiced passage cited below, Devi refers to herself in both the first and third person and by all three of her names.

Faustine and Debby were brought up Catholics, but Devi followed her nose: the Hare Krishnas, Budhist, Baptist, Black Muslims and some religions that entwined love and profit, charity and sex, faith and ecology, space and time, combinations I hadn’t stumbled upon upstate. (69)

Culture owes much of its existence to religion. Sometimes, religion of a people makes them culturally different from the people of other faiths. Hippies got attracted to Hinduism and came to India, the land of mythology.
Along with her old identity, Debby sheds her old conventions:

I’d had a life and the chance at a Big Life, and lost it, temporarily. I told myself, for now why not be Devi the tenderloin prowler, all allure and strength and zero innocence, running away from shame, running to revenge? (66-67)

Debby, despite the love and concern of her foster parents, grows up with the awareness of being different, and the feeling that she is an unwanted obstacle in a world that is moving rapidly towards its mysterious destinations. Her foster mother says: ‘We wanted to give you a clean start, that’s why we changed the name the nuns gave […] “Faustine”?’ (51)

She sets out in search of her origins and the unknown parents who had callously abandoned her. ‘Some are born wanton; others are born weak and made wanton. I am wanton.’ (159)

Devi’s affair with Frankie Fong, her boss in telemarketing job, comes to a halt. It gives her a notion that she is inherently exotic and also sparks an urge in her to find out who she is. She promptly has sex with him. He weaves for her fantastic tales of his Asian past, which further stimulate her appetite to discover her origin. ‘Frankie made
an Asian childhood sound great fun, something I wanted to claim, something I’d been robbed of.’ (26)

She offers gratitude, ‘[...] thanks to those stories, for the first time I felt connected. The DiMartinos were the aliens.’ (27)

This desire leads her to a search for her bio-parents but not before she fulfills a need to nuke Frankie Fong from her memory. She does so by setting fire to his apartment in Saratoga Springs. She sets out for California, believing that the roots of these violent impulses must surely lie in her origins. ‘I began to understand about mugged identities. There was something to nature over nurture, and to the tyranny of genes.’ (16) Genetic factors were more prominent than the environmental factors.

Mukherjee’s characters are a little too creative in their dealings with the brave New World. Mukherjee has dealt with some of her favorite issues in the novel Leave It to Me, like questions of identity and multiculturalism. Mukherjee repeatedly changes the identities of her central characters. In Jasmine, the heroine changes her identity from Jyoti to Jane (many in between). Thus symbolizing her changing attitude to life. Similarly in Leave It to Me, the protagonist moves from Baby Clear Water Iris Daughter to Faustine, to Debby, to
Devi, as she embarks on her journey towards self-realization. In a conversation between Ham and Devi, Ham remarks, “you have to come up with just the right name”, he advised, “Names Count”. (79)

With her enchanting and mysterious beauty, Debby travels far, stepping over countless men along her way, fulfilling certain needs and meeting a certain purpose. She transforms into a sharper, stronger self to accomplish her mission in life. Bharati Mukherjee uses sexual encounters with a variety of men to represent upward evolution of her women. With each man Debby invented a new identity and emerged as a different woman discovering all along new aspects to herself. Her experiences reveal a crazy world; she goes from one man to another. ‘The secret of the sexes was suddenly apparent to me. Clueless jerks who can’t get their underwear on straight still have the priceless women.’ (111) Ham, her lover, turns out to be the key link in her quest to uncover the mystery of her conception. Ham is her bio-mom’s longtime lover. Both Devi and Jess her ‘bio-mom’ seduce the same man, thus bringing an element of incest to the novel. ‘We’d slept together—“pleasured each other” was his phrase— a total of seven times.’ (111) She hears her inner voice saying. ‘We know what men who’ve shared the same woman are like, but what are women who’ve shared the same man like?’ (152)
Her different roles plunged her into identity crises. Confused relationships with men leave her restless. Changing identities to find her own context in society, we see Debby taking charge of her own destiny and shaping it almost at will. Mukherjee is depicting the problems of an immigrant in the novel. Debby is an immigrant wherever she goes. Her sojourn in China is beguiled by rootlessness and restlessness assuming different roles. At the end of her adventures, she discovers herself and her biological parents, and how they have contributed to her personality. In terms of race, being part white, part Pakistani, part Vietnamese, she feels at first that she cannot claim any ethnic group as her own. 'The whole world had gone into my making'. (129) Mukherjee says; 'the whole world has gone into her making, and she has to find her place in this hodge-podge of cultural heritage's and religious visions.'

Myra Shah approaches Devi:

She is an American Original and therefore has to decide for herself what it means to be an American in the 1990's. She has been the victim of so many different forms of brutality; political, from the Vietnam War, and from her biological parents who dumped her like garbage on the hippie trail in a desert village in India. The unspoken victim of the Vietnam- war is the child of the 70's who has been scarred in invisible ways.
Bharati Mukherjee’s themes are different in each novel. In this novel cultural transplant is a different cultural experience.

Should I envy the mother who had put her bad Karma behind her in an Indian prison, dumped her bastard child on Hindi-speaking nuns and moved on? She had done what’d felt good, what’d felt right at the time, and consequences be damned. (141).

It is a tale of murderous female jealousy between generations. Mukherjee has converted the conservative old theme. The father who ought to be a protector is a ‘killer’ and the mother denying the principle of maternity is sketched as ‘rejecter’. ‘I hated Jess. She wasn’t worthy of obsessive desire and claim or-die pursuits.’ (223)

Devi functions in an archetype. By implication, Debby is a modern day incarnation. Playing the part of the contemporary buffalo-demon is Devi’s natural father Romeo Hawk whose death brings in allusions of the Electra myth. Mukherjee says: ‘she is a figure beyond good and evil, she almost has no choice. So even though she’s also doing dreadful things, she’s also clearing away evil’.  

The end is quite shocking and violent. In all of Mukherjee’s novels, beneath the surface, violence move furtively. Violence seems to be the leitmotif of this novel, in
the attempt to make Devi a successor of her serial killer father. Devi is as crazy as her father. The end of the novel depicts the brutality of a daughter inherited from her father. This is genetic mental aberration. Her sense of rootlessness and consciousness of her rejection make her indulge in such violence. She murders in a fit of passion. Mukherjee acknowledges:

I have seen incredible violence, whether its resistance of colonial governments in my early childhood or Maoist resistance in Calcutta, which now has a Marxist government. I am terribly aware of the ways in which immigrant’s right were assaulted in Canada in the 70s when there was no constitution. I’ve been accused having a lot of violence in my work. Violence is my philosophical and aesthetic way also of talking about the incredible trauma of self-transformation that people who unhouse themselves from one society and re-house themselves into another have to go through.19

In another Interview Mukherjee says:

There’s a huge difference between vengeance and justice. Once that idea is articulated by my character, I realized that in order to make my concept of divine justice, which sometimes involves great violence, understandable to the reader, I’d have to dig into and share the Hindu Mythology of the Goddess Devi worshipped in Bengal, who was created by the cosmic spirit to do battle with the baddest bad ass of all the demons, the Buffalo, demon, and is therefore quite violent.20

The novel depicts the rootlessness and restlessness of one who belongs to two different continents. Debby suffers from a multiple personality disorder. She has a fluid identity.
Bharati Mukherjee has emerged as a writer of a
domestic thriller in her novel, Desirable Daughters. She
introduces three sisters caught between cultures. Desirable
Daughters, is a brilliantly woven, thoughtful story of three
Indian born Brahmin sisters, renowned for their beauty,
brains, wealth and privileged position in the society of the
1970’s. Two sisters emigrate to America and the other settles
in India. These three strikingly beautiful sisters in Calcutta,
feel the tug between tradition and freedom as they try to
meet the expectations of life and society. Tara the narrator is
also the young protagonist. This is reiterated throughout by
the jingle 'sisters three are we [...] as like as blossoms on a
tree', 21 (21) which is followed by Tara’s disclaimer, ‘but we
are not’. Padma, the first beautiful daughter, is shown leading
a hectic life in New Jersey. A young boy claiming to be
Padma’s illegitimate child appears one day in Tara’s house.
Tara’s entire conception of her perfect Bhattacharjee family is
called to question. This exposes an ugly under layer of
cultural disintegration. To Tara the boy symbolizes, ‘not the
India of doting grand parents, not the India of comfort and
 privilege, but the backyard of family, the compost heap.’ (27)
Parvati, ‘Miss Brains and Beauty’ shocked the family by choosing her own husband while at boarding school in America, and freeing the father from moral obligation. ‘Parvati, the pliable middle daughter had done the unthinkable: she’d made a love match.’ (51) Tara, the youngest, however let her father choose her husband. ‘There is a boy and we have found him suitable. Here is his picture. The marriage will be in three weeks’ (26).

Tara, the most affectionate and youngest unquestioningly submitted; ‘I married a man I had never met, whose picture and biography and bloodiness I approved of, because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market’. (26)

Tara recounts the utter lack of romanticism in her marriage. Only a few years later, she divorced him. She questions: ‘How could any woman, even a nineteen year old, submit to someone else’s choice, even a loving parent’s obviously, a recipe for disaster’. (26)

A modern woman raises a worthy question, ‘How can any girl with a certain amount of confidence and a sense of style surrender them both to the whims of fate and the manipulations of the marital market place?’(28)
The three sisters choose diverse paths, as they come of age in a changing world. The novel *Desirable Daughters*, is a study of marriage and family ties commitments and rebellions.

Bharati Mukherjee represented the conflict between a woman’s need to adhere to her parent’s old world of traditions, and her desire to be a part of contemporary American culture. The narrative is told from the perspective of Tara, the youngest sister who has moved farthest away. Now divorced from her parents-selected husband Bishwapriya, the first son of a privileged Indian family and a Silicon Valley billionaire. She is now a single parent-raising a son, Rabi in an ethnically mixed San Francisco neighborhood. Having embraced the American culture, Tara is living with her lover Andy, a Hungarian, Buddhist, exbiker and carpenter. She is at peace with her existence although she finds it difficult to explain her Calcutta roots to her American friends and to describe her American lifestyle to her Bengali parents. ‘I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien.’ (87) To most Americans India is a total mystery. It is enormous, and is incomprehensibly divided along racial, regional, religious and historical lines.
Divorce was out of question in the Bengali families of the nineteen sixties in India. So she never admits that she is divorced to her family or friends. Parvati says, ‘We don’t even mention your divorce to friends and relatives here. I don’t mean that we lie, or that we are ashamed or anything, but we don’t let the wrong questions come up’. (97)

Padma, the eldest, condemned Tara for her divorce. According to her, ‘Tara had become too, “American” meaning self engrossed [...] Things are never perfect in marriage, a woman must be prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime – and to model herself on Sita, Savitri, and Behula, the virtuous wives of Hindu myth’. (134)

The novel is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and a contemporary American story of a woman who has, in many ways, broken with tradition and still remains tied to her native country.

Mukherjee has made frequent references to ‘Loreto House’ in the novel. Loreto House is a girls’ school in Calcutta run by Missionary Irish nuns. Good Indian daughters were always sent to Loreto. Loreto House has a reputation of producing cultured young women.

For Hindu girls, entry into an exclusive catholic convent school depended upon exhibiting flair without flash, class without pretension, a society name without
notoriety. In return, convent education guaranteed poise, English proficiency, high level contacts, French language skills, and confident survival in whatever future the gods or the communists might dole out. (28)

Bharati Mukherjee herself studied in Loreto House. Loreto, had an exceptionally advanced teaching of literature taught by the Irish nuns.

Bharati Mukherjee’s is a global life story that echoes major themes of the past century—the death of colonialism, the rise of the third world, mass migration, the conflict between faith and tradition even the pangs of terrorism and violence. John Habich says that except that Tara the narrator, is the youngest of three girls and Mukherjee, is the second child ‘Mukherjee’s family is much like that of the Bhattacharjees in her novel. Prominent Hindus from East Bengal, their identities were circumscribed by caste, religion and gender’. 22

Mukherjee, remembers her own widowed grandmother confronting Colonialist troops and fighting for the rights of the repressed women. Tara Bhattacharjee opens her story with a legend about her namesake Tara Lata, the Tree Bride, a woman of an earlier era whose arranged marriage as a five year old child was invalidated by Cobra Goddess Manasha, who fatally bit the child bridegroom on the eve of the
wedding ceremony. Such customs continue to exist in India. There are many such girls as Tara Lata married to trees, so that they can have a life on earth, a place in society where they will not be considered out-castes and finally a place in Heaven. Hinduism treats widows as unlucky. Mukherjee states:

When I had first written the Tree Bride section, I didn’t realize that what would become important to me was not merely the Tree Bride as the iconic myth – the free person who turned adversity into opportunity – but by the end of that draft, Tara the modern narrator, realizes that she now is the family chronicler. In writing up history she is going to reframe it in order to tell herself a myth to survive by.  

The novel however, begins with the most American of all searches, the desire to trace one’s ancestry. ‘On the other hand, until last year when I finally yielded to that most American of impulses, or compulsions, a “root search”. (17)

For no perceivable reason, Tara felt a profound similarity to Tara Lata. Tara, too, had two sisters. Tara desires to explore the world. ‘I have had the time, the motivation, and even the passion to undertake this history. When my friends, my child or my sisters ask me why, I say, I am exploring the making of a consciousness’. (5)
Tara is fascinated by an ancestor, her almost namesake, Tara Lata, who was a victim of the archaic custom of child marriage. Mukherjee says:

I wanted to write about age and culture of Diaspora at a hinge moment in both India’s and America’s history. Things are changing so fast. In the nineteenth century, Tara Lata, the Tree Bride, had an identifiable enemy. The bad guys were the British. Colonialism must be fought. Because of misfortune, she was freed to live her life, as she wanted to; she could devote it to helping the freedom fighters.24

Mukherjee has used an epigraph, as a pointer to the definition of life. It is a Sanskrit verse that she found in Upper Haight area, adapted by Octavio Paz and then translated into English by Eliot Weinberger. ‘Adapted’ means to make suitable or fit as for a new use or for different conditions. ‘No one behind, no one ahead. The path the ancients cleared has closed. And the other path, everyone’s path, easy and wide, goes nowhere. I am alone and find my way’.25

The epigraph defines the path of life, which the ancients selected and which does not make sense to the modern people. This path is no more relevant. Ancient wisdom is inadequate. Each individual has to carve his own path and independently has to find his own solutions to life’s problems. Mukherjee says:
This is the globalization that we really want to prize and that we each take from each other’s heritages what we need and sew it together into our own heritage. The verse has to do with the impossibility of copying tradition and at the same time, needing not to be simply in the terrain of rugged individualism, but deciding what to discard from past traditionalism and what to take from experimentation and individualism until you can find a balance that suits just you, rather than a whole community.²⁶

In an interview Mukherjee was asked to identify what traits she shared with Tara Bhattacharjee. Her reply is stated below:

The fact that I’ve relocated to want to know about my roots, I’ve come to understand in a deeper way the complicated heritage. So I think of myself as a Hindu American, who came to USA very young, speaking very fluent English, having had a very British education. And learning about who I am [...] the mixing together [...] learning more deeply as an adult the culture that I had inherited and grafting on to the American cult that I have very willingly and enthusiastically adopted.²⁷

The novel commences in 1879 in an East Bengal village, with a wedding. The father of the child-bride is a traditionalist even though he is a lawyer specializing in English law. The twelve-year old child groom dies of snakebite and Tara Lata is consequently married to a tree. The family labels the bride as inauspicious. The bride’s father takes his daughter home, as the tragedy produces a rift between the two families. The father saves her from the life of absolute humiliation and torment by marrying her to a tree. A Bengali woman could
not go to heaven unless she was married, because the
tradition was to worship God with the husband as proxy. ‘A
lifetime’s virginity, a life without a husband to worship as
God’s proxy on earth, and thus, the despairing life of a
woman doomed to be reincarnated’. (14)

Remaining single and alone for the rest of her life, she
ultimately became an independent woman and a freedom
fighter. Nearly a century later Tara, the thirty-six year old
narrator returns to the same village with her son. Like her,
Tara Bhattacharjee is the youngest of three sisters belonging
to a Bengali Brahmin family. Each of the three Bhattacharjee
daughters was named after the Goddess, in the hope that
they would survive and prosper. The three sisters, Padma,
Parvati and Tara are born exactly three years apart from each
other.

My oldest sister, Padma, was born eighty years after
that marriage ceremony in the Shoondar Bon. My
second sister, Parvati, was born on the same date,
three years later, and I came along with the same
birthday three years after that. Yes, we did our
calculations and privately celebrated the same October
night as our collective inception day. (21)

The three sisters grow up in Calcutta in an upper class
family. Outwardly they are alike as three peas in a pod. In
later life, however, they conduct themselves in highly
individual manners. Padma now resides in New Jersey with
her husband. The middle sister Parvati is married to a Bengali Brahmin and lives in Bombay. Tara, the narrator, is the youngest of all, was married by arrangement, at the age of nineteen to Bish Chatterjee. Now, divorced from her parent-selected husband, Tara lives in San Francisco, with her adolescent son Rabi. She is having an affair with a red-bearded Buddhist ex-biker and carpenter whom Bish calls 'Tara's mistri'.

Tara, who had embraced the freedom of American life, had begun to feel claustrophobic with her traditional Bengali husband. Bish is a millionaire. He is the president of a huge Microsoft-like Corporation.

Their divorce happened:

because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go? I wanted to work, but would people think that Bish Chatterjee couldn't support his wife? In his Atherton years, as he became better known on the American scene—a player, an adviser, a pundit—he also became, at home, more of a traditional Indian. (82)

The couple divorce but stay in touch. 'We were on friendly terms. Rabi still had a father and I got occasional good advice from some one who still looked out for me'. (207)
Bish is a typical specimen of the Bengali Indian husband, ‘Bish is generous and protective; he has more than enough to provide. Indian men, whatever their faults, are programmed to provide for their wives and children’. (27)

According to Bharati Mukherjee, Bish is a composite character, ‘Bish is based on what I imagined the bridegroom would have been like that had been chosen for me’. 

Bish looked for a school for Rabi like the ones in Calcutta, and not finding one, created it. Since Bish had been recognized as a genius from his earliest school days, anything less than perfection from Rabi had to be a veiled attack on the standards he had set for himself. Bish complains of Rabi’s carelessness. ‘He was too fanciful, but not sufficiently bold. Life was all a matter of shaping up and hitting one’s mark, satisfying expectations, achieving a quota. Repudiations of reality were destined to die a dishonorable death’. (153).

Bengali mothers are famous for overestimating the brilliance of their sons, but Bengali fathers never do that. Bish had been hypercritical of Rabi, ‘[...] constantly finding fault, accusing him of wasting time drawing cartoons and memorizing old comic routines from used record albums’. (134).
Bish wanted Rabi to be an exact replica of himself ‘hardworking, respectful, brilliant’ (154) Bish Chatterjee stuck to his moral values. He believed that, ‘America made children soft in the brain as well as the body; it weakened the moral fiber. They grew up without respect for family and tradition’. (154)

The narrative moves on with the arrival of a young man into Tara’s comfortable life in San Francisco. Tara is caught up in the mystery of a stranger who claims to be the illegitimate child of a secret alliance between her eldest sister Padma, and a Bengali Christian, Ronald Dey. He says he is Chris Dey and is looking for her sister Padma, who he claims is his mother.

Tara is outraged, to her it is unthinkable, that her sister could have become a mother out of wedlock. Tara had naively believed that women from their background could never commit adultery and, even if that happened, her sister could never have abandoned her baby.

How can a mother deny her son? It’s unnatural, especially a Bengali mother, whose possessiveness makes all Jewish and Italian mothers of books and movies as remote and bloodless as English mothers packing their children off to boarding school. (39)
Tara suspects that the boy is a fraud. According to Chris Dey he was left in an orphanage immediately after his birth. Recently he was informed by his distant but responsible father, of his biological mother’s identity. The boy briefed himself about her whereabouts. Tara finds it impossible to get answers from either of her elder sisters. Unable to help herself, Tara decides to spy on and to uncover the truth about her eldest sister, ‘I can’t deliver bad news. I can’t make ultimatums. I can only [...] what? Soothe. Oldest daughters ruffle feathers, cut loose, have adventures, middle and youngest make compromises, settle them down’. (46)

Tara had remained in touch with her sisters but they had only exchanged pleasantries. This complicates Tara’s efforts to uncover the truth. Tara is closer to her middle sister Parvati. She musters courage and with great efforts contacts Parvati in India. Parvati does not discuss anything openly and moves on to other matters. Now Tara feels bound to report the matter to the police. At the same time she also wants investigation on her own. Parvati warns Tara that she may be dealing with a dangerous criminal. For Tara this plays out as a problem with Rabi. Rabi openly decides to go against her and her sister, representatives of a culture that he treats an inexplicable and personally repugnant. ‘Oh, everyone’s a liar and a crook except the perfect Bhattcharjee sisters.’ (89)
His anger reaches its height:

You’ve decided he is the liar because you called all the way over to Bombay to talk to your lying bitch of a sister—don’t shush me, Ma, I’ll call her that as long as I live. I’m getting to know you real well. Ma. You’ll believe anything she says, and You’ll play along with the big bitch’s cover up and the won’t lift a finger to help him. Who’s going to give Chris the benefit of the doubt. (90).

Rabi continues to see Christopher. Tara fails to deal with this successfully, ‘For the first time in my life. I want to slap him scream at him, and tell him, to shut up, but parents can’t feel that way.’(40)

She thinks Rabi is through with her flawed mothering. She couldn’t hide her pain and starts crying. ‘I cry too easily and once I start, I can’t stop. Every thing is collapsing, there no one to stop it, and no one to save me, no one cares’. (91)

She screams:

It is a parent child thing I never went through, a teenager, single mom scenario I never thought I’d have to live through, or something every immigrant so much we want to communicate, so much that they don’t want to hear? (40)

Parvati in a series of letters, delivered to Tara by courier is no less sure that Padma had no involvement with Ronald Dey. Tara recalls how her mother emotionally made her understand the possibility of Padma’s marriage to Ronald
Dey. ‘Passion like Didi’s is foreign to our family; recklessness unknown.’ (31) Tara had learnt this secretly.

I seem to remember Mummy telling Didi something like, if you want to marry this man, you better know what you’re getting into, because you don’t just marry his family, his religion, his biases, his Politics, and if all those things are totally different from yours as they are bound to be, then you can prepare yourself for a lifetime of being lonely. (101)

In the sequence of events, Chris Dey confronts Tara. He becomes more adamant, ‘You ask what I want? I want what everyone has. I want to belong. I want a mother, a family, auntie, cousins’. (39)

The boy’s existence threatens Tara, ‘It’s good to discover my roots but not if they rise up and strangle me. I wanted to be persuaded by cool logic’. (138)

Tara resorts to other measures like phone calls. She phones Padma who does not return any of Tara’s calls. Chris handed over the letter to Tara. The letter reads:

The bearer of this letter is my son and your nephew, Mr. Christopher Dey. His mother is your sister, Padma. She and I had a love affair, for which I am totally responsible and have borne entire guilt and financial burden. This occurred when we were all very young in Calcutta in the summer of 1973. Christopher is the manifestation of that behavior. (41)

In the letter Ronald begs Tara to facilitate a meeting between Padma and Chris. The letter provides clue to Tara
but ‘I want to deny his claim. I want to deny it on behalf of our family honor, but the evidence is mounting.’ (39)

Against Andy’s wishes and promises she reports the matter to the police department. When she returns home, she finds that Andy has learned of her visit to the police. He is angry and leaves her. ‘And then he was gone; he left me. My Zen Master just disappeared from my life as cleanly as he’d entered it’. (170)

Tara, then, corresponded with the boy’s father and Ronald’s reply is very curious. He claims that he wrote no such letter. With Ronald’s letter Tara is able to determine that Christopher is a fraud. However there is a real Chris, and Padma is very likely to be his mother. Ronald in his letter, warns Tara of the unscrupulous forces who seek to destroy the incautious and the innocent, ‘[...] didi’s abandoned baby and all the reasons behind it; the tentacles of the Dawood gang and its poisonous spread, and Bish’s money from the signal invention of our time, were all linked and they were all coalescing around me’. (234)

There is a time lapse between Part I and Part II of the novel. Part II opens with Tara’s visit to New York to see Padma. ‘I landed in New York, ready for the “sisterly chat”,'
ready to find out, once and for all, the story of Ron Dey’. (173).

Tara’s determination had already cost her, her lover, Andy and she is worried but determined to confront her sister. Padma and her husband Harish greet her in a casual manner that seemed to tell her, not to expect much. Tara attempts to discuss the matter with Didi, who refuses to talk about such a ridiculous assertion. Padma continues to refuse to acknowledge anything. Tara calls the Sikh detective assigned to her case. This Indian officer informs Tara that there is an infestation of gangs in the United States from India. These gangs prey on Indians with money. The officer warns her that her family is a target for a kidnapping. Padma briskly bundles Tara off for a shopping spree in preparation for a welcoming party in Jackson Heights, New York’s Indian district for the Elite. She used Tara to showcase the jewelry and saris she marketed. Tara had been out of saris and gold accessories for years. ‘I felt like an American bride trying to please her Indian in-laws’. (196). A big Indian party follows in which Tara dressed in her Indian finery, becomes flirtatious with the men and even enjoys her role. While on the East Coast she receives the disturbing news that Dr. Ronald Dey has been killed in an automobile accident. Tension mounts for Tara but Padma remains indifferent to the news. Ronald’s
death does not mean anything to her. 'I’m very sorry, but what am I supposed to feel? People we knew over there are dying every day'. (210).

Jack, the detective faxes pictures for Tara to look at in the hopes that she can identify the man acting as Christopher. Tara does identify one of the men as the false Christopher. He is a criminal, a member of the underworld Indian Dawood gang. Jack warns Tara that she, Bish and Rabi are in danger. Chris Dey, the imposter, is after Tara’s ex-husband’s money.

Mukherjee has used the gang as a vehicle to comment upon current, related issues of immigration and crime, rather than an event in Tara’s life. A different kind of terrorism plays a role in the novel. Mukherjee concedes:

I used part of what I had experienced myself in Jasmine, the hot dog vendor who is a refugee, a terrorist. Here in Desirable Daughters, when I used the Dawood gang I was anticipating the Daniel Pearl kind of kidnapping, which is going on. The Dawood gang was involved very recently in the attack on the American Centre in Calcutta my hometown. But it was not until the World Trade Centre was demolished that the average citizen began to realize how, like Tara, you can be living your life, immersed in your own personal conflict.29

Tara later learns that the real Christopher is also dead. Both father and son were killed on the same day. Tara goes to San Francisco to spend sometime with Rabi and Bish. She
prepares a Bengali feast for them. Tara is fulfilling her traditional role by providing nourishment to the family. Later Tara and Bish make love. This is followed by the explosion of a bomb that destroys Tara’s house. Rabi comes safely out of the house. Bish carries Tara through the fire and suffers third degree burns. In an inversion of rituals, the holy fire that had acted as ‘sakshi’ or witness to their marriage now inflicts them with burns.

Part III of the novel brings Tara and Rabi to India. They stay first with Parvati and then with Tara’s parents. Parvati is married to a Bengali Brahmin Aurobindo. They live in a spectacular fifteenth floor, high rise apartment overlooking the Arabian Sea. Parvati is Indian, to the point of allowing her husband’s relatives to be houseguests for weeks at their luxurious apartment. Parvati’s easy life with servants, drivers, two sons and other amenities at her disposal is described by Tara as a ‘very stressed out life’. Parvati and Aurobindo continue living as other traditional Indian couples do. Parvati and Aurobindo hide their emotions and pretend that things are all right and they are enjoying the permanent bond of marriage. In her letter, she begs Tara, I hope you aren’t doing bad things to yourself like taking prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Please, please, don’t become that
Americanized’. (105) Tara is fed up with the life of pretension. The following lines picture her restlessness:

That world is gone, we’re here, we have to stop pretending, we have to stop living in a place that’s changed on us while we’ve been away. I don’t want to be a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber, didi. I can’t deal with modern India, it’s changed too much and too fast, and I don’t want to live in a half India kept on life-support. (184)

When Tara arrives India, she spends her first day shopping for a wig; ‘[...] to cover the slow-growing chopped stubble; otherwise people who know nothing of our divorce will assume my widowhood’. (284)

As a result of the fire in her house she lost her hair. She wanted to buy a wig to cover her shaven head; otherwise people in India would take her to be a widow. Widowhood is considered inauspicious in India. Looking at a widow, women fear that even through interaction, a similar fate may befall them.

Tara, then goes to meet her parents who have left Calcutta and retired to the holy city-Rishikesh. Another aspect of India shocked Tara. Her mother does not want treatment for Parkinsons disease that is damaging her and wants to die in Rishikesh.

She wasn’t going to scurry from specialist to specialist. Her husband would not leave the mountains, and she
would not leave him. Goddess Kali, the destroyer of time, the dissipater of darkness, the scourge of sinfulness, I too beg you to free me from earthly terrors and longings. (292)

Tara and Rabi make a pilgrimage to the home of the legendary Tree Bride, who as the young widow remarried to a tree, retreats to her father’s house and makes it a refuge for the poor, the sick and finally the fighters for Indian independence. She was dragged from her home in 1944 by colonial authorities who simply her death six days later.

In the house Rabi finds a trunk of old magazines and newspapers as well as many of Tara’s Loreto House essays which he reads reverently and admires. They also browse some of the books on the history of Tara Lata. These books serve as a source of inspiration for Tara. ‘These books are more than enough, I said. May be the years of blackness had began to lift’. (305)

Desirable Daughters constantly refers to the story of Tara Lata, the tree bride. Through the impact of the past upon the present, Mukherjee examines ‘[...] the stubborn potency of myth in the face of overwhelming change,’ in the lives of the three desirable daughters. Tara, like her ancestor, has a stoic attitude towards life. Unlike other heroines by Mukherjee, she is calm and peaceful. She furthers her peace
by visiting Rishikesh and her ancestral village in Bengal. Tara of *The Tiger's Daughter* does not find peace in India while Tara Bhattacharjee comes to find peace here. She terminates all identity problems by identifying with Tara Lata. She realizes that Indian history too is full of inspiring examples like Tara Lata. The novel combines her pride in her Indian heritage and her gratitude at the opportunities in America.

The novel opens poetically. 'In the mind’s eye, a one way procession of flickering oil lamps sways along the muddy shanko between rice paddies and flooded ponds, and finally disappears into a distant wall of impenetrable jungle'. (3)

On the outskirts of this jungle, Bharati Mukherjee establishes the origins of her narrator, Tara Bhattacharjee, the youngest of three desirable daughters of a prosperous Bengali family. The girls had been raised according to the social norms and traditions of India. Mukherjee shares some traits with the family. She admits:

There are some parallels between Tara and me. Like Tara I’m one of three sisters. Like Tara I had a sheltered girlhood in Calcutta. Like the three Bhattacharjee sisters, my sister and I came to the US and chose very different lifestyles. I started this novel with the idea that I wanted to write about three women who find themselves far from their hometown, and who, then, have to rethink what “home” means, and re-invent each in her own way – a space where she feels she most belongs. The adventures of Bhattacharjee sisters are totally imagined. 31
The main idea of the story revolves around Tara’s life and everything she has ever believed to be true about her families and sisters being turned upside down by the sudden appearance of a young man who claims to be a close relative.

I felt myself collapsing suddenly, like a balloon hitting the ceiling and darting out of control all over the room. I love my sisters. It’s the purest love I’ve ever known. Hate is the last thing I could feel for them; it’s the only emotion that never entered our little sisterhood. (40)

Desirable Daughters, lays out the lives of three sisters all brought up in strict conformity to domestic customs and social conventions of a conservative and traditional life.

Mukherjee offers a striking portrait of three sisters living in two worlds: the traditional Brahmin society of upper-class Calcutta, where they were born, and the secular world of the modern west they moved to as adults. A nice hybrid, combining the suspense of a good thriller with the atmosphere and texture of a family epic.

Moving between generations, Mukherjee blends together a fascinating story of the sisters’ ancestors, their childhood memories from India’s history. Robert Olen Butler comments, 'In a world increasingly challenged and defined by the collision of cultures, the collision of past ways and present ways, Bharati Mukherjee is writing achingly compassionate, ravishingly beautiful, absolutely essential books. And Desirable Daughters is one of her best.'
Praising the narration, Amy Tan says, ‘an amazing literary
feat and a masterpiece of story telling’. In William Kennedy’s
words, ‘Bharati Mukherjee has written a rich and suspenseful
novel in *Desirable Daughters*, a beautifully written family
story of the eternal pull of ancient Indian tradition on even
the most contemporary of lives. She is a splendid writer’.  
*Times Out New York* reviewed the novel, ‘It’s a real drama lies
in the way the three sisters reconcile themselves to clashing
values’.

An important idea to address throughout the novel is
the clash of culture and how it affects identity and persons.
Mukherjee acknowledges:

Cultural clashes and coalescences have always been
very important in understanding who we are as people
and as individuals. Imperial literature, postcolonial
literature, first contact, literature in North America –
just to name few sub genres have spoken to the
importance of addressing the process of specific
cultural encounters. In my fiction specially in *Desirable
Daughters*, I’m interested in exploring the ways in
which we, who are exposed to many cultures because
we live in the age of globalization and information
technologies into a new and singular whole.

The *Book List* review claims, ‘*Desirable Daughters*
explores the continuum between tradition and change as it
chips away at superficialities to reach the core of human
experience’.
Manju Sampat focuses on the immigrant aspect, 'Bharati Mukherjee is an old hand at chronicling immigrant fiction in America today. In *Desirable Daughters*, her latest novel, Mukherjee endeavors to telescope entire life times as she weaves a masterful story that moves effortlessly between generations'.

M.S. Nagrajan, praises the fascinating language of *Desirable Daughters*, '[...] with its gorgeous and evocative prose and rising crescendo of a spy thriller, *Desirable Daughters* reads with an absorption bordering on compulsion'.

Margaret Gunning highlights the Indianness, 'Steeped in Indian culture old and new, it keeps bogging down in tight little circles of detail that create an atmosphere of cramped inwardness, even suffocation.'

Deborah Mason, refers to the parenting aspect:

This wise novel comes with a warning; beware a world in which traditional well springs of family and ethnic origin become so diluted that they make no claim on you at all and leave nothing to rebel against, improvise on, or, finally come home to.

The *Publishers Weekly* review identifies and applauds the maturity of the writer:
It should take nothing away from the achievements of new young writer’s of south Asian origin to state that Mukherjee eclipses all of them in her new novel, the highlighting of her career to date. Only a writer with mature vision, a sense of history and a long-nurtured observations of the indo-cultures and flash points where they intersect.

Desirable Daughters is set partly in America and partly in India. Mukherjee once again deals with the adjustments between India and America. Thus, Tara Bhattacharjee, the youngest of the three daughters of a well off tea-merchant of Calcutta, struggles to reconcile to her single existence in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the mother of a teenage son and ex-wife of the most successful company genius ‘poster boy of entrepreneurship’ of Silicon Valley. In the course of this novel, she experiences the tug of her family and her own inherited traditional culture. The story is told from Tara’s point of view. The narrative takes us from Calcutta to San Francisco to Bombay to Jackson Heights. The cultural, historic and geographic details are rendered in great detail. Mukherjee, gives a vivid picture of the India of her childhood - a world that has changed a great deal. She investigates the effects of conservative upbringing on the three sisters.

Desirable Daughters is the exploration of the first generation Indian-American cultural-clash and identity crises. Mukherjee describes the essential dilemma of Bengali culture
in the quoted lines. The feelings of restlessness and alienation represent the theme of the novel.

Bengali culture trains one to claim the father’s birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh home. Although she has never seen it, [...] when I speak of this to my American friends – the iron clad identifiers of region, language caste and subcaste – they call me “over determined” and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crisis and feelings of alienation, I of course am right when everyone knows your business and every name declares your identity, where no landscape fails to contain a plethora of human figures, even a damaged consciousness, even loneliness become privileged commodities. (33-34)

Mukherjee uses the tale of another Tara, Tara Lata, to evoke an India in which daughters were given away in child marriages. The experiences of the ancient Tara in a Bengali village of the past are juxtaposed with those of the modern day Tara, a modern Indian woman in the America of the present. The contemporary woman – Tara imagines the child bride; ‘A Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her’. (4)

After Tara Lata’s would-be husband dies of a snake bite, she is united with a god who comes down to earth as a tree to save her from a lifetime of disgrace and misery. The girl becomes a heroine in rural Bengal as a spiritual healer and
martyred freedom fighter. The narrator of the novel evaluates herself and her sister in terms of that heroism. 'Each generation of women in my family has discovered in her something new. Even in far-flung California, the Tree-Bride speaks again.'(289) This story linking Tara to her family and to India, to her past and ultimately, her future, frames the narrative. Tara heads into her own story. 'Tara Lata Gangooly had turned the tragedy of her husband’s death and a lifetime’s virginity into a model of selfless saintliness. My story was different, perhaps even an inversion'. (290)

The novel shows that the past is not something that stays neat in a frame but is a force that influences the present and the future. Mukherjee’s writings show the influence of Hindu mythology in which animals can transform into gods and monsters and gods can transform into people. She applies this tradition of changing forms to the mythology of America in which people are allowed to think of themselves as American, undergoing their own transformation. The novel pushes the story deeply in the direction of the past. Moving from generation to generation, past and present, Mukherjee weaves a portrait of a modern yet traditional Indo-American family with a secret at its core and a loyalty to preserve its pride. Lee Siegel says that, 'The desirable daughters of this novel represent three ways of relating, as South Asian
women, to modernity and the west, three ways of understanding the manifold meanings of culture and self."  

In Hindu societies especially in over protected patriarchal families, daughters are not at all desirable. Mukherjee gives beautiful and sexy aspects to all three daughters in the novel. Sex is the tool that enables these three sisters to break out and liberate themselves. In 1970’s an Indian father required his daughters to behave at all times like modest Indian ladies. Mr. Bhattacharjee needed three desirable sons-in-law for his well educated, groomed English speaking, beautiful daughters. Like Wife referred to the conventional, defined role of wives in Indian society, the title Desirable Daughters delineates the role requirements of good Indian daughters. Good daughters are supposed to be obedient, modest, and skilled. They always marry the man the family chooses for them. They follow dress and behavior codes. They become good wives and daughters-in-law. All the aspects of womanhood are outlined in great detail in ancient Indian tradition and literature. In the Ramayana, Dusharatha says to Kausalaya: ‘As wife, friend, servant, and as sister too, also as mother has she been to me’.  

Mukherjee defines these three sisters in the novel. They are trained highly in desirable mannerisms. They are
given suitable schooling and very correct environment. Yet they cannot ultimately accomplish this because they follow and give into their own initiatives rather than follow the dictates of patriarchy. This pursuit of initiatives leads them into highly "undesirable" situations. The two elder sisters make mistakes, but their father is able to cover up. Once they are pulled out of that protective halo, they act out all their fancies. Mukherjee believes that only America gives one the opportunity for wonderful, melodramatic errors.

Padma, the eldest and most glamorous, is a 'glitterati', married to Harish Mehta, a non Bengali businessman previously married and with grown up children. Padma is a multicultural performance artist staging Indian mythological evenings. 'Padma Mehta is a television personality. She is an icon among Bengalis of the tristate area. 'What she wears and what she recommends are taken as fashion statements in the community.' (231) And Harish Metha took advantage of her beauty, 'her radiance helped wipe out his past, her past, India, his former marriage, his children in Texas and California, and his multiple failures to establish himself as entrepreneur, consultant, money manager, and venture capitalist'. (183)
Her lifestyle is superficial. She leads a traditional Bengali life. She poses to be ‘more Indian, than Indians’. She carefully and consciously maintains a façade of Indianness.

She captures more of the old Indian world in the alien land. ‘Her clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and Indian friends, Indian clothes and food and a charming accent had seemed to me a cowardly way of coping with a new country’. (134)

Tara, in New Jersey, observes the variety of Indian cultures that have invented themselves in the United States. She meets many Indians leading double lives, unwilling to be defined by name and caste the way they are in India. Indian communities in America are too big a force not to be recognized. They have carved a separate identity. Bharati Mukherjee is delivering a commentary on today’s Indian American community. Padma does not behave in a desirable way. It is gradually revealed that she has an illegitimate child. As Tara watched her:

It seemed that a mask was descending on her face, or that a mask had been lifted. Every secret line and care vice, every irregularity every feature that a long, hard life could bloat or pull or flatten spread for a moment then stopped. (221)
The first defection was by the middle sister Parvati. ‘[...] jumping the marriage queue’ she chose a husband on her own, a young Indian M.B.A. from Tufts, named Aurobindo.

The third and the youngest was the only daughter to succumb to an arranged marriage and later go through a divorce. She then lived with her lover who was a Buddhist American and a son. She is the only one of the sisters who listens to her father and lets him find a husband for her. Later she realizes that these traditions do not suit any of the sisters, the way they suited the patriarch, the Tree Bride’s father or the Tree Bride herself.

Mukherjee weaves a tale of mystery, intrigue and family secrets. The father cannot protect his daughters from changing cultures. The respectable Bengali family’s precious reputation turned out to be a mere illusion. Tara says to Bish, ‘We dressed alike, we looked alike, we even had the same birthday. In the ancestral long ago that might have guaranteed a certain predictability of life long similarity. Look at us, Bish! It’s all an illusion’. (266).

Of the three sisters Tara is the most removed from her family’s traditions and its inheritance until events cause her to resurrect her weakened relationships with her homeland and her siblings. ‘The gap between youngest daughter and
oldest, the disparity of our marriages and the path our immigrations have taken, have made us strangers’. (94)

Despite all pressures, the relationship between the three sisters strengthens. It also helps in reestablishing their trust and loyalty to their family. The complex plot of the novel explores many things. The old age virtues, of the upbringing of desirable daughters, are contrasted with the changing values of the New World they have come to embrace. Tara in an attempt to fabricate an identity outside marriage separates her essential self from anything defined as foreign. ‘The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes me invisible. I am not “Asian”, which is reserved for what in outdated textbooks used to be called “Oriental” I’m all things. (78)

She believes that such invisibility is liberating. ‘I feel not just invisible but heroically invisible, a border crashing claimant, of all people’s legacies’. (79)

Love is a slippery word when both of Tara’s partners bring their own definition. For Andy her lover, ‘Love is having fun with someone’. (21) For her ex-husband Bish, love had been, ‘indistinguishable from status and honors’. (27)

Tara’s quest for identity throws up new revelations. Tara, to her dismay, discovers that Rabi, her son, whom she thinks is an artistic child born to achieve great things like his
father, is a homosexual. 'Ma, I am gay.' (164) Rabi has a different sexual orientation. Tara accepts her son’s homosexuality very stoically. She calmly comes to terms with it. Tara seemed very weak and uncertain of herself and her desires. Her stoicism is a result of mythological reliving of Tara Lata’s life. She resolves the issue of her son’s situation well. The acceptance result in bringing mother and son closer than before.

Today’s post-modern society has let go of its moral compass and is learning towards making decisions based on feelings and a ‘let live’ attitude. Gay, in addition to meaning ‘merry’, ‘joyous’ or ‘glad’ also means homosexual’. The word gay has had sexual meaning since at least the 19th century. In Victorian England, female and male prostitutes were called gay, because they dressed ‘gaily’.

Rabi is the product of globalization. The teenager is a most typical example of a California kid liberating himself by cross-cultural angst, open to enlarging himself with ties to his Indian origins. Mukherjee has shown him as a specimen of cross-cultural upbringing. In Rabi, she brings out the conflict of imposing an Indian pattern of parent hood.

Tara, is forced all these circumstances to seek out her past and connect once again with the family from which she
had separated. Bharati Mukherjee explores the socio-cultural history of Bengal, blending it with personal family history, which is transmitted down the generations. Central to her story is the impact of western culture on the Indian Bengali society. Tara is very close to Bharati Mukherjee. Tara is tying her original Bengali self to a new American self and discovering that cross-cultural values learnt at Loreto House still come to her rescue. Tara’s own journey through life oscillates between India and America. Her experiences are tied up and expressed in Tara’s mythological reliving of the Tree Bride. Tara and Tara Lata share certain characteristics. Both are natural storytellers and strong willed characters. Similar to the Tree Bride, Tara too believes in the spirit of liberation. Tara’s mature handling of life’s problem like Padma’s illegitimate child, desertion of Andy, coming to terms with Rabi’s homosexuality etc. represent, the final moments of liberation. As she strolls with her son Rabi, along the jungle pathway where the Tree Bride once walked, she has a vision of what lies ahead:

The road gives way to crushed stone, rising above ponds on either side. This is called a shanko. I say a word I have not used in my life and only now suddenly remember. Many words are flooding in and the trail ahead, as far as I can see, is lighted by kerosene and naphtha lamps held by the children of fruit vendors sitting on the carts. (310)
Her experiences help her to become one with Tara Lata. She shares the experiences of Tara Lata. The visionary experience is symbolic of peace and spirituality in India. This enriching visit of Tara of *Desirable Daughters* is in contrast to the Tara, of *The Tiger’s Daughter*, who comes to India in quest of peace but finds discord and desperation. Bharati Mukherjee has finally found peace. The writer has finally resolved the turmoil that reigned in the lives of her other heroines. Tara, Dimple, Jasmine, Hannah and Debby, all went through deep distress and violent reactions. Tara in *Desirable Daughters* finds solace in the image of her patient and saintly ancestor Tara Lata.

Bharati Mukherjee’s journey as a writer has finally brought her to the point where tension has evaporated. The protagonist returns to rural Bengal and discovers peace and tranquility. The questions of identity are resolved through achieving a sense of oneness with Tara Lata. Tara Lata becomes the epitome of ideal Indian womanhood. She carved a positive life and did not give into repression and conservative tradition. Mukherjee proudly projects the exotic and fascinating Tree-Bride, who was as multi-faceted as any Indian Goddess, as redeemer of womankind.
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Chapter 5

Conclusion
Bharati Mukherjee has committed herself to celebrating the melting pot culture of America. The complex journey of immigration and the problems that immigrants undergo are recurrent themes in Bharati Mukherjee’s novels. The female protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee’s novels are characterized by their sense of rootlessness and restlessness and their attempts to be rooted. Mukherjee has herself undergone the traumatic process of acculturation. She comments:

We immigrants have experienced rapid changes in history of the nations in which we lived. When we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society. Our lives are remarkable, often heroic [...] although they (the fictional immigrant characters) are often hurt or depressed by setbacks in their new lives and occupations, they do not give up. They take risks they wouldn’t have taken in their old comfortable worlds to solve their problems. As they change citizenship, they are reborn.¹

Mukherjee’s heroines are either Indians living abroad or vice versa. Being an immigrant herself, Mukherjee tries to show the darker side of immigration. Her experiences first in Canada then the U.S. serve as subjects of her novels. Her writings proceed in an evolutionary manner. She says, ‘My themes are larger, my strategies more complex [...] I have put together my aesthetic manifesto: Multiculturalism / diversity are the key words.’²
She creates female characters, who break out, beyond the boundaries imposed on them by patriarchy and also by their race, class and economic status. Mukherjee’s novels are narratives of ‘emergence’. She depicts her heroines as fighters, who struggle hard and triumph over the obstacles in their way, and who take charge of their destinies by crossing cultural lines. What Mukherjee realises as essential is ‘[...] the finding of a new identity, the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture.’

Mukherjee’s heroines, in the beginning, all represent ordinary identity; they then lose their initial identity in the world and go on to construct and reconstruct their identities in response to different places. All these novels are female-oriented novels. Women hold central positions while the male characters remain on the outskirts and are realized only in relation to the central characters.

Bharati Mukherjee takes up multiple situations, pointing to one resolute theme-woman reshaping their identities in an alien culture. Her heroines represent a graph. Mukherjee tries to move them from the margin to the center, towards their empowerment and towards an affirmation of their identities. Her characters display an undying drive to build life with fragments. We as readers can measure the progress
made by them in realization of their dreams, beginning with unhappiness and distress. These heroines exemplify the growing change in the Indian women of this century. Mukherjee seems to be saying that the seeds of modernity were sown in the Indian dust. The Indian woman grows from a daughter-wife role into an independent identity. Dimple liberates herself by having an affair with a white man. Jasmine and Debby, opt for freedom through relationships with different men. Hannah goes for fulfillment of love to an Indian king. Tara Bhattacharjee, has a Buddhist as a lover.

In Mukherjee’s view the world is a complex mixture of people. Her characters are immigrants caught between two cultures Indian and American, as well as between traditional and modern life. Third world women struggle to achieve new identities in an alien culture. This struggle results from their sudden freedom from the bond of tradition that held them tightly, and this liberty leaves them oscillating in the new unfamiliar cultures. Both Tara and Dimple feel bewildered, as there is a fusion of Americanness and Indianness. Neither, can they take refuge in the old Indian self nor, in the American self. The outcome is a split personality. After spending seven years in the west, Tara Banerjee looks at her native country through changed eyes. She finds herself a total stranger in her native land. She is totally lost and confused. Longing for her own culture,
creates a conflict, and results in her unstable identity. She realizes that she burdened herself by choosing to live in the west.

Dimple migrates to the United States believing that America would welcome her. She soon encounters loneliness and wishes to return to Calcutta. She cannot adapt to the new surrounding. She fails in her attempt to be Americanized. Jasmine, an immigrant from the Third World to the United States, emerges as a heroic character who is determined to change her destiny and explore infinite possibilities. She constantly reinvents herself in order to fit whatever situation she finds, where as Hannah Easton, goes back to her roots to America, where she can find her true identity. In Debby’s case the definition of ‘belonging’ is different. She is a daughter of mixed parentage, her rootlessness and restlessness is depicted as one who belongs to two different continents. In Tara Bhattacharjee’s quest for identity, there is a clash between her traditional Brahmin roots and American preferences. When she lives in San Francisco, she experiences contrasting emotions regarding the diverse cultures and the migrant dilemmas. Mukherjee projects the two men in Tara’s life Bish and Andy, as symbols of the two cultures. Andy, the American projection, is the transient one.
Bharati Mukherjee also tackles up the problem of loss of culture. She probes into the depth of the consciousness of her central female characters. Her heroines are guided by a self-awareness, which propels them towards self-realization. From the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother, each protagonist strives for an identity of her own. In the words of Simone De Beauvoir, ‘One is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman [...] It is civilization as a whole but produces the creative [...] which is described as feminine.’

Bharati Mukherjee takes up a number of women’s issues. According to her, men get adjusted and absorbed in the alien culture, while women do not. She often deals with problems, which emerge after marriage. Marriage according to her is the experience which brings about major changes. Dimple and Tara Cartwright undergo traumatic experiences. Migration is thrust upon them as a consequence of marriage - a migration from one’s own former self to an imposed one. And this conflict gets multiplied with migration into another country. They have to discard all that their traditional upbringing had taught them about marriage. They have to transform it to suit their changing selves as they discover strange situations in the New World. Tara, in *The Tiger’s Daughter* was always under stress. She was conscious of her foreignness. She is troubled by rootlessness which persists in India also. Americanized Tara fails to
bring back her old sense of security and views India with the critical eye of a foreigner. When she was away from home, she had idealized her motherland and cherished nostalgic memories of it, but when she confronts the changed India, all her ideals collapse. Tara is totally confused. She cannot share her feelings even with her American husband. For David she is a foreigner and for her relatives an ‘outcaster’ who has polluted herself by marrying a man from another race. She finds herself oscillating between her feelings of rootlessness and lack of identity.

For Dimple, the desire to belong is a deep felt need but her neurotic behavior makes life both in India and in the U.S. equally restless. Dimple’s neurotic behavior and immaturity in Wife makes her stand apart from other heroines of Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee seems to be saying that the Indian upbringing falls short of American needs. Her neurotic behavior is furthered by the loneliness that she experiences in the United States. She shows no maturity in grasping the reality around her and attempts to fit into her surroundings. This culminates in the cold-blooded murder of Amit.

Bharati Mukherjee acknowledges that 'the kinds of women I write about ‘[...] are those who are adaptable. We have all been raised to please, been trained to be adaptable as wives, and that
adaptability is working to the women’s advantage when we come over as Immigrants. Immigrants like Jasmine find themselves constantly reinventing themselves in order to adapt to the constantly changing world. By depicting the odyssey of Jasmine, Mukherjee shows how immigrants survive in unique ways; how they cope with the new environment thrust upon them. Jasmine shows spirit and enthusiasm in learning to survive against all odds.

Among Mukherjee’s protagonists, Jasmine is the most representative of the independent modern woman. She is ambitious and adapts to every changed circumstance of life. She truly enjoys the benefits of immigration. She, very skillfully, falls in line with the behavioral patterns of American culture and carves a niche for herself. Similarly, Hannah Easton discovers that, ‘the survivor is the one who improvises, not follows, the rules.’ Mukherjee here, seems to be saying that those people can survive in an alien world who are flexible and can reshape themselves according to the circumstances. Hannah’s identity undergoes transformation during her restless moves from Salem to Stepney, Coromnadel to Devgad and then back to Salem. Both Hannah and Jasmine bury their past and emerge as real fighters. Mukherjee’s protagonists experience simultaneously, the capacity to be shocked and surprised by the cultural clash in the new
surrounding and their willingness to assimilate themselves in that new culture.

The main female characters, despite the differences in race, class and economic status viz. Dimple, Jasmine, Hannah, Debby are all have fluid identities rather than fixed ones. The protagonists’ names change as well as their residences. All novels explore the shifting identities of diasporic women, both in the United States and India. Mukherjee saw her Indianness ‘as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated’. All of them move beyond the rules set by patriarchy. They use sexuality and violence in power struggles with dominant authorities to move ahead in their quest. Mukherjee shows that the physical body merely serves as a vehicle for the inner self’s journey towards a higher plane. Mukherjee makes her readers realize that individuals are a series of identities, simultaneous identities. One should do away with the idea of fixed identity. To improvise identity, to see ourselves as an integral part of a changing world, one who fails to do so collapses. In the course of the novel *Jasmine*, the narrator uses eight different names as her story progresses. The narrator is Jyoti, each of her names represents a transitional self as she travels from Hasnapur, India to Baden, Iowa. She changes her identity in order to survive and continue her journey. Named Jyoti at birth she is transformed in each of her new locations, moving from Punjab to
Florida to New York to Iowa and finally to California. For each new metamorphosis, she acquires a new name—Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase and Jane. The name changes throughout the novel also herald the changes in physical relationships with different men. Mukherjee ends the novel with a nameless heroine, indicating the on-going quest. Jasmine defines her different identities through her associations with different men. Men somehow, prove women’s identity. She crosses several borders in her sexual encounters. Similarly Debby drops both her names, Faustine and Debby and adopts the new identity of Devi. When Gabriel transports Hannah Easton to India, she finds it very fascinating. She is alive to the life around her and steps forward in a quest of meaningful life. She leaves Gabriel on grounds of faithlessness and next sees his ship sinking. She herself should have been drowned but is saved by Raja Jadav Singh, only to become his Bibi afterwards. Hannah’s passionate imitation of her mother’s choice is visible in her relationship with Raja Jadav Singh.

Bharati Mukherjee repeats Hannah’s experience in the character of Debby. Both girls are brought up in conservative respectability by their adopted parents. When they come of age, they both choose to experiment with multiple lovers as both their mothers had done and both also defied the careful ‘respectability’ both the adoptive mothers had imparted. This represents a stage in a woman’s search for her
identity. Sharing or emulating the mother’s behavior defines her identity. Mukherjee in her novels uses sexuality as a channel to empower her heroines and give a shape to a new identity.

Mukherjee’s heroines die metaphorically in order to live their cherished dreams. It is the willingness of Debby, Jasmine, Hannah, Tara Bhattacharjee to murder their past selves that enables them to actively advance into unknown but promising futures. The future they choose have the potential for material and spiritual success. Mukherjee’s characters display an undying drive towards life and thus they express their affirmation to life. Debby Dee goes from one man to another to accomplish her mission in life-to search for her bio-parents. All heroines represent upward movement of a new woman. All of them are the manifestation of G.B. Shaw’s idea of ‘Life-Force’. Debby is the only unmarried woman among all of Mukherjee’s heroines. Dimple, Jasmine, Hannah, Tara Bhattacharjee do not find sexual fulfillment with their husbands. Debby is exotic; all heroines discover passion and excitement in the arms of their lovers. All are experimenters with sexuality. Mukherjee’s heroines discover their own power as sexual creatures. They come from very protective backgrounds. For these characters, sexuality is a way of rebelling. Dimple and Tara Bhattacharjee both accompany their husbands to America. Both Bish and Amit expected their wives to be traditional
wives even in the new country. They make rebels, Tara divorced Bish and Dimple indulges herself in an extra marital affair with Milt Glasser. Tara too has a Buddhist lover. Their acts reveal their passionate attempt to Americanize themselves, to evolve into a whole new entity. Similarly Hannah and Jasmine after the death of their husbands do not seal their lives but find fulfillment in multiple relationships. They express their sexual desires more candidly, though according to patriarchy they ought to have led lives of widowhood. They struggle to forge new selves in a strange land. America holds promise of a new selfhood. Self-assertion however, is a power that these women enjoy. Every heroine of Mukherjee has a different approach to life. The only common tie that binds all of them is the need for assimilation in an alien land seeking an independent existence. They discard their ethnicity altogether because this is the only way available to them to cope with the freedom of choices thrust upon them, to see themselves within the construct of new ‘American’ women. For Mukherjee’s protagonists, the west liberates their inner self. They find new surroundings that enable them to leave behind those things that limit their personal freedom. This new freedom forces them to give up their ethnic roots. Each one faces a conflict between individual desire and societal expectations, accepts the hurdles and takes the risk necessary to make a leap into a new
future. For Mukherjee, as stated earlier, this change of personality is associated with the death of one’s former self. Ultimately it is not the traditional role models that the women reject, but the fact that they no longer reconcile the models to their circumstances. This drives them to react with violence. Violence is the outcome of their frustration at other people’s inability to understand their changing needs and desires. Mukherjee also believes that the violence in her novels is linked to the fact of the diaspora, the breaking up and scattering of a people who migrate to other countries. Mukherjee uses violence as a skillful strategy. Her novel’s association of violence with transformation is its leitmotif: Mukherjee asserts,

Violence is very connected with one’s original culture into a new country, no matter for what reason we’ve come to the new country, implies or necessitates death of ones former self or mutilation of ones former self and so I want to think that the physical violence in my novels are really my metaphorical or artistic way of showing the psychic damage that takes place.⁸

Tara, at the end of the novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* is caught in the midst of violent mob. In the sense that the violence outside is a clear manifestation of Tara’s inner turmoil raging in her heart. She is suspended between two worlds; the inner conflict brought her to such situation. She is a victim of violence, where as Dimple is an agent of violence. The act of killing her husband Amit, is suggestive that
violence is passively lying in her. America intensifies her bewilderment and turns the violence inside out and she ends up as a murderess. Jasmine after her rape cleanses her body and purifies her soul through prayer. She has a small knife given by a fellow traveler. She uses it first to cut her tongue and becomes Kali - the goddess of destruction and next she very violently murders Half Face.

The novel *Leave It to Me* is as violent as the prologue. Devi discovers that ‘destruction is creation’s necessary prelude.’ (212) Like Jasmine, Debby too assumes a fearful form of Goddess Devi, and murders her natural father-who abandoned her after her birth. Debby’s sense of rootlessness and negligence reaches into a violent murder. Hannah Easton, on the other hand kills Morad Farah - Aurangzeb’s commander who came to Devgad to arrest Raja Jadav Singh. She kills him to save her love. Bharati Mukherjee’s heroines are subjected to productive violence which is parallel to the ideology of American progress.

Pain of uprooting is experienced by the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee. They reach the alien country believing it to be the Promised Land, a land of limitless possibilities but reaching there, they realise that, their wishes will never come true. This culminates in culture shock. Mukherjee is preoccupied with the problems of
immigration. Rules of American government do not give work permit to Indian wives on a dependent visa. Dimple, the legal immigrant to U.S., goes with her husband. Amit goes out to work and Dimple who has nothing to do turns neurotic. Jasmine, an illegal immigrant enjoys life in America. Immigrants in America live as a community. Bhattacharjee sisters move in the Indian community. Jasmine and Dimple also lived with the Indian group. Immigrants in America gain a separate identity. They adjust, develop their own definition and call themselves N.R.Is. Mukherjee seems to be saying that the burden of responsibility on the immigrant women is greater than that of those who do not leave the shores of India. The writings of Mukherjee indicate her quest to find a solution to women’s problem in a New World. At the same time, she acknowledges the reality, one’s cultural inheritance is an integral part of one’s personality in moment of trial, and culture provides the answer. For instance, Tara Bhattacharjee comes to her mother’s home to resolve her problems and she furthers her peace in Rishi Kesh, a holy place. She solves all her identity crises by identifying herself by Tara Lata. Dimple stabs her husband seven times destroying the marriage tie. Jasmine slits her tongue and becomes Kali and Debby changes herself to Devi, to avenge themselves. Bharati Mukherjee admits that her characters
'are a breed of pioneers who have the guts to forsake a predictable life in order to throw themselves into a new one.'

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