Reconstruction of Culture and Immigrant Identity in Selected Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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Reconstruction of Culture and Immigrant Identity in Selected Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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STATEMENT

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in this thesis, entitled **Reconstruction of Culture and Immigrant Identity in Selected Novels of Bharati Mukherjee,** is the result of research carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India under the supervision of Professor Rohini Mokashi-Punekar in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the matter embodied in the thesis entitled **Reconstruction of Culture and Immigrant Identity in Selected Novels of Bharati Mukherjee**, submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Monalisha Saikia, a student of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, has been carried out under my supervision. It is also certified that this work has not been submitted anywhere else for the award of a research degree.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The urge to migrate is no less 'natural' than the urge to settle.

(K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* xviii)

The above quotation encompasses the primary concerns of this thesis. K.A. Appiah, in the introduction to his seminal book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, a philosophical manifesto on the ethics of humanity, addresses the basic reason for human migration as a natural tendency which includes both sojourning as well as settling down. At the same time, Appiah's insightful statement draws one's attention to the concomitant fluidity of culture and its malleability that is synonymous with migration. This encapsulates the scope of this thesis. With migration comes a change in the cultural context. Therefore, a study of the effects of migration on the immigrant is a study of the change in constitution of the identity of the immigrant. The parameters of this thesis confine themselves to the immigrant identity that is shaped out of various cultural contexts at different stages in the process of settling down in a new land.

Migration is a relocation, a "more-or-less permanent movement of people across a social boundary" and "is to be distinguished conceptually from nomadism, seasonal migrant work, the travel of one or more workers from a fixed household in search of work and regular movements between town and country" or even "refugees" (Mann 239). Immigrants are those people "who have relocated from their native country to another country" (Alexander and Thompson 308). This crossing-over of boundaries, besides being social, has other dimensions to it, such as

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political, economic, cultural, religious and psychological, immigration being "a significant social phenomenon in its own right, as well as illuminating the social structure of the host society" (Mann 240). This thesis covers the immigrants' rite of passage to the "host societies" (Brettel vii), focusing on its nodal points of liminality, interstitiality, and "cultural citizenship" (Miller), each lending a specific dimension to identity reconstruction and culture.[1]

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 gives a brief overview of Bharati Mukherjee's fiction. Section 2 lays out the scope, aim and method of this study and section 3 explains the organization of the thesis throwing some light on each chapter.

I

Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction

Bharati Mukherjee's publications straddle across forty odd years: her first novel was published in 1971 and the latest in 2011. It is worth mentioning that this study undertakes only five novels for detailed analysis and not the entire oeuvre of Mukherjee keeping in mind the specific focus of the thesis. Yet, the time continuum (1971 to 2004 in this thesis) is spread across a broad canvas, extensive in its comprehension of the difficulties of immigrants as they encounter a different culture. From psychological stress or trauma, cultural adjustment, an acknowledgement of roots in order to come to terms with the transforming identity of the immigrant, Bharati Mukherjee's works encompass all these aspects. It is because of the exploration of the immigrant predicament in almost all its vicissitudes that Mukherjee's works compel research and study.

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Bharati Mukherjee, born in 1940, left for the United States in 1961 after earning her post-graduate degree from the University of Baroda, India. Married to writer Clark Blaise of Canada, Mukherjee moved to Canada to continue her teaching career in 1966. She completed her doctorate from the University of Iowa in the US in 1969. A good many years after staying in Canada, Mukherjee and her family finally settled down in the US in 1980, and she continued with her teaching profession. Today, she holds the designation of a distinguished Professor in the University of California, Berkeley. She became a naturalized American citizen in the year 1988.

Always inclined to writing from a very young age, and influenced by writers like Bernard Malamud, Isaac Babel, Joseph Conrad, and a host of other literary luminaries, Mukherjee published her first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, in 1971. V.S.Naipaul was also "an early model for Mukherjee" (Edwards, *Conversations* xi), but Mukherjee later sought a different path for herself. Spending a sabbatical year in 1973-74 in India, both Mukherjee and her husband wrote their experiences in the form of the memoir *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Another non-fictional work was *Kautilya's Concept of Diplomacy: A New Interpretation* in 1976. In 1975, she published her second novel, *Wife* and in 1985, *Darkness*, a collection of short stories. Her article on the prevalent racism in Canada titled "An Invisible Woman" which appeared in the magazine *Saturday Night* (March, 1981) fetched Mukherjee the National Magazine Award (Tandon 21). An investigative work on the terror-bombing of Air-India Flight 182 in 1985, co-authored again with husband Clark Blaise, *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* was published in 1987(Edwards,*Conversations* xv). In 1988 Mukherjee's acclaim reached its peak with the 1988 National Book Critics Circle Award for her second collection of short stories, *The Middleman and Other Stories*. Mukherjee's position in

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the American literary scene grew with the publication of her most celebrated novel, *Jasmine*, in 1989. In 1993 Mukherjee published *The Holder of the World* and *Leave It to Me* in 1996. As part of a trilogy, Mukherjee wrote in 2002 *Desirable Daughters* and in 2004 *The Tree Bride*. The novel that followed the former two is *Miss New India* published as recently as 2011.

Mukherjee has to her credit a host of fellowships and awards. She became affiliated to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1993, embarking on lecturing "abroad for the U.S. State Department" in 2002 (Edwards, *Conversations* xxii). In 2006 Mukherjee was selected to chair the committee for the selection of the National Book Award for Fiction.

Research on her work has been vibrant for decades, and books, reviews and scholarly papers on her fiction and other writings are aplenty. Mukherjee has been referred to as the "*grande dame* of diasporic Indian literature" and her critical views on immigration and diaspora are often quoted by many other immigrant/diasporic writers (Edwards, *Conversations* xi, italics in original). Primarily, immigrant narratives such as Mukherjee's are diasporic in the discourse of ideology, hegemony and imperialism. Such writings become sites of creativity and resistance where the perplexing social, emotional, physical, economic, and cultural predicament of immigrants is critically reflected. Pramod K. Nayar points out, "In the latter half of the twentieth century, the writings of transplanted authors such as Bharati Mukherjee, Buchi Emecheta, David Dabydeen, Caryl Philips, and Hanif Kureishi have captured the diasporic, hybridized state of migrant communities" (*Postcolonial Literature* 187). V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* (1989), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged*

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Marriage (1995) Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996), Meena Alexander's *The Shock of Arrival* (1996), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2004), and writers such as Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, Amitav Ghosh, Wendy Law-Yone, Agha Shahid Ali, Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Rienzi Crusz, Michael Ondaatje, Gloria Anzaldúa - to name only a very few, have lent themselves to the arena of immigrant writing and its socio-political dynamics.

While Mukherjee inevitably finds herself included among the "Asian Indian women writers" (Lal 110), she is also one reckoned to be a part of "the great tradition of American fiction" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 11).

Review of Literature

Bharati Mukherjee's works have received much critical attention over the years. Her novels have provoked considerable academic discussion, both in the US and among the postcolonial critics. The following section tracks the main directions that emerge in the critical work on Mukherjee.

Among the full-length studies on Mukherjee's works are Nagendra Kumar's *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective* (2001), Sushma Tandon's *Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: A Perspective* (2004), Vandana Singh's *The Fictional World of Bharati Mukherjee* (2010), and Stanley M. Stephen's *Bharati Mukherjee: A Study in Immigrant Sensibility* (2010). According to Kumar Mukherjee's focus has changed over the years from expatriation to ramifications of immigration and the necessity of assimilation. Sushma Tandon examines into the socio-cultural dimensions of the American community in which Mukherjee's immigrant characters are placed. Vandana Singh's study extends that of Kumar's and Tandon's in that it encompasses Mukherjee's works till the publication of *The Tree Bride* (2004) even

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while looking at the cultural transformations that occur in the adopted land. Continuing with the strands dealt with by the previous full-length critical works, Stanley M. Stephen examines the notions of home, belonging and the convergences of the past and present in Mukherjee's novels. Some of the extant collections of essays on Mukherjee's works are Emmanuel S. Nelson's *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (1993), R.K. Dhawan's *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium* (1996), and Somdatta Mandal's *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (2010).

Besides the above studies on Mukherjee, there is also available Fakrul Alam's biography *Bharati Mukherjee* (1996) while Bradley C. Edwards' *Conversations with Bharati Mukherjee* (2009) compiles some of the interviews given by the writer.

The Immigrant Writer

Speaking of Bharati Mukherjee's portrayal of South Asian immigrants in North America, Fakrul Alam points out that "she has written extensively and imaginatively about their successes and failures and has offered us fascinating glimpses into their lives and the Indian diaspora on the basis of a deeply felt and thought-provoking perspective on immigration" ("Migration" 81). Emmanuel S. Nelson in *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* remarks:

> Mukherjee's complicated politics reflect her multiple (dis)locations; her works reveal the imprint of a complex perspective – a perspective that is simultaneously shaped by her ethnicity, postcoloniality, gender, and migrancy. This complexity, in itself, is not new; after all, there are many immigrant women writers of color who share Mukherjee's predicament. What is fascinating, however, is Mukherjee's determined rejection of the emotional

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> paralysis of exile and her enthusiastic affirmation of the immigrant condition; her remarkable success in forging a coherent vision out of the chaos of her multiple displacements; and her ability to articulate that vision in a voice that is as subtle as it is insistent, as graceful as it is provocative. (x)

King-Kok Cheung speaks of Asian writers in the US among whom Bharati Mukherjee features in the foreground:

> Asian American literature has been enriched by the voices of writers of diverse ethnic origins. Especially notable is the emergence of South Asian and Southeast Asian American authors, including Wendy Law-Yone (Burmese); Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, and Bharati Mukherjee (Indian); Bapsi Sidhwa and Sara Suleri (Pakistani) ; Rienzi Crusz and Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lankan); Cecilia Brainard , Jessica Hagedorn, and Ninotchka Rosca (Filipino); Le Ly Hayslip, Jade Ngọc Quang Huỳnh, and Nguyễn Qúi Dú'c (Vietnamese); and S.P.Somtow and Wanwadee Larsen (Thai). The competing impulses of claiming America and maintaining ties with Asia are especially pronounced among some of these immigrants. ("Re-viewing" 7)

Cheung further adds that Mukherjee gives importance to the "American experience" of the immigrants instead of wallowing in the expatriate's sense of nostalgia (7). Ketu H.Katrak describes Mukherjee as "the quintessential immigrant-turned-citizen who now embraces being an 'American citizen' with a troubling and insistent fierceness" ("South Asian" 210). Somdatta Mandal in *Interviews and Creative Writing* says that Mukherjee is the sole writer of the South Asian diaspora to reject hyphenization and reiterate her claim as an American writer (20). Referring to Mukherjee's negation of both the 'melting pot' and 'mosaic' theories of assimilation, Mandal quotes

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Mukherjee, "Rather, I like to think of it as a pickling process – one where the individual parts retain some shape and form but also take on a homogeneous flavour" (21).

Throwing light on the fact that Mukherjee is preoccupied with India in multifarious ways, Sunanda Mongia observes that "India functions as a central metaphor and a framework even when a novelist, for example Bharati Mukerjee [sic], refuses her Indian roots and prefers to call her novels examples of 'New American Literatures'" ("Recent Indian" 218). Mongia quotes Mukherjee, as the writer describes herself: "I've put together my aesthetic manifesto, which is not unlike that of Moghul miniature painting with its many foci of interests" (218). R.K. Dhawan reflects that Mukherjee does not see herself in the same rung as Anita Desai and R.K. Narayan because her writing is not about Indians in India. Mukherjee also differentiates herself from Naipaul who writes from the expatriate perspective. Mukherjee sees herself in the same category of Bernard Malamud and "writes about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adopts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture" (*Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee* 14). Isaac Babel and Joseph Conrad are her other influences. Dhawan goes further to explain Mukherjee's stand on types of writers and where she herself fits in:

> Mukherjee holds that there are two kinds of writers – those who confirm what the public wants to know, and the other who disturb, interrogate the existing systems and patterns. She identifies herself with the second group. Viewed thus, she is more like Shashi Deshpande than R.K. Narayan. A creative writer to the core, she is highly critical of postcolonial theory and criticism. Critics like Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, she declares, are the 'assassins' of imagination' (16).

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A gradual development in her writing is seen as Mukherjee moves from autobiographical concerns to larger issues of multiculturalism and diversity.

Transformation and Acculturation

Jasbir Jain remarks that Bharati Mukherjee's works mark a transition in immigrant fiction, from a preoccupation with nostalgia and binding memories to creating space for the new culture of the adopted land. The focus would thereby be on "the knife-edge existence" of the present inducing "transformations and not merely adjustment or acculturation" ("Plural Tradition" 79). Jennifer Drake comments that 'assimilation' is "cultural looting, cultural exchange, or a willful and sometimes costly negotiation" ("Looting American Culture" 60). While referring to the immigrant narratives of Bharati Mukherjee, Drake asserts that in this "world where transformation has become more comprehensible than rigid notions of comprehensibility, Mukherjee's multifocal and multicultural American writing struggles for, and leads us toward, multiple models of comprehensibility" (82). Ruth Maxey situates "South Asian American literary treatments of white American corporeality within the context of other critiques of whiteness, both academic and artistic," and argues that Mukherjee's writing "represents the most wide-ranging and complex engagement with these ideas" ("'Who wants'" 529-30).

Bharati Mukherjee's place in the work of immigrant writing is problematized by another aspect, that of the 'double-emigrant.' Casteel speaks of Eva Hoffman, "a double-emigrant" who has "not two but three possible locations, as the tripartite structure she adopts" ("Eva Hoffman's Double Emigration" 297). Thus, "Bipolar readings fail to elucidate Hoffman's presentation of Canada because they disregard the double-emigration structure that makes possible her negative construction of

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Canada" (297).This is equated with Bharati Mukherjee when Casteel observes, "We can see this pattern at work in the writings of other double-emigrants. Bharati Mukherjee, for instance, has quite vociferously privileged the United States (her second adoptive homeland) over Canada (her first) in a manner similar to that of Hoffman" (297).

While talking about George Lamming's approach to language as cosmopolitan, Nadi Edwards brings into purview other cosmopolitan writers in terms which Timothy Brennan used in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*. Brennan has claimed that "literary figures from the Third World, such as 'Mario Vargas Llosa, Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Isabel Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, Bharati Mukherjee, and a few others' can be called 'Third World cosmopolitans'" (qtd. in Edwards, "George Lamming's Literary Nationalism" 61). Edwards further elaborates that "[c]osmopolitans combine the contradictions of metropolitan exile and nationalist identity: 'a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and an alienation from it'" (61). This echoes the cosmopolitan strains in Mukherjee's later works, like *Desirable Daughters* and even *The Tree Bride*.

Post-Patriarchy and Postcolonialism

Klinkowitz in "Fiction" speaks of an "important trend noted by Ellen G. Friedman in 'Post Patriarchal Endings in Recent U.S. Fiction'" and says, "novelists as various as Kathy Acker, Marilynne Robinson, Joyce Carol Oates, Allison Moore, Toni Morrison, and Bharati Mukherjee have devised new ways of writing quest narratives 'that do not turn on a search for the father or nostalgia for a past surety'" (341). Bharati Mukherjee finds herself the subject of various studies. Malini Johar Schueller refers to postcolonial studies in the context of American studies, and draws attention

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to Bruce Simon's essay "Maryse Condé, Bharati Mukherjee, and Nathaniel Hawthorne: 'Hybridity in the Americas: Reading Condé, Mukherjee, and Hawthorne,'" and points out that it "considers how hybridity debates can be read in American studies and how readings in American studies can refocus debates on hybridity" ("Postcolonial" 166). In discussing the recent studies on Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*, Smith and Wright speak of Lawrence Buell who refers to Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* as among the "recent texts that seek to revise Hawthorne's story" ("Hawthorne" 33). Mukherjee's novel "is one work that resists the exceptionalist consensus, insisting instead on deterritorializing Hawthorne" (33). Bharati Mukherjee is thus located as an Indian English writer, a diasporic Indian writer, an immigrant writer, an expatriate writer, an Asian-American writer, and even a writer of the American mainstream.

Cultural Encounter and its Ramifications

A significant theme of Mukherjee's oeuvre is the encounter of different cultures and its effects on immigrants. Shakuntala Bharvani studies the issues of transformation, migration, and temporal and spatial interactions and exchanges between cultures with reference to Mukherjee's novel, *The Holder of the World* ("*Holder of the World*"). On the same novel Laxmi Parasuram speaks of the inversion of the common phenomenon of east-west travel to one of an American travelling to India and thereby eliding the barriers of time and space and supplanting with cross-cultural interrelationship of a globally connected world ("Holding the Colliding Walls"). Again Shyam S. Agarwalla in "An Indian Woman" questions if it is Mukherjee herself in the garb of an American visiting the exotic world of Mughal India and contends that the "Mughal India, of the time of Aurangzeb, is now modern USA, of Regan and Bush and the colonial India, of her [Mukherjee's] time, is the colonial America of

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Hannah" (204). Pradeep Trikha in "*Holder of the World"* speaks about the multi-layered interpretations of the novel. It can be viewed as a feminist reading for women's liberation and identity, a historical rendering of America and India in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, and an analysis of the cross-cultural experiences of people in lands other than their homelands. In his review of *Desirable Daughters*, Ramlal Agarwal states "In *Desirable Daughters*, Bharati Mukherjee sets herself a dual task: she wants to tell her Indian readers about Indian expatriates in America and her American readers about weird customs and traditions of Indian society" (86). Shao-Pin Luo's essay

> aims to 're-imagine the world' by exploring the connection between migration and interaction among cultures described in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) and Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993). Both novels examine ideas of travel and transculturation, especially for women, by traversing through time and geography and illustrating the interconnectedness of different traditions. ("Rewriting Travel" 78)

Pradeep Trikha speaks of one of Mukherjee's major themes, "psychological transformation, especially among women immigrants from Asia" quoting the writer herself, and explores the dynamics of the immigrant arrival in the new land and the consequent cultural, social and psychological conflicts from a variety of perspectives ("Quest for Self" 178). F.A. Inamdar in "Immigrant Lives" investigates the process of adaptation to a new culture, and the accompanying failure and success in doing so. Shobha Shinde in "Cross-Cultural Crisis" speaks of the cultural shock and consequent grappling with one's identity and an acknowledgement of a final need for accepting the choices of adapting to the new land. Ananda Prabha Barat says that despite Mukherjee's claims of being an American writer, India is very much present

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in her aesthetics. The mixing of the two cultures reflects in the mind of the protagonist, Tara in the *The Tiger's Daughter* and finally leads to a "split-up" psyche in the protagonist ("Bharati Mukherjee" 58). Jaiwanti Dimri observes that the unfamiliarity with a new culture and the attempts to adopt a new identity, involve extreme physical and psychological stress and violence ("From Marriage to Murder"). Prasanna Sree Sathupathi in "Psychotic Violence" examines extreme sense of personal crisis which the protagonist Dimple in *Wife* undergoes leading to the murder of her husband in an attempt to relieve herself of the intense turmoil of cultural conflict she undergoes in the new land. A.P. Swain remarks that Dimple in Mukherjee's *Wife* is an agonized psyche and struggling to seek her identity, finally yielding to a total self-alienation, and in the process murdering her own husband ("Dimple in *Wife*"). In line with almost the same contention, M. Rajeshwar says that Dimple yields completely to her own sado-masochism which is further exacerbated by the violence outside in the American environment ("Sado-Masochism"). S. Indira examines the modern individual suffering from alienation, and looks at Dimple from the point of view of "neurotic and solipsistic individuals" ("Exploration of Inner Space" 59).

In "*Jasmine:* An Odyssey," Indira differentiates Mukherjee from Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai in that while Mukherjee gives her immigrant characters the scope of assimilation and acculturation in order to belong to a new world, Markandaya and Desai stop short of doing so and focus on the conflicts of immigrants resulting from trying to adjust to the new culture. Sumita Roy in "*Jasmine*: Exile as Spiritual Quest" sees *Jasmine* as a progress towards spirituality and a quest for values in life. A contrast is seen between the world of accomplishment in America and "the annihilation of personality or self-negation" in the old world (Dhawan 22).

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Usha Bande speaks about the alienness felt in a new culture when immigrants are unable to connect with it, and the resultant psychological turmoil ("Re-casting Dimple"). T. Padma shows that Mukherjee's fiction goes beyond the common problems of cultural conflicts on shifting to another land, and probes into the areas of "existential angst and zeitgeist" ("From Acculturation" 161). Jasmine finds her own self in the 'American dream,' in acknowledgement of her choices and individual fulfilment.

The Sense of Belonging

With the backdrop of expatriation and immigration, Mukherjee's novels develop narratives of home and belongingness, as also nation and narration. Maya Manju Sharma discusses the transformation that Mukherjee undergoes from being "the aloof expatriate writer using irony" like Naipaul to celebrating, in Mukherjee's own words, "the exuberance of immigration" like Malamud ("Inner World" 4). Pramila Venkateswaran in " Bharati Mukherjee as Autobiographer," analyses *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and emphasizes on the significance of realization of Mukherjee as an immigrant rather than an expatriate, and giving up the "Naipaulian preoccupation with nomadic alienation," thereby plunging into "the liberating potential of immigration" (Nelson xi). Christine Gomez says that the immigrant narratives of Mukherjee have been preceded by her fiction of expatriate experiences. The process of expatriation to immigration involves the anxiety of being in two cultures, the crises of "existential alienation," and "self-estrangement" ("On-Going Quest" 27), and then the progress from "alienation to integration" (37). In the review "In the New World," Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz says: "Mukherjee's particular gift is montage, a jump-cut movement that creates a bond with the first-person narrator and distance from

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everyone else, thus underscoring with great economy the immigrant's isolation, byproduct of American opportunity" (8).

Malashri Lal in "Bharati Mukherjee" examines the "maximalist credo" in Mukherjee's writing .The immigrants have their own bag of "pre-history," and thus their own "cultural imperatives, interacting with the unknown forces of the new world, create a drama of co-options and collaborations which the story teller records" (Mandal 13-14). Ruth Maxey in "'The Messiness of Rebirth" comes to the conclusion that Mukherjee's ceaseless portrayal of the dynamics of migration from varied perspectives have "enriched both contemporary American letters and literature of the South Asian diaspora" (Mandal 15). Shweta Rao and Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri in "Indian Wife" say that " in *Wife* the author has utilized the tropology of kitchen displaying the array of liberating as well as the constricting possibilities it entails for a newly immigrated Indian woman in America" (Mandal 17).

Writing about immigration and belonging naturally implies 'home' and roots. Uma Parameswaran speaks about the implications of 'home' in the diasporic context and asserts that it is a place where the "feet are, even if some hearts just might be half way around the world" ("Home" 38). Gabrielle Collu refers to *Jasmine* while exploring the relationship of the immigrant characters to the homeland in the novels of South Asian women diasporic writers, and says that the relationship "was maintained, recovered, or added onto other affiliations through a real, re-created, or re-imagined relationship with the mother" ("South Asian Women" 56). Indira Nityanandam in "Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" points out that in both the novels the protagonists fail to find a 'home' in a new land on one hand, and on the other, they cannot return home. Therefore, the solution seems to

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be in adopting the culture of the adopted land and break away with one's own ethnic leanings. Victor J. Ramraj in "Diasporas and Multiculturalism" further elaborates:

> The attachment to the ancestral homeland varies considerably among the diasporans and is inversely proportional to the degree individuals and communities are induced to or are willing to assimilate or integrate with their new environment, or remain wedded to ancestral customs, traditions, languages, and religions. Those tending towards assimilation are less concerned with sustaining ancestral ties than with coming to terms with their new environment and acquiring a new identity. Writers like Bharati Mukherjee expect the assimilation to be mutual. To achieve this mutuality requires, as Home K. Bhabha indicates in his theoretical study of the modern nation, a 'cultural liminality - *within the nation*' not just in the immigrant community. (217, italics in original)

This naturally echoes Mukherjee's own assertion that both America and its immigrants have mutually changed each other.

Migrants have the choice to assimilate and transform themselves, and Mukherjee believes that nostalgia for the homeland will only lead to paralysis and disintegration of the self. Jill Roberts sets out "to explore in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* divergent conditions of cultural displacement through the variations of adoption that operate in each novel, from the healing 'search' for origins that kindles the former to the suspect freedom of dislocation celebrated by the latter" ("Between Two 'Darknesses'" 80). Judie Newman in "Priority Narratives" points out to "the novelistic technique especially adopted by its narrator Tara [in *Desirable Daughters*], whose attempts to centre the story upon her individual experience are repeatedly frustrated by a whirling centrifuge of other stories,

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alternative models, involving different territories, migrations and meditations" (Mandal 21).

Aparajita Ray in "Rootlessness" explores the issue of roots and the role of nostalgia in Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*. Ray also takes up *Wife* and points out that the protagonists in both novels get disillusioned with marriage and struggle to find their own identities in a new and alien environment. Robyn Warhol-Down in "*Jasmine* Reconsidered" is of the opinion that Jasmine is unlike "such conventional Western individualists as Jane Eyre," and does not represent the genre of "the female *Bildungsroman*" (Mandal 19). Anita Balakrishnan in "Tracing Tara-Lata's Footsteps" investigates in Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* the anxieties that trouble Indian Americans arising out of the "negotiations between the politics of proximity and the politics of distance" and their effects on identity formation (Mandal 21). Bruce King speaks of Bharati Mukherjee as one of the many postcolonial writers taking on the aspect of assimilation, and says:

> post-coloniality recognizes that nations are mental, social, and political constructions that change according to circumstances. In a time of massive immigration, rapid international communication, and the increased demands by minorities, national cultural boundaries are less stable than in the past and notions of national identity are changing. Some writers, such as Bharati Mukherjee in the United States and Neil Bissoondath in Canada, argue for assimilation. (24)

Janet M. Powers in her "Sociopolitical Critique," "argues that 'the startling turns of plot in *Wife* and *Jasmine*, which might at first be taken as inept writing,' in fact, do not

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'violate narrative logic but . . . join with socio-political observations at a higher level to create a new sort of postcolonial narrative logic'" (Nelson xiii).

Identity Politics

Mukherjee's novels are permeated by issues of identity and the quest for an understanding of the self. Jasbir Jain speaks of Bharati Mukherjee rejecting a hyphenated identity and vouching for a fluid and self-constructed one instead, and points out that Mukherjee's use of myth establishes "continuity" even if by virtue of "relocation and reinterpretation" ("Finding" 143). Brinda Bose, in her essay "Question of Identity," explores the making of a new self, considering issues like ethnicity, gender and migrancy in three of Mukherjee's novels, *The Tiger's Daughter, Wife,* and *Jasmine*. Bose comments on the "complex personal and cultural negotiations" that immigrant women have to go through, caught in the struggle, often violent, between "nostalgic immobility" and the necessity of leaving behind remembrances in order to adapt to a new world (Nelson xii). P.A. Abraham in "Crisis of Unbelonging" speaks of the anxiety of being in two worlds for an expatriate, and this takes its toll on the expatriate's language, state of mind, and the self. Shyam M. Asnani in "Identity Crisis" speaks about the identity crisis in the novels of Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972), Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1976), and M.G.Vassanji's *No New Land* (1991) and having to straddle two worlds, the protagonists reach tragic ends. Viney Kirpal in "Indian English Novel" while talking of the anti-essentialism of identity formation of the Indian novels of the 1990s, says that both Rushdie and Mukherjee have shown trends towards "internationalism," and so do Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* and Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca*.

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In the interview, “Decoding the Language” Bharati Mukherjee tells Suzanne Ruta about the identity of her characters: “I'm different from other diasporic Indian writers in that I'm not concentrating exclusively on nostalgia, but I'm writing about people who are in between and who are deforming their pasts and reforming their identities” (13). Gurleen Grewal, in her essay “Born Again American,” questions the possibility of Jasmine’s journey of transformation from a remote Indian villager to a pursuer of the American dream. This compromise with “such a conservative ideology also necessitates other compromises – both artistic and political” (Nelson xvi). In “The Technological Hybrid,” John K. Hoppe says, “In revisionary-subversive response to the nativist American ideology which holds that Anglo- Americans are the blessed children and international acolytes of this American ideal, Mukherjee turns the tables” (138). In "We Murder Who We Were," Kristin Carter-Sanborn looks at the “postcolonial concerns of *Jasmine*” and the “dynamics of subjectivity in Mukherjee’s novel” (574). Anu Aneja in “‘Jasmine,’ the Sweet Scent of Exile” avers: “The bitter smell of exile--of coming to terms with the loss of previous ways of knowing the world, quickly transforms itself into the sweet scent of a newly defined reality that yields its soft contours to the individual who has the will to sculpt an ever widening future out of past experiences” (73).

Indira Bhatt in “*Jasmine*: An Immigrant’s Attempt at Assimilation” points out that while in M.G.Vassanji’s novel *No New Land* assimilation is sought through “education and employment,” Bharati Mukherjee’s main character finds assimilation through marriage with a ‘white’ man (Dhawan 21). Bhatt, however, arrives at the conclusion that that the “easy choices, the eagerness to conform and commitment to assimilation make the character a mere puppet and not a carved-out three-dimensional character” (21). Shakuntala Bharvani investigates the primary theme of

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'transformation' running through *Jasmine* and criticises Mukherjee by saying that she has failed to carve out round characters of her protagonists , and deals with rather a superficial "exterior" rather than plumbing the depths of the "pain of exile" ("*Jasmine*: An Immigrant Experience?" 181).

Gender Issues

Gender is a salient feature in Mukherjee's works. All her protagonists are women situated in diverse predicaments where they need to negotiate through complex situations to survive in a new world. Sunanda Mongia speaks in terms of diasporic context and says that the most predominant factor in the construction of a woman's "personality" is the "experience of gender" ("Fabricated" 205). Mongia's investigation of the novel *Jasmine* tries to point out "how the physiological and psycho-social factors combine to create a unique subjectivity" (205). C.Sengupta in "Feminine Mystique in *Jasmine*" takes up a feminist reading, and the protagonist fights against regressive traditions and tries to replace it by a corresponding equivalence of modernity, thus hinting at the resilience and power of a woman.

King-Kok Cheung speaks of feminism and cultural nationalism:

> More complex is the relationship between feminism and cultural nationalism. Many Asian American feminist critics champion cultural nationalism in their own way by contending not only against Asian and white patriarchy but also against Eurocentric feminism. Some of these critics have taken women writers to task for espousing white liberal feminism at the expense of "third world" cultures. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, for instance, has been interrogated by Inderpal Grewal and Susan Koshy, among others, for its hierarchical comparison of women in India and the United States, with India coded as an

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> oppressive place for women and the United States emerging as a land of hope and freedom. (“Re-viewing” 12)

In “Rearticulating Violence,” Jody Mason argues that *Wife* also deals with Dimple's attempting to get a hold on ‘power’, and her violence is only representative of ‘agency’ and ‘resistance.’ Neeru Anand “analyses the novel [*The Holder of the World*] from a reader-centric perspective that focuses on textual positioning and the level of engagement/ interaction between a text and its readers . . . this text critically engages with the issues of gendered spaces, transgression, and assertion of the body” (“The Story Retold” 19-20). K. T. Sunitha in “Cross-cultural Dilemmas” examines the representation of the Indian woman in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, setting it against expatriation and cross-cultural encounter.

The Use of History

Mukherjee uses history in her novels to create a background and to establish the fact that cultures, however different, do accommodate differences. V.C. Sudheer in “History and the Past Reality in *The Holder of the World*” appreciates the novel as a proper historical novel, complimenting the writer’s aesthetic creativity and in-depth research of the past. G.A.Ghanshyam and Usha Iyengar speak of Bharati Mukherjee as a postmodern immigrant writer, writing about transformation, migration and “time travelling,” and of “the Puritan American 17th and early 18th century world trying to come to terms with the Mughal Indian view of life” (“Transformation and Migration” 120).

In a review of *The Holder of the World*, Uma Parameswaran points out:

> In reconstructing a piece of Raj history, Mukherjee joins other novelists from her native India, such as Manohar Malgonkar (*The Princes, The Devil's Wind*),

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> Kamala Markandaya (*The Golden Honeycomb*), and, more recently, Gita Mehta (*Raj*). She adds another dimension to linear narrativization by using the concept of virtual reality that is currently in the news. (637)

Snehasis Maiti in "Distorted Images" examines "the representation or misrepresentation of history in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine*" (Mandal 15). She also alleges that Mukherjee "is betraying her responsibility (of representing India as it really is) as a postcolonial writer" (16).

In a different vein T.R.Shashipriya in "*Leave It to Me*: A Persistence of Immigration" says that the focus of this novel is "on the consequences of America's recent past – the hippie culture of the 1960s Vietnam – rather than a novel of dislocation in the diasporic sense of her earlier fiction. Here her [Mukherjee's] shift from an immigrant diasporic writer to a multicultural one is complete" (Mandal 20).

Fayeza Hasanat in "Three Kinds of History" refers to Connie Young Yu to show the existence of both written and oral histories of Asian Americans. Hasanat also adds:

> Women's history of Asian-American diaspora thus gets reconstructed when women "historically think back through their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers" (Grice 18). Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004) follow the same track of thinking back through history in an attempt of trace the origin of a female consciousness and the making of an identity that transgresses boundaries and analyzes history in order to give it a new recourse. (270)

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Debjani Banerjee's essay "In the Presence of History" inquires into the use of history in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Jasmine* and says that it is merely for the sake of convenience and sensationalism that Mukherjee includes the Naxal revolt and Sikh terrorism in these texts. Thus, Mukherjee seems to abandon "her responsibilities as a postcolonial intellectual" and "finds herself in a problematic yet privileged position as an interpreter of India to the West" (Nelson xvi). Pushpa N. Parekh in "Telling Her Tale" contends that *Jasmine* reflects "classical female-oriented oral tales of India" (Nelson xiii).

Adventure in Time and Space

The themes of 'quest,' 'adventure,' 'travel' and 'time' find ample place in immigrant fiction. Sandhya Rao Mehta in "The 'Utmost Coasts Abroad'" refers to Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* and speaks of Hannah Easton, the protagonist's choice to undertake an adventure to the exotic East and her success in "questioning and discovering new ways" of determining "reality in a world which was essentially orthodox" (Dhawan 22). Rajul Bhargava explores the "two relational configurations" of 'assimilation' and 'disintegration' in the temporal interstitial space of expatriate narratives of Mukherjee and Rohinton Mistry ("On the Borderlines" 93).

The Theme of Violence

Mukherjee's novels are suffused with violence, and Samir Dayal in his essay, "Creating, Preserving, Destroying" contends that "the complex and ambivalent functionality of violence in *Jasmine* reveals 'the contradictions of postcolonial subject-formation'" (Nelson xiii). Bradley C. Edwards in "Autobiography and Art" is of the opinion that though Mukherjee has refused to acknowledge any autobiographical claims in *Jasmine*, "a key technique" in the novel has been the infusion of action into

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"personal memories," "often in the form of violence, to illustrate dramatically a non-Western feminism in the course of Jasmine's Americanization" (Mandal 18-19).

Representation and the Periphery

Alpana Sharma Knippling understands Mukherjee's claim to being a part of the American literary stream but also raises doubts about the writer's capacity to represent the marginalized and the writer's tendency to homogenise all kinds of immigrants, which borders on essentialism and imperialism ("Toward an Investigation). Thomas Carl Austenfeld refers to Mita Banerjee's analysis in "Polymorphous Perversity or the Contingency of Stereotypes in Bharati Mukherjee's *Leave It to Me*":

> [Banerjee] bemoans the fact that Western readers' stereotypical expectations of Asians' spicy cooking and spicier sexuality are now answered even by Asian writers, as if "ethnic" authors had decided to pander to the expected discourse. The ensuing confirmation of such expectations renders postcolonial fiction more postmodern in the sense of being unencumbered by realism, unable to critique from the outside, and itself subject to appropriation by Western paradigms. ("German Contributions" 474-75)

In "A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee's Neo-nationalism," Anne Brewster says, "Bharati Mukherjee's discourse on migrants in the U.S. positions them not on the margin of contemporary American culture but, rather, as exemplars of a hegemonic nationalism" (1). Anupama Jain in "Re-reading Beyond Third World Difference" asserts, "Rereading beyond 'Third World difference' in Mukherjee's novel means realizing that *Jasmine* deconstructs easy binaries about race and resists categorization as 'minority' literature. The novel instead requires new types of

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readings that describe – rather than prescribe – the contours of multicultural experiences" (117). Sharmani Patricia Gabriel claims that *The Tiger's Daughter* brings to the foreground "not only an interrogation of the presumed unities of the new homeland, but also a dismantling of the nationalist narrative of a unitary originary homeland" ("'Immigrant' or 'Post-colonial'?" 92).

The foregoing review of literature holds up for discussion several issues that are found in Mukherjee's fiction. If the context and focus of this thesis are taken into perspective, then the theme of re-interpretation of culture in the process of immigration is common enough in critical analyses. However a revisiting of identity reconstruction from a postcolonial framework would enable the precipitation of different dimensions of the author's perception of immigrant acculturation and the politics of identity. Many scholars have pointed out the diasporic elements in Mukherjee's oeuvre while several others have acknowledged Mukherjee's insistence on transformation of identity by relegating the homeland to a distance, so as to facilitate the manifestation of an individuality that is not a collective. Yet, there are quite a few critics such as Anu Aneja, Sangeeta Ray, Kristen Carter-Sanborn, Gurleen Grewal, Anindyo Roy, Alpana Sharma Knippling, M. Sivaramakrishna, Debjani Banerjee, Anne Brewster, Inderpal Grewal, and Lisa Lau who see in Mukherjee's belief in the idea of America and in the liberation from stifling traditions of 'Third World' India, a renewed sustenance of binaries between the West and the East. This thesis takes as its point of departure the work of such critics who see Mukherjee's writing as a kind of 're-orientalism' and will attempt to study five of Mukherjee's novels from a postcolonial perspective examining ensuing questions of identity and culture.

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Choice of Texts

The proposed study will take up five novels of Bharati Mukherjee as the primary texts. A brief summary of each of the novels follows:

The Tiger's Daughter (1971)

This is Mukherjee's first novel where the protagonist, Tara Banerjee Cartwright comes home to India from the United States after having stayed for seven years. Tara is home to find that she feels homeless, alienated and in a state of ambivalence. Calcutta, where she had grown up, is now always threatening with potential violence, overturning the safe cocooned aristocratic life-style to which she and her upper-class Bengali family and friends were used. Her friends may be preoccupied with nostalgia but deeper undercurrents run through Tara. Her thoughts go back to where she feels more comfortable and at home, to David Cartwright, her American husband. When the novel ends, it is only going back to David which matters to her, even while a violent mob surrounding the car in which she and her friends were trying to flee makes the reality of Calcutta palpable beyond measure.

Wife (1975)

In her second novel, Mukherjee talks of Dimple Das Gupta, the protagonist who marries an Indian and then migrates to the United States with her husband, Amit. Being pulled by the culture at home and attracted by the new culture in the adopted land, Dimple finds herself at a loss and unable to decide how to balance the conflicting currents. From small acts of violence her mental agony finally takes her to a stage where she finds a solution in murdering her husband. She is 'wife' struggling to break free of her traditions in the US.

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Jasmine (1989)

Breaking free of the constraints of class, caste, traditions, gender and the boundaries of space, Jasmine the protagonist, seeks to find her ultimate peace by fulfilling a wish her deceased husband failed to do. Killed by Sikh terrorists, Jasmine's husband Prakash could not pursue his studies in the United States and Jasmine sets out to commit sati at the Florida International Institute of Technology. Her landing in Florida starts with the very murder of the sea captain who rapes her, and thus begins her encounter with a life in an alien land where she sees the need to transform herself for her survival. She finds herself chasing the 'American Dream' and becomes Americanized in celebrating her sense of individuality and capacity for happiness that she deems fit for herself. From Jyoti to Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase and Jane, the redefining of her self is an immigrant story of creating her own space in the adopted land. She defies fate, as she defies an essentialized notion of identity.

Desirable Daughters (2002)

The protagonist, Tara Chatterjee attempts "a roots search" that make up her identity, and in doing so, it takes her to her ancestor and namesake, Tara Lata Gangooly, the Tree Bride of Mishtigunj. Thus, Tara finds the interweaving of the historical with the temporal now, of the personal and the cosmic and the interspersing of the Indian past and the American present in California.

The Tree Bride (2004)

Following from the *Desirable Daughters*, Tara Chatterjee knows no rest in her search for her roots until she explores in detail the British colonial encounter with India, and the abandoned narratives resulting from that encounter. What appears like

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a chaos finally unfolds as a pattern, involving the interweaving of time and space, the continuing strength of tradition, and the convergence of cultures transcending all borders.

II

The Scope

Taking literature as a site and "location of culture" (Bhabha), this thesis explores in selected novels of Bharati Mukherjee, the process of reinterpretation of culture and the consequent enunciation of immigrant identity. The process of rebuilding meanings in shared practices or culture in the adopted land hinges upon a complex matrix of factors such as language and location; race, class and ethnicity; gender and sexuality; nations, nationalities and borders; home, belongingness and marginalization; and as Hall puts it, the "co-ordinates of difference and power" (qtd. in Bromley 1).

This thesis takes up five novels of Bharati Mukherjee for extensive study on the issue of immigrant identity. The primary texts are *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), and *The Tree Bride* (2004).*The Holder of the World* (1993), and *Leave It to Me* (1997) have not been discussed because the focus of this thesis is on the Indian immigrant in the United States of America. Mukherjee's most recent novel, *Miss New India* (2011), for much the same reason, is not included in this thesis.

The temporal canvas of this study extends from the 1965 Immigration Act of the United States to the contemporary 9/11 political situation. The 1965 Act, also known as the Hart-Cellar Act, is commonly cited to indicate the facilitation of the "second wave of immigration from India," and to contrast "the first wave of largely illiterate

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laborers" (in the early 1900s) from "the new Indian immigrants [who] were predominantly highly educated professionals who came to the United States for their postgraduate education and stayed or who had emigrated as physicians, engineers, and technical workers with educational credentials from Indian universities" (Alba and Nee 209). This refers to legal migrants but does not keep away the fact that there were no illegal migrants immigrating to the United States; a case in point is the protagonist of Mukherjee's most celebrated novel, *Jasmine* taken up in chapter 4 of this thesis. The discourse of 9/11 begins with the September 11, 2001 acts of terror in the US. It brought into sharp focus the borderlessness of transnational terror and the network of Islamic fundamentalism. The immediate consequence of this event was the restoration of binaries between 'us' and 'them,' implying a tremendous surge in US patriotism, taking a most rigid stand in what is now commonly known as the 'war on terror.' The signifying point here is that, as Nayar puts it, "the USA and other nations reaffirmed national and cultural boundaries" and Christian 'white' America began to be valorized against other ethnicities and religions, especially, Islam (*Postcolonialism* 199). Postcolonial ambivalence and hybridity were swept aside.[2]

The main issues of this thesis range from the postcolonial dimension of the Indian identity to the neo-colonial structures of power and politics of identity formation in the 'First World': "Orientalism" (Said) to "Re-orientalism" (Lisa Lau). Thus, a notable point of this thesis is that it explores the postcolonial 'Third World' immigrant from India facing a continuing colonialism in the 'imperial' circumstances of the United States of America. Put in other words, this thesis sets into relief the postcolonial discourse at work in identity reconstruction. The study takes into account the phenomena of contemporary globalization and transculturation, and the

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resultant cosmopolitanism in ‘First World’ metropolitan areas that finds its implications in the immigrants’ identifications.

The structuralist, poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial interpretations of identity have become encapsulated in the notion of a non-essentialist fluid identity, which is not only discursive but also dependent on “difference” (Sevänen; Edgar and Sedgwick; Barker). Further, concepts like hybridity, migrancy and diaspora converge with issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, etc. to narrate the making of identity in the contemporary globalized world. In the context of this thesis, the analysis of identity takes the temporal framework of such a background. Critical standpoints on assimilation, acculturation, cosmopolitanism, and the postnational have also been taken into account. The texts taken for study span the period from the 1970s to post ‘9/11’ in the US, and, therefore, reflect the topicality of discussions of culture and identity in cultural and literary theory.

Concomitant to tracing personal changes within the immigrant individual, this thesis reflects the changing global socio-economic-political dynamics of a globalized world. Glocalization, transculturation, and cosmopolitanism are the terms that encompass these sea-changes in a world that has tried to address racial and colonial discriminations, and yet is witness to a new imperialism and neo-colonialism. Bharati Mukherjee’s novels run the trajectory of this changing world from the 1960s to the present.

The thesis confines itself to the specific immigrant context of the United States vis-à-vis the Indian immigrant, as portrayed in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Therefore, the study makes a modest attempt to understand the author’s literary

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firmament and socio-cultural setting of the texts. The focus, by and large, is on the female protagonists.

Objectives and Hypothesis

The literature review undertaken a little earlier shows that though many aspects of Bharati Mukherjee's fiction have received critical attention, yet, a comprehensive study on the issue of 'cultural reconstruction' from the perspective of liminality and cosmopolitanism in a political setting that could be described as postnational has not found much discussion. This thesis seeks to specifically look at the reinterpretation of culture and the realignment of quotidian existence by immigrants in the interstitiality of mainstream dominance and identity politics. Bharati Mukherjee's novels allow this exploration for research and study. This study aims to fill that gap and contribute towards an understanding of the inevitability and indispensability of reconstruction of culture in immigrant lives as they try to manoeuvre their survival in a new land. [3]

Although Mukherjee's novels show the protagonists' proclivity towards assimilation with the new culture, the thesis simultaneously directs one's attention to the reinterpretation of the homeland culture and its concomitant effects on the immigrants. Spatial and temporal distance from the motherland together with wrenching new experiences of the adopted land engenders a prismatic lens that entails a totally different perspective on the old culture. This has serious ramifications on the immigrant psyche. At the same time, previous lifestyle habits and memories of the homeland culture complicate and pre-empt the unquestioning acceptance of the dominant society. This problematizes integration with the current society and prompts the sustenance of both the old and the new ways of living in what is called

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cultural citizenship. The analysis of Mukherjee's novels in the thesis leads up to this juncture in the immigrant journey. The study attempts to focus on the fluidity of culture's hybridity that allows a re-evaluation of old beliefs and traditions against the newness that accosts an immigrant upon relocating to a new land.

Immigrants cannot identify with the host society in an effortless unproblematized way. Given the perplexities and dilemmas at the interface of crossing cultures, a simple and non-problematic adjustment to such a cultural matrix is not possible. Therefore, Mukherjee shows her characters engaging in a conscious reconstruction of culture in order to endure the overpowering tugs of nostalgia and the alienation of the new culture, to overcome or balance the conflicting claims of the homeland and the adopted land. Through effort and agency a new and complex sense of identity, belongingness and fulfilment occurs at these interstitial spaces. The question of a reconstructed identity has been dealt with in many, often conflicted, ways within postcolonial writings. For many, this traumatic process of breaking into a reconstituted identity, is not a matter of loss but is a process of gaining a new identity and new affiliations. Bharati Mukherjee is one such writer, as this thesis sets out to demonstrate.

Bharati Mukherjee's immigrant narratives seem to be underpinned by broader collusions in the globalizing neo-colonial framework of the contemporary world. This thesis, arguing with the help of insights from postcolonial theory which exposes imperialistic overtones in writings that perpetuate re-orientalism of a kind, suggests that privileging a set of beliefs over another and representing them as 'natural' is a political act which Mukherjee, oddly enough, fails to recognize.

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Methodology

The study adopts the tools of postcolonial theory and cultural studies to arrive at an understanding of the transformations of identity of the postcolonial 'Third World' Indian immigrant in the multicultural and pluralistic dynamics of the 'First World' United States. The theoretical framework finds detailed elaboration in chapter 2 of the thesis.

III

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis explores the transformation of the immigrant identity from the critical perspective of postcolonial theory in the selected novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Weaving the six chapters together is the theme of fluid identity that finds itself reconstructed with various ramifications. The context of the United States of America as the adopted land of the immigrant is taken as the backdrop along with India as the culture from which the immigrants are in transit. The issues that this thesis holds for investigation are primarily the reconstruction of culture in the liminal stage of arrival in the new land of relocation, the strategies of negotiation that the immigrant undertakes to effect transformations in identity formation, and the matrices of becoming a cultural citizen in the 'First World' context.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction and overview of the thesis, showing the scope, objective, hypothesis, and method, and also locating Bharati Mukherjee in immigrant and diasporic literature. Section 1 of the chapter gives a brief literature review of Mukherjee's works highlighting the primary issues that have received critical attention and engendered debate. Section 2 details the scope of the study

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limiting its temporal framework from the post-1965 immigration issues in the US to the contemporary times. Section 3 shows the layout of the six chapters of the thesis and a brief survey of its contents.

Marking the different landmarks in the thesis, chapter 2 lays out the theoretical framework of the issues investigated in the study. Section 1 explains briefly the provenance and praxis of postcolonial theory, and its relevance to the study of identity reconstruction of the Indian immigrants in the United States. It provides a condensed profile of the Indian minority living within mainstream America. Section 2 throws light on Mukherjee's perspectives on immigration and the 'idea of America' that plays a significant role in shaping her diasporic /immigrant narratives. It also elucidates the issues of diaspora and postcolonialism that are reflected in her works that cater to the multicultural American audience.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 make detailed analyses of the processes involved in the reconstruction of the immigrant identity as portrayed by the protagonists of Mukherjee's texts. While chapter 3 explores *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, chapter 4 takes up only one novel, *Jasmine*, taking into consideration the extensive analysis the novel offers and the expanse of the critique germane to the topic. Section 1 of chapter 3 throws light on the term 'liminality,' showing its genealogy and the various interpretations it has received till date. Section 2 adopts the connotations of the term and interrogates the liminal ambivalence of protagonist Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter*. Section 3, similarly, reveals the intense mental agony and indecisiveness that pursues an immigrant unable to handle the cultural differences as depicted in *Wife*. Section 4 concludes with the inferences drawn from the preceding sections.

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Chapter 4 which discusses Mukherjee's most well-known novel, *Jasmine* is divided into three sections. Section 1 explains the implications of the terms of negotiation and hybridity in the context of the thesis. Section 2 interrogates the strategies of negotiation that the protagonist undertakes to attain her individual desires and pursue the 'American dream.' Section 3 attempts to correlate the different aspects of the analysis and tries to show the valorization of the 'First World' against the 'backwardness' of the 'Third World' in the novel.

In chapter 5, *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* have been taken for analysis. In section 1 of the chapter, the concept of the 'cultural citizen' is briefly explored against the background of the geopolitics of the contemporary world. In section 2, protagonist Tara in *Desirable Daughters* tries to understand the tugs of homeland beliefs and memories that haunt her quotidian existence in the United States and the significance of their presence across temporal and spatial boundaries. Section 3 underscores Tara's 'roots search' and the undertones that structure her postcolonial narrative of the homeland. Section 4 deduces the implications of these sections and tries to show the collusions underlying the cultural citizen that Mukherjee's protagonist becomes in the two novels.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of the basic findings of each chapter. Further, it elaborates on some of the pertinent issues that need special emphasis in some of the texts. It also briefly touches on further research that can be pursued from this study. The chapter finally gathers the analytical interpretations deduced from this research on the reconstruction of culture and its impact on immigrant identity. It reiterates the fluidity of identity and the varied cultural connotations that identity reflects, significantly highlighting the power of politics that underscores it.

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Notes

[1] In this study, the notion of 'culture' is seen from the political praxis of Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies pertain to the construction of discourse, which as Stuart Hall elaborates, is "a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society" ("Work of Representation" 6, italics in original). Hall defines culture as "the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society" and also includes "the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life" ("Gramsci's Relevance" 439).

[2] The ramifications of 9/11 in the context of postcolonial theory are many and far-reaching, as elaborated by Nayar in his *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 199-204. Steven Salaita in his essay, "Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans Before and After 9/11," draws one's serious attention to the drastic resurfacing of the differences of 'us' and 'them' that came in the wake of 9/11 in the US. The phenomenon of 9/11 can also be seen as a cultural category as expounded by Nayar in his *States of Sentiment: Exploring the Cultures of Emotion*. As far as Bharati Mukherjee is concerned, Bella Adams in her *Asian American Literature* discusses Mukherjee's discourse of immigration post 9/11, still continuing to believe in the US as a land freedom.

[3] Samboonath Singh's paper, "Cultural Reconstruction in the Canadian Indian Diaspora," throws light on how reconstruction of culture can take place in an adopted land. Singh focuses on the construction of an "ethno-religious" identity in the midst of "ethnic diversity" (1).

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Chapter II

Theoretical Framework and Issues

This chapter attempts to discuss some aspects of postcolonial theory, its interrogation of ramifications of representation, imperialism and the politics of identity with specific relevance to the issues of this thesis. The chapter also holds up for view and analysis Bharati Mukherjee's perspectives on immigration with particular relevance to the novels undertaken for this study.

This chapter is organized primarily into two sections. Section 1 renders a brief overview of postcolonial theory and its praxis, keeping in view the particularities of this thesis. Section 2 presents a critical perspective on Bharati Mukherjee's approach to the issue of immigration, its impact on identity reconstruction and diasporic/ immigrant narratives as a whole. [1]

I

Theoretical Issues

This study takes up the definition of the term postcolonial put forward by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in the preface to the second edition of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, "to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies" (xix). Postcolonial theory makes an analysis of these practices represented by discourse in which race has been the characteristic marker of difference. [2] With the main binary of the "the West and the Rest" (6), this colonial discourse has spawned

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other antipodal inequalities and injustices, creating an Other to the West. In other words, "Postcolonial theory explores how colonial ideology, strategies of representation, and racial prejudices are coded into the literary texts, and how these informed concrete political, military, and social 'operations' in colonialism" (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 18).

Postcolonial theory problematizes narratives of representation that seem to stereotype the Orient or non-Western cultures and peoples as the Other or inferior to the European/American; as traditional in contrast to the progressive, enlightened, modern West; as a homogeneity without differences; and as necessarily requiring the civilizing imperial values, culture and policies of the West. Emerging as a "distinct category" in the 1990s, a primary consequence of "postcolonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics" (Barry 191). Barry contends that "whenever a universal signification is claimed for a work, then, white, Eurocentric norms and practices are being promoted by a sleight of hand to this elevated status, and all others correspondingly relegated to subsidiary, marginalised roles" (192). The provenance of postcolonial theory dates back to the analysis of the identity of the colonized in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), where Fanon revealed the European casting of the pre-colonial culture of the native as, in Barry's words, "a pre-civilised limbo, or even as a historical void" (192). It is to this book by Fanon that Gayatri Spivak, writing in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), attributed the origin of the "source book" of postcolonial theory, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978 (Young, *Postcolonialism* 8). Said's groundbreaking work exposed the constructedness of the Orient by the West "as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Dennis Walder, qtd. in Barry 192), decadent and savage, which Westerners do not

acknowledge in themselves; simultaneously, the East is perceived as "a fascinating realm of the exotic, the mystical and the seductive" (Barry 192). Both Fanon and Said thereby laid the foundation of a theory which has probed the assumed differences between the East and the West, and the props which have deliberately sustained these differences.

Drawing from poststructuralist notions of "identity and indeterminacy," Homi K.Bhabha disrupts these ideas of dichotomies between the Western centre and the Eastern periphery and asserts the "shifting, hybrid constructions" of postcolonial identities (Guerin et al. 304). Bhabha "proposes instead a dialogic model of nationalities, ethnicities, and identities characterized by what he calls *hybridity*; . . . something new, emerging from a 'Third Space' to interrogate the givens of the past" (Guerin et al. 304-305, italics in original). Exploring female subjectivity, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," draws attention to the fact that the "'subaltern' or subproletarian women in the Third World" "are silenced by the dialogue between the male-dominated West and the male-dominated East, offering little hope for the subaltern woman's voice to rise up amidst the global social institutions that oppress her" (Guerin et al. 305). Spivak is concerned about the agency of the 'subaltern' and, therefore, cautions against the surreptitious ventriloquism of postcolonial studies or Western feminism while representing the non-Western woman.

Aptly describing the colonial ramifications on contemporary subject formation, Mongia in her introduction to *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* points out: "As hybridity, marginality and the diasporic become even more seductive notions for describing contemporary constructions of conflict-ridden subjectivity, the experience of migration becomes 'emblematic of the fissured identities posited by post-

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structuralist theory, and hence synonymous with the fractures – epistemic and otherwise – experienced by colonized people'" (7).[3] Salman Rushdie embraces this fractured identity of migrants and the possibility of different ways of belonging, while Paul Gilroy, talking of British and Black identities, had already explored the 'double consciousness' or the mutual constitutive character of different cultures in the process of cultural translation. In other words, Gilroy underscores the hybrid nature of displaced identities, which finds expression in his term "black Atlantic." What in effect happens is hybridity, as Bhabha has argued, completely dismantles the binaries in colonial discourse consequently foregrounding mimicry, ambivalence and fluidity. Identity, therefore, does not remain fixed, but constantly shifts in displacement. Postcolonial theory uses this non-essential identity in its interrogations to justify the falsity of racism and the hegemony of the West over the rest of the world. Though postcoloniality and decolonization have implied measures to counter the devastating effects of colonization, there are yet new faces of colonialism as imperialism. 'Postcoloniality' suggests "strategies of resistance, negotiation, and cultural assertion" to the former 'Third World' colonized peoples, and it seeks to highlight native cultures and folklores, and construct new modes of narratives and new histories in the continuation and re-formation of the pre-colonial stage (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 8). 'Decolonization' seeks to understand and free colonial constraints of thought and culture, which is a form of resistance to Europeanized construction of the world. Padmini Mongia points out, "The burden of postcolonial theory . . . is the burden of Western philosophy, a rethinking of the very terms by which knowledge has been constructed" (5). What is noteworthy is that it has become long established in postcolonial theory that, as Spivak argues, a return to a pre-colonial native culture is impossible. Having gone through a thorough overhaul in

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colonialism, the "native past" has become "unrecognizable," therefore, what Spivak argues for is the recognition of the "complexity of form, full of differences and contradictions" of the native culture (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 24-25).

What may be seen as the continuation of colonialism today can be deduced in a converse way from Nayar's enumeration of the three main features of colonialism -- "governance" by Europeans, "study of non-European cultures", and "transformation of native societies" (*Postcolonial Literature* 4). First, that though a colonial government may not be a de facto ruler of a non-European and a non-American 'Third World' nation-state, global economic imperialism leaves little room for native cultures to survive without exploiting the socio-economic-cultural space for profit. Secondly, the study of non-European cultures is still perniciously alive in trying to homogenize and globalize the ethnic native space of the 'Third World.' Finally, the changes in native societies have surfaced in 'glocalization.' Even with political independence of the colonized nations, economic independence has not been achieved and such imperialism has been termed 'neo-colonialism.'

The neo-colonial currents of the globalized world affect the postcolonial identity. A postcolonial 'Third World' immigrant to an imperial 'First World' is affected by the imbrications of various forces. The national is problematized as the immigrant enters another national territory. Borders become interstitial spaces thereby. Culture finds new meanings. The past is a matrix of history, memory, imagination and representation. Race, ethnicity, indigeneity, place, globalization, and diaspora have become the axes on which the politics of identity works. Race still plays a crucial role in discrimination in the contemporary setting while ethnicity rules how assimilation into a dominant community can be engineered. Since postcolonial theory is broadly an examination of displacement, whether of indigenous communities or native

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cultures or even mobility (of capital and peoples), globalization as an arm of advanced technology and social network has become the common hinge for exploring the dynamics of postcolonial cultural identity. “If anything seems to characterize globalization at the turn of the century, it is the phenomenon of the extraordinary and accelerating movement of peoples throughout the world,” writes Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin even while pointing out that diaspora leads to the “vexed questions of identity, memory and home” (*Post-Colonial Studies* 7). The nation-state has undergone changes in conception as critics like Benedict Anderson describe the nation only as “imagined communities.” “For James Clifford there is a new world order of mobility, of rootless histories, and the paradox of global culture is that it is ‘at home’ with this motion rather than in a particular place” (7). Referring to the India and the culture that Rushdie went away from, and talking of the writer as an exile or emigrant or expatriate, Rushdie says in his seminal essay, “Imaginary Homelands,” “. . . our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; [echoing Spivak as mentioned above in this chapter] that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (428). Rushdie in the same essay adds another important point, “It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (429).

Diaspora examines this concept of ‘loss’ and the continuation of strategies which compensates for the loss of culture and home. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have pointed out that while ‘immigration and migration “focus on movement, disruption and displacement” diaspora concentrates on “the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection that come to characterize the diasporic society”

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(*Post-Colonial Studies* 425). The approach to this thesis is that of both diasporic continuation of cultural loyalty of the homeland as well as that of immigrant's journey and arrival in liminal displacement. The thesis takes both the concepts of diaspora and immigration together, finding the conjunction of both in Avtah Brah's assertion, "At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey" ("Thinking" 443). This also brings into purview Vijay Mishra's phrase, "the diasporic imaginary" (in his essay bearing the same as the title) by which he refers to an "ethnic enclave in a nation-state" living "in displacement" as well as to the ethnic group's acknowledgement of the nation as "a narrative imaginatively constructed by its subject" (448).

Diasporic communities from postcolonial nations transact through their postcolonial hybridized identities. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall points out an important facet of cultural identity, that of "'becoming' as well as of 'being,'" which he ascribes to the identity resulting from "the colonial experience" (435). Hall elaborates:

> It [Cultural identity] belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (435)

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Hall highlights the imperative of acknowledging a non-essentialist identity, of hybridity and diaspora, “by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; . . . Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (438).

Identity is a “temporary stabilization of meaning or description of ourselves with which we emotionally identify,” defines Chris Barker (442). Identity relates to the “[P]oints of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us,” adds Barker (442). The identity of the postcolonial ‘Third World’ immigrant thus evolves out of the points of strategic identifications relating to class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, race, language, and such other elements which come into play in the process of identification with a culture, homeland or adopted land, locality or community, time and space. In a transcultural global world, different forms of simultaneous belonging can exist with layers of identifications. Originating from the notion of hybridity, contemporary postcolonial studies now explores “multicultural citizenship” as advocated by Will Kymlicka; the immigrant now identifies with many places and identities. Cosmopolitanism and postnationalism are ready references now. While a cosmopolitan identity is rootless yet connected to multiple locations and celebrated by writers like Rushdie and Pico Iyer (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 178), a postnational identity is a trope of the contemporary future as seen by theorists like Arjun Appadurai (1993, 1996), Jurgen Habermas (2001), Donald Pease (1997) and Manuel Castells (1996) – a condition that could be the outcome of a substitution of the concept of the nation-state by transcultural networks and cyberculture (Nayar, *Contemporary Literary* 181-182). What, of course, has come to stay is ‘cultural citizenship’ as termed by Toby Miller, with affiliations to a culture left behind in the

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homeland by the immigrant as well as loyalty to an adopted homeland ("Introducing…Cultural Citizenship").

Postcolonial Theory, Indian Immigrants and the US

'Cultural citizenship' may have come as an inevitable common tendency in the dynamics of settling down in "the society of relocation," as referred to by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (*Post-Colonial Studies* 425). Yet, the reality of 9/11 has undermined the postcolonial props of hybridity and ambivalence in the resumption of cultural binaries of the 'First World' and the 'rest.' Multiculturalism in postcolonial studies and as an immigrant policy in the US has been shaken from its complacency. Since the 1990s, postcolonial studies has focused on the oppressed 'Third World' minorities and marginalized immigrants in the 'First World,' and, therefore, the 9/11 cultural exclusion in the US has been under the scanner. As Desai and Nair point out, many critics, "in the more recent context of the second U.S.-led war in Iraq, have chosen to revive the discourse of 'empire' and its association with American notions of exceptionalism and manifest destiny" (2). Desai and Nair also add that "postcolonialism as a critical enterprise is attentive not only to the imperial abuses of state power in the United States but to those it finds anywhere and everywhere in the world" (10). To quote another point of view on the relation of postcolonial studies and the US, Jenny Sharpe remarks, ". . . when used as a descriptive term for the United States, *postcolonial* does not name its past as a white settler colony or its emergence as a neocolonial power; rather it designates the presence of racial minorities and Third World immigrants" (181, italics in original).

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Known variously as ‘Asian Indians,’ ‘South Asians,’ ‘South Asian Americans,’ the immigrants from India are best referred to as ‘Indian Americans’ (Lal x-xiv). Vinay Lal explains,

> The reticence of Indians, especially, in being marked “South Asian” is more pronounced in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the witch hunts that, around the world, have sent thousands of innocent Muslims to jail, pushed others into the commission of desperate acts, and cast a pall of suspicion around all Muslim males. (xiii)

This seems to add to the reason why the nomenclature ‘Indian Americans’ serves best for this community.

Indians first started to immigrate to the United States in the first half of the twentieth century more as “cheap labor” (Alba and Nee 208). However, the 1924 Immigration Act barred Indian immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens because of their being “nonwhites” (Alba and Nee 209). This first wave of immigration had few Indian women because immigrant wives were not allowed to enter the US by the 1917 immigration law.

With the second wave of immigration which started after the Immigration Act of 1965, also known as the National Origins Act of 1965 (Lal 53), “Indian population has, extrapolating from the figure of 1.71 million in the 2000 census, grown to over two million” (Lal 4). The community, says Lal “commands the highest per capita income of any racial or ethnic group, as well as the highest rate of college graduates” (4). While the first phase constituted mainly “illiterate laborers” the second phase comprised of educated highly skilled professionals (Alba and Nee 209). From the

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conventional professions of medicine and engineering, the job prospects shifted to the information technology and investment banking sectors. To add to these, immigrants from India have successfully engaged themselves in “the taxi business, fast food and convenience store franchises, and hospitality industries” (Lal 5). Indian Americans made their presence visible by the fast spread of Indian restaurants, ‘Little Indias’ with a concentration of the Indian population in the metropolitan places, the rise of a South Asian diasporic literature, the celebration of Bollywood and cultural festivals held in college campuses, the tangible numbers of ever increasing Indian students in schools and colleges, and so forth (5). Lal’s *The Other Indians* becomes a “cohesive history” of these “phenomena, and many others touching on the political, social, cultural, and religious lives of Indian Americans” to chart out the “narratives of Indian American ‘identity’” etched on the “geopolitics of Indianness” (5-6). What one understands is that the Indian American diaspora has come of age and is not unnoticed in the geopolitical dynamics of the global world.

The Indian Minority and the American Mainstream

Even though the Indian diaspora has made its substantial effects felt in almost all aspects of the American mainstream society, race and ethnic discrimination are all too tangible. Lal points out that incidents of such discrimination and “glass ceiling” in professional promotions are often encountered by the Indian Americans (59-60). In the 1980s, racism made its virulent presence felt by episodes of ‘dotbusting’ (the dot referring to the vermilion dot applied by married Hindu women on their foreheads), molestation of women, vandalism of business property, physical assault which ranged to fatal injury. To counter this, the Indian diaspora soon “embraced literature, art, and music . . . [to] give expression to their conception of politics, public life, and social activism” (77). Gay rights for Indians were demanded while Indian culture was

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reified as “almost eternal” (78). Further, a distinction was always prevalent between American culture or rather the “lack of culture in American society” and the Indian “practices, norms, and protocols of behaviour” (82). What the reification of Indian culture directs to is the belief that in spite of being a “global citizen, an Indian is an Indian, whether in Dubai, Mumbai, or UCLA” (84). As far as academic scholarship is concerned, Lal refers to the fact that almost every university or college has an Indian faculty presence, and takes the names of the most elite among them, “the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, the literary theorist Homi Bhabha, and the multi-faceted Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak” who hold “endowed professorships at the country’s most elite universities who occupy besides a leading role in their own disciplines” (107). Economist Amartya Sen, writers such as R.K. Narayan, Ved Mehta, Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Suketu Mehta, Vikram Chandra, Shishir Kurup, Abraham Verghese, Atul Gawande, Agha Shahid Ali, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri are some of the names that have played a dominant role in establishing Asian/Indian scholarship and writing in the US ; in the cyberspace of the internet too, Indians have occupied their own location both in terms of a voice for their culture as well as professionals in cybertechnology (107-116). In the US perspective, the Indian Americans have become a ‘model minority’ as most Indian Americans have succeeded in the race to fulfil their ‘American dream.’

For the American mainstream, the Indian diaspora is yet another of those ethnic groups which has “continually reshaped” to form its “composite culture” or “cultural syncretism” (Alba and Nee 64). Tracing its nascency to the “colonial northern European settlers,” the American mainstream “has evolved through incremental inclusion of ethnic and racial groups that formerly were excluded and accretion of

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parts of their cultures to the composite culture" (12). This also includes the incorporation of cultural characteristics (in terms of "cuisine," "entertainment," "artistic expression," etc) and other "alternative institutional forms" such as religion, etc. of later waves of immigrants into America (13). Alba and Nee contend that for the earliest waves of immigrants in the US, assimilation was the primary way of integrating with the mainstream. However, this process, according to Alba and Nee, does not have to remain an inevitable mode of acculturation. At the same time, they also emphasize that assimilation will still remain a significant process of composing the mainstream fabric of the United States. "The contemporary immigration scene displays complex, contradictory patterns, from rapid assimilation apparent among some professionals and their children to the new way of sojourning apparent in transnational circuits, and to the potential among other immigrant groups for incorporation as racialized minorities" (273). The contemporary immigrants bring forms of "human-cultural and financial capital" along with them which is different from the immigrants in the past and therefore, there is a concomitant change in the kind of "communities they enter, and their race and legal status" (274). As a result, acculturation happens at "different rates and often selectively, by shedding some aspects of immigrant cultural practices while retaining others" (274) and would be influenced by the experiences of America. Other forms of capital like low wage labourers and social factors like racism play their own dynamics in the integration into the mainstream. C.L.Innes draws attention to the meaning of 'assimilation' as follows:

> A form of colonizing process which aims to integrate indigenous populations by the imposition of the colonizer's language and values, and sometimes through intermarriage, in order to eventually make them disappear as incongruent or

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> opposing constituents. The term also refers to the process of integrating immigrants and other ethnocultural minority groups into a dominant culture. (233)

Since the limits of this thesis are confined to the cultural encounter of Indian immigrants with the American culture, as reflected in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, this thesis will focus on acculturation with reference to the Indian Americans interacting with the American mainstream. Acculturation is a "set of social processes by which we learn how to 'go on' in a culture through the acquisition of the language, values, norms and maps of meaning that constitute a way of life" (Barker 435). The assimilation model of acculturation has been a contested field in the US.

> Assimilation is a contested idea today. Since the 1960s it has been seen in a most negative light, as an ethnocentric and patronizing imposition on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity. The very word seems to conjure up a bygone era, when the multicultural nature of American society was not comprehended, let alone respected, and there appeared, at least to white Americans, to be a unitary and unquestioned American way of life. (Alba and Nee 1)

It is because of the conscious or unconscious assumption that "minority groups would inevitably" (Alba and Nee 1-2) want to renounce their own cultures that the earlier concept of assimilation has faced such rejection and negative light. It has received such derogatory reactions for its unidirectional belief in a kind of "Eurocentric hegemony" undermining any "value and sustainability of minority cultures" and an unquestioned demand to live up to the standards of Anglo-American culture. It is this view of assimilation that has become "passé" (2). The civil rights movement with its concomitant emphasis on the importance of 'identity' finally

denuded the strength of such a conception of incorporation of immigrants and minorities to the mainstream American society.

The new conception of the term has gained force in the 1990s with scholars like Alba and Nee refusing to accept the 'melting pot' theory of inevitable and necessary mergence of immigrants into the Anglo-European norm (Heisler 90). The "new theory of assimilation," as advocated by Alba and Nee (Heisler 90), is based on the observation that institutional structures and changes of the 'receiver society' enable assimilation of immigrants contingent upon the human-cultural-social-financial capital brought along from the homelands.

> Assimilation, defined as 'the attenuation of distinctions based on ethnic origin' ([Alba and Nee] 2003:38) proceeds incrementally involving a variety of mechanisms at different levels (individuals, groups, networks), where the particular sets of mechanisms vary across racial and ethnic groups. What matters most is that the boundary between immigrants and the 'mainstream' is not fixed (as the traditional assimilation perspective suggested), but changes over time, as boundaries may become blurred or shift entirely. (Heisler 90)

Alba and Nee underscore the multicultural diversity of the American mainstream, and that with the recurring waves of immigration into 'immigrant America,' minority cultures have become integrated enough to evolve as part of the mainstream culture of the United States. The US known basically as a "settler society", the earliest assumption was that the immigrant population would wholly and unquestionably accept the Anglo-American culture and equally disown one's own culture wholly (Alba and Nee17) . Ideas about assimilation changed with each wave of immigration

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right from the colonial times from Europe's northwest to the nineteenth-century from the rest of Europe and Asia. Alba and Nee point out that the trend of social and intellectual movements since the 1960s brought about many changes:

> Criticism of the old canonical formulation of assimilation reflects a new consensus involving a mandate for the inclusion of all groups in civil society and for remedial action to secure *equality of rights*, interpreted broadly as meaning parity in life chances. This logic has permeated thinking about the incorporation of immigrant minorities, imparting a strong momentum to the rejection of the old assimilation canon. (6, italics in original)

In the context of globalization and non-European immigration, different models have emerged as to the process of adaptations to the mainstream. It may be "ethnic pluralism" with a close network with the homeland (6). This has led to the phenomenon of transnationalism, with the advantage of globalization and technology. "The pluralist alternative envisions that, in the contemporary world, the choice to live in an ethnic social and cultural matrix need not be associated with the loss of the advantages once afforded almost exclusively by the mainstream" (6).The other category which is an alternative to assimilation for incorporation to the mainstream is that of the "disadvantaged minorities" (8), connected with the concepts of "segmented" and "downward" assimilation, referring,

> [to the] route of assimilation guided by the cultural models of poor, native-born African Americans and Latinos, a route which has probably been traveled in previous immigrant eras – for example, by the Afro-Caribbean immigrants of the early twentieth century and their children, many of whom gradually became part of the black American population. (8)

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The alternative models of pluralism and segmented assimilation in the process of incorporation into the mainstream have their own validities and limitations just like the ‘assimilation’ model.

> One reason why the pluralist model has received so much attention is that it develops an alternative to the third mode of incorporation, spotlighted by the model of segmented assimilation. While this model encompasses the possibility of assimilation into the mainstream – this is one segment, or trajectory – its focus of interest is on assimilation into a disadvantaged minority status. That outcome is seen as the result of changes in economic structures that reduce opportunities for upward mobility; racial distinctions that remain powerful and place the children of non-white immigrants at a disadvantage; and the attractiveness of an inner-city, underclass culture for those in the second generation who have experienced discrimination and rejection in schools and workplaces. (Alba and Nee 276- 277)

The concept of ‘segmented’ assimilation (first used by Portes and Zhou in 1993) has received much focus (as also mentioned by Alba and Nee) in terms of the second generation (children of immigrants) assimilation. Taking into consideration the “unequal and stratified characteristics of American society” (Heisler 90), ‘segmented assimilation’ explains that the second generation “may assimilate into different segments of the existing class structure” (91), which is conditioned by the social class the parents belong to:

> Thus, children of middle-class immigrants who can take advantage of the opportunities offered by American society (in particular educational opportunities and associated opportunities for upward mobility) are likely to

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> become assimilated into the middle class. The children of lower-class immigrants, the vast majority of whom are visible minorities, may face a different trajectory . . . the children . . . are in danger of joining the urban underclass consisting of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in a "new rainbow underclass" located "at the bottom of society." (Heisler 91)

Because of the information technology revolution aided by globalization, the US has become a metropolitan, cosmopolitan hybridized matrix of culture. In order to read the immigrant's adjustment in such a context, a "whole new mode of reading 'dislocation' and 'immigrant' spaces is now called for" (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 209).[4] Nayar further sums up the contemporary reading of immigrant displacement in the following way:

> In the 1990s, the scope of postcolonial studies moved beyond addressing 'Third World' cultures and colonial histories to include issues relating to the 'Third World' within 'First World' nations: immigrants, refugees, blacks/Hispanics and other ethnic minorities in the US and UK. This marked a shift in thinking about the *nature* of the postcolonial itself. Including minorities under the rubric of 'postcolonial' indicated a bridge-building between formerly colonized and oppressed people in Asian/ African/South American nations and socially subordinated and marginalized races/communities in 'First World' nations. Diasporic peoples who were subject to racism and systemic marginalization even within 'First World' nations saw themselves as colonized. Further, native peoples in Canada, Australia, the USA began to argue that indigenous peoples the world over had been colonized by the white settler races. The debate broadened the purview of postcolonial studies to include indigenous peoples and their experience of colonialism. As we can see,

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> postcolonialism has now become a term to discuss the problems, and narratives, of much of the world's marginalized classes. (21, italics in original)

This extensive quote significantly highlights and elaborates the extant realm, reach and applicability of postcolonial theory today. Cultural Studies, as another arm of postcolonial theory, comes into play with its interrogation of power and politics that underpin culture, and throws valuable light on the position of immigrants in the "host community" and the process of their identity formation (Abercrombie 108).[5] Cutlure is "a mobile signifier that enables distinct ways of talking about human activity" (Barker 438). Since migration is synonymous to mobility, there is an inevitable rebuilding of the cultural construct of the immigrant community. This thesis employs the concept of 'cultural reconstruction' rather than 'assimilation' to highlight the "political and contingent" representation of this construct (438). The thesis shows how "signifying practices" that carve a distinct "way of life" are reconstructed in the "intersection of power and meaning," creating "zones of temporary coherence and shared but always contested significance in a social space" (438). This approach to culture echoes the anti-essential perspective on identity, and to an extent, the theory of 'social constructionism' which sets into relief the "cultural assumptions" of interpreting day-to-day life (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 353).[6] In the process of constructing a new reality for themselves, Mukherjee's characters seem to deliberately choose certain aspects of homeland culture while making a forcible or violent attempt to jettison those aspects that do not suit the imperatives of the new context. In the novels undertaken for study, there is a conscious engagement in the reconstruction of meanings that reflect ideological standpoints and cultural representations. For such interrogations, this thesis harnesses the methodology and approach of both postcolonial theory and cultural studies. This facilitates the

exploration of the dynamics of reinterpretation of culture by Mukherjee's immigrants in the process of their identity formation. The relocation context is, as mentioned above, the United States of America.

II

Mukherjee's Perspectives on Immigration

Bharati Mukherjee writes about immigrants who have made America multicultural. Her oeuvre is mostly focused on Indian immigrants arriving in the United States with the Immigration Act 1965. Mukherjee, by virtue of her own immigrant status, finally becoming a naturalized citizen of the US, is both an insider to the situation of Indian immigrants as well as an outsider, looking at immigration from the American perspective. Mukherjee claims to be an American and has demanded that the mainstream acknowledge her as such. At the same time, she makes it clear that she is aware of the Anglo-European orientation of mainstream America and has, therefore, sought to establish a legitimate place for the Indian immigrant as an integral part of the immigrant settler society.

Mukherjee's bitter experiences of Canadian multiculturalism and her own decision to finally move to the United States have given her a strong foothold in the immigrant situation. In her essay, "Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties," she refers to her experiences as a transition from an expatriate in Canada to an immigrant in the US, in other words, from a "detached on-looker to committed immigrant" (31). Mukherjee, being a naturalized US citizen, rejects any hyphenization of being called as 'Asian-American.' In her own words, she says, the "rejection of hyphenization is my lonely campaign to obliterate categorizing the cultural landscape into a 'center' and its 'peripheries.' To reject hyphenization is to

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demand that the nation deliver the promises of the American Dream and the American Constitution to all its citizens" (33).

Mukherjee returns again and again to the chief concerns in her fiction and non-fictional works, that of expatriation, immigration, transformation of identity, cultural conflicts with their subsequent effects on the immigrant psyche, and socio-economic and political problems of adjustment to a new land. Even Mukherjee's essays and articles deliberate extensively on the politics of immigration in the US. Mukherjee is vocal about her standpoint at different phases of her own process of becoming an Indian expatriate, an Indian immigrant both in Canada and the United States, and finally a naturalized citizen of the United States.

Mukherjee looks at the different waves of immigration which have constituted different 'Americas,' different incorporations into the mainstream American culture, according to the different stages of American immigration history. Mukherjee explains in her interview with Angela Elam,

> When I was writing *Jasmine*, the character was an undocumented alien, and the book of stories just before that also included characters who had come *sneaki* – you know, who had snuck into the United States or were not always welcome. That was 1989. In 2002 and 2004, *Desirable Daughters* and *Tree Bride*, we have a different America, a different traditional American attitude about immigrants from non-European countries. People coming over, like Tara and her husband, Bish Chatterjee, who are making great engineering and Intel progress in places like Silicon Valley, are cosmopolitan. They have self-confidence. They might say, 'I can be here, and I also can be three months in my retirement home in India, or a villa in Italy with ease.' So, I'm

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> looking at different kinds of immigrants in different books. (137-38, italics in original).

Mukherjee's implication is a cultural translation which presupposes culture as fluid and non-essential. The immigrant, therefore, is at liberty for a cultural exchange that could retain the homeland culture to the extent that it enables a convenient adaptation to the "host culture" (Scott and Marshall 155). Mukherjee believes that to abandon aspects of one's identity is a wholesome dimension of immigration. Mukherjee says, "What excites me is that we have the chance to retain those values we treasure from our original cultures, but that we also acknowledge that the outer forms of those values are likely to change" ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 34). The protagonist Tara in *Desirable Daughters* is not living in a water-tight "world where East is East, West is West" given the globalized world of today, observes Mukherjee in her interview with Krasny (123).

While earlier it was 'assimilation' that Mukherjee had advocated and had refused to accept the practice of 'multicultural' policies, Mukherjee has finally adopted the concept of 'mongrelization' in the context of the immigrant's approach to the receiver society. Mukherjee asserts:

> "Assimilation" is no longer useful because of the politicization of that word. I don't like "hybridity" as a word because it seems to me to imply a kind of scientific, laboratory setting in which experiments are being controlled by a scientist. "Mongrelization" is a word that I want to take back from its original pejorative connotations. To me it implies a kind of accidental, spontaneous coming together – you don't know what is going to result from this coming together -- and the energy that a new group or new species brings to society.

> So, for me "mongrelization" means that you don't care about preconceived social hierarchies, about racial or class status. (Edwards, "Saying Yes" 164)

Thus, Mukherjee seems to take note of the fact that the 'melting pot' theory of assimilation, operational till the 1980s, no longer works now. She notes in the interview with Edwards:

> *Jasmine* was the story of immigration and two-way transformation in the U.S. of the late eighties, from the first-person point of view of an undocumented entrant. The eighties was a time when the "melting pot" myth was still operational here. The South Asian immigration story of the 1990s, 2000, and future, however, is about an America that no longer expects meltdown from its newcomers, no longer expects to control the borders, and has issued many different kinds of visas . . . That means that neither America expects them to nor are the new entrants expecting themselves to give their entire loyalty to the United States and to think of themselves as American….The educated immigrants coming in today have a very clear sense of self, pride in education, pride in self worth, confidence in their global mobility. Their primary loyalty is either to the corporate entity . . . or to the self – what can I get, where can I maximize my financial circumstances? So *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are exploring an America very different from that of *Jasmine*. The South Asian immigration and naturalized American characters in them have a much greater range of opportunity and success in the corporate and social worlds. ("Saying Yes" 171-172)

This is Mukherjee's take on the conceptual changes regarding the transformations of the immigrant identity that have taken place over the last four decades. Vouching

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strongly at first for assimilation into the American culture, the writer later seems to retract and give importance to transculturation in multiple citizenship or cultural membership. Mukherjee also takes into account Western science and technological advancements that have posed as attractions to the Indian immigrant. The superstitions-free Western society is drawn as a canvas to etch individual desires and aspirations.

It is Mukherjee's belief that immigration is a process of 'gain' in contrast to those who find a 'loss' in transit to a new culture ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 34). It is a gain in "discarding the communal identity" to have access to an "individual identity" – an individual identity which keeps transforming and evolving, as both Mukherjee and her protagonists in *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters* undergo reconstructions of their identities (143). Drawing a similarity with Salman Rushdie, Mukherjee asserts:

> Others often talk of diaspora, of arrival as the end of the process. They talk of arrival in the context of loss -- the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an intact ethnic culture. They use such words as "erosion" and "loss" in alarmist ways. I want to talk of arrival as gain. Both Salman Rushdie and I see immigration as a process of self-integration. ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 34)

Mukherjee explores the constructive dimensions of immigration that are acknowledged in a process of change and transformation.

The Idea of America and Mukherjee's Audience

Mukherjee differentiates between the United States, on one hand, as "a sovereign nation" with its own "demarcated, patrolled boundaries" and on the other, the idea of 'America' as something which "exists as image or idea, as dream or

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nightmare, as romance or plague, constructed by discrete individual fantasies, and shaded by collective paranoias and mythologies" ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 29). America to Mukherjee is "the stage for the drama of self-transformation" (29). According to the writer, the American culture is "a culture of dreamers, who believe that material shape (which is not the same as materialism) can be given to dreams" (29).

Mukherjee's audience is basically multicultural America. She is an eloquent figure in representing India to the West. At best, she holds up for view Indian culture and the postcolonial Indian identity in her writings. Less appealingly, she casts India much more as a homogenized whole in describing primarily a 'Third World' landscape with its baggage of traditions and suppression of individual identity. In contrast, she valorizes the idea of America which allows the privileging of the individual identity over the collective and ensuing freedom.

Bharati Mukherjee seems to be conscious of what she engenders in her critics. She says:

> My rejection of hyphenization has been deliberately misrepresented as "race treachery" by some India-born, urban, upper-middle-class Marxist green-card holders with lucrative Chairs on U.S. campuses . . . They direct their rage at me because, as a U.S. citizen, I have invested in the present and the future rather than in the expatriate's imagined homeland. They condemn me because I acknowledge erosion of memory as a natural result of emigration; because I count that erosion as net gain rather than as loss; and because I celebrate racial and cultural "mongrelization." ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 33)

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Mukherjee's diasporic/immigrant narratives

Being a diasporic writer, there is a constant shift between time and space in Mukherjee's writing. Memory of the homeland definitely plays a pivotal part in centring the plot while the demands of the present cultural struggles in the "dominant society" releases strategies to best cope with the situation (Abercrombie 20). From an omniscient narrator in the first two novels to a first person narration of personal crises in her later novels, Mukherjee's narrative voice has undergone transformation. She attests this to the needs of the changing socio-cultural and political scene of immigration in the US. She also endorses the fact that she herself has undergone changes in her perception of belonging. While in her first two novels her "expatriate sensibility" was at work, it was in her non-fictional collaborative work with her husband, *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) which made her aware of her immigrant loyalties to her adopted land and simultaneously, her distance from her homeland (Gomez 26).

Apart from the eponymous protagonist in the novel *Jasmine*, Mukherjee's immigrant characters are drawn either from the middle class or from the upper class Indian family. Most of her protagonists in her novels are Bengali and, therefore, the characters are invested with the Bengali culture. What predominates is the Bengali as the Indian representative to her US audience. The characters mostly are afflicted with the dilemmas of identity transformation and the choices at their disposal. The identification is either a deliberate or an unconscious act, and this is where Mukherjee's identity politics comes in to play.

As told to Elam, Mukherjee reposes her characters with choices of agency and transformation even while believing in the workings of fate, " I personally think of fate

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as providing destiny, providing scenarios, and then the individual, with his or her personality, decides what to do given that scenario. So for me, fate is quite dynamic. We create our fate given certain pieces, certain cards" (128). The past is there, but when and as required it is up to the characters to recall it or overcome these memories or even transcend them.

Mukherjee is vocal about describing the writer she is, "The experiences of violent unhousement from a biological homeland and rehousement in an adopted homeland that is not always welcoming to its dark-complexioned citizens have tested me as a person and made me the writer I am today" ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 33). She also declares her agenda:

> As a writer, my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show that I (and the hundreds of thousands of recent immigrants like me) are, minute-by-minute, transforming America. The transformation is a two-way process; it affects both the individual and the national-cultural identity. (34)

However, in her interview with Chen and Goudie in 1996, Mukherjee refutes any claim of having any deliberate agenda to transform America but insists that she hopes for her writing as an immigrant writer to have its effects: "*to transform* as well as *be transformed* by the world I'm re-imagining and re-creating through words. I'd like to think that ideas and feelings generated by my fiction will trickle into other cultures and literatures through translation, and provoke rethinking of what citizenship entails" (91, italics in original).

Mukherjee states in the essay, "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" that her artistic vision of a comprehensive structure is that of the Mughal miniature painting,

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in which every aspect of the border and the centre vie for equal attention, even while they are wrought together by form and colour (Chen and Goudie 77). Narratives and sub-narratives receive indistinguishable significance, compact with passion and metaphors of the artist's observation of life, history, nation and culture (77). Both "compression" and the "art of indirection" govern Mukherjee's writing (Elam 134).

Mukherjee believes that she is not catering to the binaries of the 'First World' and the 'Third World', centre and periphery, or even the mainstream and minority stereotypes. It is in history that she invests much of her literary acumen, "I want to make those historical facts sensuous to the reader. I want to put the reader inside the scene rather than have, you know, spectators" (Elam 137). Mukherjee also does not consider her fiction to be feminist, yet she contends in her interview with Desai and Branstone, "but I do see myself as a champion of civil rights. Extending civil rights to all disadvantaged groups" (104).

Issues of Diaspora and Postcolonialism

Bharati Mukherjee is primarily a diasporic writer, exploring the condition of displacement and the significance of roots. Mukherjee asks her readers to look at her writings from the "contexts of diaspora and transnationalism" and not from the binaries of "India/Britain, Indian national/postcolonial tensions" (Edwards, "Saying Yes" 171). The narrative of the nation or the homeland is structured within the myths, memories, and the culture of the Indian nation. The immigrant moving to a new land is displaced in the hybridity of in-between cultures. Mukherjee projects the differences in cultures, between the adopted land and the homeland, and tries to negotiate these differences by sometimes using Indian mythology to act as counter-narratives to the grand narratives of the West. Mukherjee's characters aim for an

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understanding of their own ethnicity, and simultaneously attempt to carve out their own individuality, provoked by the modernity of the New World and its apparent sense of freedom from some claustrophobic traditions of the homeland.

Mukherjee does not want to be coerced into writing only about Indian natives just because she is "India-born" (Chen and Goudie 85). She does not want to be labelled as a postcolonial. She perceives herself as reaching beyond postcolonialism to conceive of her own aesthetics of fiction. In an insightful remark on one of the ills that "haunt" contemporary postcolonial writing, Nayar points out, "The burden of the postcolonial text to be 'authentic' (what Bahri accurately describes as 'subjugation of story to information', 201), ethnographically accurate and full of information often detracts its other purpose: to tell stories, to be imaginative and artistic" (*Postcolonial Literature* 20). Perhaps this is why Mukherjee does not want to be confined to the postcolonial perspective only. For her, the postcolonial's "creative imagination is fueled primarily by the desire to create a new mythology of Indian nationhood after the Raj's brutalization of Indian culture" (Chen and Goudie 76). Where postcolonial studies, Mukherjee feels, homogenizes by skin colour and ethnicity, as a writer she believes in stressing her individuality. Mukherjee believes that the fault lies in the postcolonialists' seeking for journalistic writings of sociology, rather than the ability to digest imaginative art (Desai and Barnstone 107). Mukherjee believes that postcolonialists had issues with her because of her foray into explorations of new themes in American culture and immigration history rather than remaining tied to exilic Indian literature.

The grievances against Mukherjee's writings of postcolonial theorists are many. In Mukherjee's endorsement of the notion of assimilation, directly in her first two novels, and subtly in her later works, Aijaz Ahmad finds Mukherjee reviving the

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Anglo-oriented racist melting-pot theory of immigrant acculturation (*In Theory*). Ahmad's other grievance is that Mukherjee is one among others who represent Indian writing in English as the representative of everything that is Indian (75). Ahmad finds no anti-imperialist in Mukherjee, rather a corroborator to the counter-canon of 'Third World' literature with the stamp of acknowledgement of the Western metropolitan academy. Further, as Nayar has pointed out, "Ahmad suggests that immigration has its own politics. The combinations of origins, professional ambitions, and the absence of a socialist agenda cause the immigrant intellectual to seek a politics of 'Third World'ism-as-opposition" (*Postcolonial Literature* 30).

In representing the Third World, Mukherjee seems to echo Fredric Jameson's contention that 'Third World' texts are 'national allegories.' But, as Ahmad highlights, there cannot be one representative of nationalism, and that that nationalism cannot speak only of oppression or imperialism. It can also be questioned as to how 'authentic' is the portrayal of Mukherjee's immigrant Indian individual and the representation of the Indian nation-state.

What may even come within the purview of postcolonial reading of Bharati Mukherjee, the writer, is another of Ahmad's accusation. As Nayar sums it up,

> Ahmad points out that postcolonial intellectuals do their theorizing in the West, a comment that echoes Arif Dirlik's dry proposition that postcolonialism begins with the arrival of the 'Third World' academic in 'First World' academia (1994). It somehow suggests, according to Ahmad and Dirlik that the postcolonial can only be situated in 'First World' academia, write for 'First World' audiences and write in the language (read 'jargon'!) of the 'First World'. It is, quite justifiably, a valid comment. (*Postcolonial Literature* 31)

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Mukherjee seems to valorize the global in her fiction, a global homogenized culture, more imperial in nature by its conformity to the American mainstream for, “Globalization is surely an extension, a more insidious one in fact, of colonialism and capitalist modernity” (*Postcolonial Literature* 32). Further, as Nayar also points out, “It is also important to note . . . celebrations of globalizations are made only from within the context of high-paid professorships and material comforts of ‘First World’ citizenships and locations. Academics and theorists from ‘First World’ contexts speak on behalf of the oppressed ‘Third World’ ” (33).

In Mukherjee’s casting of India as a repository of “an awful lot of cultural vices such as sexism, patriarchy, castism, classism,” she seems to consolidate the West’s orientalistic perceptions (Chen and Goudie 90). In fact, Lisa Lau argues, as is elaborated later in this thesis, that Mukherjee and other such writers of the ‘Third World’ publishing in the ‘First World’ have initiated the process of renewed orientalism or “re-orientalism.” Similarly, non-Western feminist writers like Mohanty have held up for criticism the Western feminists’ representation of the homogenous ‘Third World’ woman suffering of patriarchy and oppression. From the postcolonial framework, Mukherjee’s work reflects this collusion with Western feminists’ perception of the Indian woman. In sustaining the ‘First World’ as a gateway to liberation from such ‘Third World’ oppression of the ‘Third World’ women, Mukherjee paints a lopsided picture of the East. There are no easy binaries between the ‘First World’ and ‘Third World.’ The complexities within ‘Third World’ have to be taken into account: class, caste, gender, sexuality, etc. (Rajan and Park). Nor is Western feminism above invidious racism.

Thus, what Bharati Mukherjee apprehends as an assault on her literary and political aesthetics by the postcolonialists, the postcolonialists find perpetuation of

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homogenization of the 'Third World' natives and the perpetuation of their marginalization in Mukherjee. Where Mukherjee emphasizes her right to her creative individuality, the postcolonialists only see it as a betrayal to her Indianness (Desai and Barnstone 115). On one hand, Mukherjee celebrates immigration as exuberance and gain, while on the other the postcolonialists' accuse Mukherjee of conniving with imperialism and neo-colonialism, which is a loss in terms of resorting back to colonialism and Eurocentric hegemony; an imperialism which seeks to erase all native culture.

Postcolonialists have accused Mukherjee of clumping together all immigrants as being in the periphery of the mainstream by virtue of being from the 'Old World.' The United States is seen by Mukherjee as the 'New World' because of its modern technology, oriented to globalization, transculturation and cosmopolitanism. So, the questions that arise are, is Mukherjee rendering the discourse of colonial hegemony, as old wine in a new bottle? Is Mukherjee 're-othering' the native in the contemporary world even while postcolonialism vehemently protests against homogeneity, and clamours for the acknowledgement of ethnic differences and equal respect for all representations? Does Mukherjee subtly connive with the politics of imperialism when representing the native culture of India and its contemporary backwardness viz. poverty, caste, oppression, etc.? These are questions that this thesis particularly addresses. Further, is Mukherjee depicting an 'authentic' picture of what she is showcasing? Postcolonialism does make it its concern to articulate issues of the 'Third World' in First World nations. Surprisingly though, Mukherjee still uses the terms 'New World' and 'Old World' rather than the more contemporary terms such as 'Third World and 'First World'. Mukherjee equates America with the 'New World' and the immigrant as a prior resident of the 'Old World.'

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The continuing oppression of the contemporary world exerted in the main through American imperialism as seen by the postcolonialists is something Mukherjee does not seem to acknowledge. What is to be noted is that the postcolonial encounter of the Indian immigrant is re-enacted again in the First World without the obvious force and violence of the colonization of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The diasporic can be looked at as postcolonial because of their marginalization by the dominant majority, "anything that contests oppressive structures informed by colonial ideologies such as racism can be described as 'postcolonial', even though such groups live in 'First World', metropolitan locations" (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 9).

This can be related to Nayar's reference to Said, who proposes "a disputational reading process where the author's 'given' must be seen in the light of texts/ experiences which are effaced," in order to combat master narratives of elision and imperialism (*Postcolonial Literature* 24). Mukherjee is possibly overlooking the interpretations of colonial masters of the Orient and making her characters and narratives speak and see the reality as shown through the colonizing discourse of the colonizer. As implied by Spivak the marginalized seems to be perpetually marginalized by the "'Third Worldism' of postcolonial studies" (*Postcolonial Literature* 25).

It is important to examine the discourse that runs through Mukherjee's fiction, the ideology and the representation. What has her narrative allowed to be voiced and what silenced? It is very clear that it is from the site of displacement that Mukherjee speaks of as an immigrant writer of immigrants.

However, it must be pointed out that Mukherjee cannot be unaffected by the colonial traces on identity, language and culture of India, by virtue of the fact that

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Mukherjee herself claims to be an American writer of 'Indian' origin. The postcolonial is defined as a site by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin,

> to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constructed. (*The Empire Writes Back* 12)

Not taking into consideration the postcoloniality of Mukherjee's writing would be a serious oversight in the analysis of her characters and fiction. While Mukherjee is a naturalized American citizen, her characters range from undocumented aliens to temporary immigrants seemingly with no select direction in the trajectory of their future. The author's works and characters are set at the crossroads of the vestiges of European colonialism, Indian postcoloniality, and American imperialism. The following chapters attempt to tease out the implications of the representations of immigrants made by Mukherjee in her fiction through insights gleaned from a few major postcolonial theorists.

Notes

[1] For a general understanding of identity, this study refers to Castells, *The Power of Identity* 2nd ed.; Woodward, *Understanding Identity*, and *Questioning Identity* 2nd ed.

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[2] Black and Solomos' *Theories of Race: A Reader* brings together a wide collection of essays providing a comprehensive perspective on the notion of race.

[3] For the concept of diaspora, this thesis has taken its critical insights also from Braziel and Mannur's *Theorizing Diaspora*; Brown's *Global South Asians* ; and Katrak's "The Aesthetics of Dislocation."

[4] For a broader grasp of postcolonial literature, Chew and Richards' *A Concise Companion to Postcolonial Literature* ; Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism;* Loomba et al.'s *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* ; and Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* have been referred to.

[5] Nayar's *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*, and *Reading Culture: Theory, Praxis, Politics* extensively explores the approach to interpreting reality through Cultural Studies, and the concept of culture and its praxis.

[6] "Constructionism – the idea that facts are not discovered but socially produced – is an epistemological perspective that has been applied within both the natural and the social sciences" (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 353); Scott and Marshall reiterate this "socially created nature of social life" and point out that this concept is "often contrasted with so-called essentialism because it moves away from the ideas of the naturally given or taken for granted" (607); Bruce and Yearley elaborate on the principles that are included in the phrase, "social construction of reality," "popularised by Berger and Luckmann" (280-281).

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Chapter III

Arriving at the Liminal

Given the porousness and hybridity of culture, changes and reconstruction of identity are indispensable in the liminal space engendered in all cultural encounters. The leading focus of this chapter is the exploration of this fertile liminal space that is perceived in Bharati Mukherjee's delineation of the 'arrival' of immigrants in a new country. In *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) and *Wife* (1975), Mukherjee's first two novels, the 'arrival' of the protagonists may be seen both as a physical crossing of boundaries from India to the United States of America, and a metaphorical transcendence of relatively fixed cultures into an acknowledgement of fluidity and flux. Rather than highlighting the hybrid identity that is formed in this juxtaposition of differences of borders and cultures (which will be the primary concern of chapter 4), this chapter aspires to inquire into and understand the initial stages of acculturation of the two respective protagonists, Tara and Dimple. Simultaneously, the ambiguity, indecisiveness, and in-betweenness of the liminal condition which generates a sense of alienation and utter confusion in the subjects is also the focus of this chapter. The analysis is largely informed by Homi Bhabha's postcolonial perspective of cultural and literary theory, especially his notion of 'liminality,' and reinforced by critical insights of other cultural and postcolonial theorists such as Spivak, Said, Gilroy and Hall as mentioned in Chapter 2.

This chapter is divided into four sections: section one lays out a brief explanation of the concept of 'the liminal' highlighting Bhabha's notion of the 'third space of enunciation'; sections two and three analyse *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* respectively in the light of Bhabha's framework of liminality and postcolonial theory;

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and section four concludes with a brief summary of the research analysis of the major perspectives of the two novels.

I

The Liminal

The term 'liminality' is derived from the Latin word 'limen' which means 'a threshold.' Commonly used in psychology to denote the area between the sensate and the subliminal, the liminal is an "interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area" and is distinct "from the more definite word 'limit' to which it is related" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 131-132). This liminal space between boundaries becomes a conduit of an ambiguous and ambivalent temporary present, and a confluence of the temporalities of the past and the future. "'Liminality' is a concept developed by the Franco-Dutch folklorist Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and anthropologist Victor Turner (1969)" to refer to a transition phase or stage (Brooker 150). Known for his study of the rites of passage rituals in his seminal work, *Les rites de passage*, which highlights important transition periods in human lives such as birth, puberty, marriage, death, etc., Arnold Van Gennep introduced the concept of liminality to refer to the threshold of a new phase in a person's life, leaving behind or losing the previous stage and entering another.[1] Different rituals or ceremonies mark such occasions which enable people to enter a new period of life or create a new identity. Gennep contended that all rites of passage follow certain similar patterns in the form of a period of separation from the previous way of life (which is a preliminary stage), a state of transition or change from one position to another (a liminal stage), and finally, a process of reincorporation or entering a different phase of life (the postliminal stage).[2] It is the second stage of a rite of passage which is a

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liminal space of ambiguity and indecisiveness that more often than not leads to an identity crisis, and thereafter a possible identity reconstruction.

Van Gennep's concept of liminality was further developed by Victor Turner in his works, especially *The Ritual Process*.[3] Turner also draws from Mircea Eliade's notion of categorisation of human experience into the sacred and profane to describe this concept of a transformation space between phases of segregation and assimilation. Turner defines liminal individuals or entities as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (qtd. in La Shure). He asserts in his *Dramas* that "it is the analysis of culture into factors and their free recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is most characteristic of liminality" (qtd. in La Shure). Turner continues in *The Ritual Process*, "if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (qtd. in La Shure).

The implications of Gennep's and Turner's concept of liminality are reflected in Bhabha's critical employment of the term. In his engagement with postcolonial theory, Bhabha has postulated the concepts of liminality, hybridity, mimicry, difference and ambivalence in order to explicate the fluidity of culture and the reciprocal influence of both the colonizer and colonized in identity formation. Employing these notions, Bhabha not only dislodges the claim to purity or superiority of cultures at any point in human civilization, but also reads the colonial power as fractured with resistance and agency (Kalua 32-73).

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To Bhabha, colonialism is not a fact of the past, but a diffident continuation of the politics of power that surfaces rather ironically in the anxiety of the dominant over the dominated, and in the colonial strains of imperialism subtly covering the contemporary globalized world. Bhabha's postcolonial perspectives, Huddart points out, "contribute an original understanding of our colonial present" tracing back to the five hundred years of Western colonization and its effects of "complex and varied cultural contact and interaction" (Huddart 2). As interpreted by Shaobo Xie,

> What happens at the point of contact between the colonizer and the colonized is the emergence of the Third Space of enunciation, the hybrid, ambivalent, indeterminate space of signification. Just as Derrida adds a third term, the temporal dimension, to the Saussurean sign, so Bhabha constructs a third space, an interstitial locus of meaning, between the indigenous and the European, the colonizer and the colonized. This newly emergent cultural space proves subversive to both the indigenous and the Western, allowing neither of them cultural and discursive continuity. (Xie 157)

In postcolonial theory, the notion of the liminal is useful to describe this 'Third Space' which facilitates the counter-discourse to domination, imperialism, and the negative binaries of the self and the Other, the Orient and the West, and the modern and the primitive, expressly created by the colonizing forces in history. It is the productive space that Bhabha advocates as the hybridity of cultures. Liminality as an interstitial space "between fixed identifications" allows the emergence of this "cultural hybridity" that sustains difference without any pre-conceived notion or imposition of "hierarchy" (Bhabha, *Location* 5). Bhabha elucidates:

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> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. Fanon's vision of revolutionary cultural and political change as a 'fluctuating movement' of occult instability could not be articulated as cultural practice without an acknowledgement of this indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation. It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (*Location* 54-55)

What happens in the space between cultures, on the borderlines, is explicated by Bhabha with the concept of the liminal. Stressing on the signification of meaning, Bhabha underscores this threshold or liminal space between assumed fixities of identities "to undermine solid, authentic culture in favour of unexpected, hybrid, and fortuitious cultures" which are (Huddart 7), therefore, newly produced and become the space for the location of culture, Bhabha's notion of culture being the "complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions" (qtd. in Kalua 22). This space is both spatially and temporally located: "the liminal is often found in particular (post-colonial) social spaces, but also marks the constant process of creating new identities (their open-endedness or their 'becoming')" (Huddart 7), and in the 'disjunct' and 'displaced' moment of the present. Bhabha explains:

> The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and the future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-

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> presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities. Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as the blasting of a monadic moment from the homogeneous course of history, 'establishing a conception of the present as the "time of the now"'. (*Location* 6)

The boundary of the present then permeates into the fluidity of a continuous now. The "boundary becomes the place from which *something begins its presencing* in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond" (*Location* 7, italics in original), the 'beyond' which "signifies spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future" (5-6). It is thus with this notion of the fluid present that Bhabha deconstructs the "concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities," and avers that "[i]ncreasingly, 'national' cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities" (7-8). Bhabha contends:

> What is striking about the theoretical focus on the enunciatory present as a liberatory discursive strategy is its proposal that emergent cultural identifications are articulated at the liminal edge of identity – in that arbitrary closure, that 'unity . . . in quotation marks' (Hall) that the language metaphor so clearly enacts. Postcolonial and black critiques propose forms of contestatory subjectivities that are empowered in the act of erasing the politics of binary opposition – the inverted polarities of a counter-politics (Gates). There is an attempt to construct a theory of the social imaginary that requires no subject expressing originary anguish (West), no singular self-image

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(Gates), no necessary or eternal belongingness (Hall). The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism. (256)

Here, Bhabha emphasizes the liberatory position of an ever-changing present that culture is best described in, erasing the binaries of opposition. Bhabha appropriates the example of the 'stairwell' put forward by the African-American artist Renée Green to characterize the liminal space. As quoted in the *Location of Culture,* Green says:

> I used architecture literally as a reference, using the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations between binary divisions such as higher and lower and heaven and hell. The stairwell became a liminal space, a pathway between the upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness. (5)

Bhabha elaborates on this liminality to explain the 'in-betweenness' of identity:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. (*Location* 5)

Kalua in his doctoral dissertation, "Collapse of Certainty," gives a comprehensive summary of Bhabha's adaptation of the notion of liminality:

> Homi Bhabha adapts liminality from the domain of ritual ceremonies and links it to the postcolonial condition which, understood in its multifaceted

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> constitution, becomes the locus of and paradigmatic matrix for understanding identity formations. In order to identify this post-dialectical moment of the "beyond", Bhabha makes use of Said, Freud, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida to transfer Victor Turner's concept of liminality from its anthropological usage to a more nuanced matrix of meanings in the postcolonial context. That is, Bhabha mediates the meaning of liminality in terms of theoretical parameters which Freud, Lacan and Foucault as well as Derrida employ in order to articulate their respective deconstructive positions and also to convey their impact on identities. Thus liminality comes to be associated with the mobile and indeterminate clusters or genealogies of meanings reflected in the works of the above psychoanalytic and poststructuralist thinkers. (44-45)

Thus, 'liminality' is a useful metaphor for the understanding of the postmodern postcolonial identity formation in the meeting of different cultures. In the narratives of immigration, when the 'Third World' postcolonial immigrant arrives as a marginal in a 'First World' imperial culture, the encounter of different cultures gives space to a liminal condition, as propounded by Bhabha, which brings to the foreground the borders of the self and Other, the transgression of these frontiers, the politics of representation and dominance, the struggle of holding on to roots, the possibility of integration with or alienation from a new culture, rejection of the homeland culture, and finally, the consequent identity crisis. A constant "process of engagement, contestation and appropriation" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 130), this interstitial passage is a phase in every immigrant's process of transit to a new land. The play of fear and desire for the Other, the interactions between the mainstream and the marginal replicate the discourse of the colonizer and the colonized. As the immigrants try to negotiate meanings and transact implications of

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new cultural codes, the reciprocal influences of the receiver society and those at the periphery become a two-directional relationship unlike, as Bhabha explained in his critique of Edward Said's, the uni-directional approach of the colonial encounter.

Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* are explorations of this transition period of dilemma and bewilderment that persists with a fierce insistence in the lives of the immigrant protagonists when they reach the United States from India. The uncertainty of the future, the loss of the past and the impossibility of 'return' to the familiarities of the homeland, make the present a turbulent duration of emotional, social, cultural and even economic unpredictability. The arrival of Tara and Dimple in the United States is that "unbearable ordeal of the collapse of certainty" which translates into a spiralling series of transformations in the subjects, defying and disrupting any imperial binaries of dominance, of centre/margin, self/other, black/ white, and so forth, instead establishing the perpetual mobility of culture and a contingent and indeterminate identity (Bhabha, *Location* 214). This, of course, is reminiscent of the colonial encounter:

> An important consequence of this disruption of imperial binary systems is a particular emphasis on the interactive and dialectical effects of the colonial encounter. Imperial binarisms always assume a movement in one direction – a movement from the colonizer to the colonized, from the explorer to the explored, from the surveyor to the surveyed. But just as post-colonial identity emerges in the ambivalent spaces of the colonial encounter, so the dynamic of change is not all in one direction; it is in fact transcultural, with a significant circulation of effects back and forth between the two, for the engagement with the colonies became an increasingly important factor in the imperial society's

> constitution and understanding of itself. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 27)

Drawing from an understanding of this disruption of familiar boundaries, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* seem to portray the same transcultural ambiguity and transcendence of binaries. The imperative of interacting concurrently with different cultures compels the protagonists to grapple with a fluid and ambivalent present to reach at least some kind of understanding of their 'location of culture.' This liminal situation bespeaks the necessity of reinterpretation and reinvention of cultural signifiers from the margins.[4] How does Mukherjee portray this encounter in these two novels? What is the orientation that drives the process of this cultural reconstruction? How does postcolonial theory look at Mukherjee's delineation of interpretation of culture by her protagonists? These are the questions that this chapter aims to explore in the analysis of the two novels. The second and third sections of this chapter attempt to illustrate the same in these two works of Mukherjee by exploring the various aspects of liminality that conceives of a new culture, neither of the past nor of the future, but of a temporal present stretching towards what Bhabha has described as the 'beyond.'

II

The Tiger's Daughter

The Tiger's Daughter is the story of Tara Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great-grand-daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, a redoubtable landowner, and daughter of 'Bengal Tiger Banerjee,' a rich, powerful industrialist of the elite Calcutta aristocracy.[5] Tendering no explanations to anybody for his drastic move, Tara's father sends her off to Poughkeepsie in the United States, thousands of miles away

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from Calcutta, to study at the tender age of fifteen. The impact of this translocation is inexplicably far-reaching. Tara is left to herself, unable to translate her emotional turmoil to anybody. Family and friends in Calcutta cannot comprehend the difference between India and America, while for Tara's college mates in the United States, she is the exotic 'Third World' Indian. Tara spends seven years in the US during which she gets married to David Cartwright, an American writer. She looks forward to go home for a vacation, to rest and restore the balance which she felt she had lost in life after moving off to the US. At twenty-two, she is finally home, but she cannot identify with it. Another period of intense unrest and depression follows, similar to the time when she had reached Vassar College, in the US, seven years ago. Finally, when she decides that it would be best to return to the US and to David, Tara gets caught up in the riots of Calcutta streets uncertain whether she would ever live to tell David that she loved him very much.

The Blurring of Boundaries

Like all immigrant fiction, *The Tiger's Daughter* plays out the journey metaphor of a departure and an arrival, enacted within the axes of both space and time. The encounter of different cultures which the novel narrates is a typical engagement of Mukherjee's fiction. Reiterating this, Ruth Maxey says that it is not difficult to understand that migration is a focal point in "Bharati Mukherjee's discourse of national identity and belonging," as she "has found a rich textual resource" in being an immigrant herself and "a well-established South Asian American novelist" ("Messiness" 63). For the immigrant, the period of arrival is a critical phase because it sets the tone for the process of a new transaction that happens with both the "dominant community" and the homeland (Mishra 448). Personal experiences of the immigrant are to be understood and interpreted in the context of the new socio-

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cultural matrix. This creates the scope for different identifications and for construction of renewed identities. Cultural, social and mental borders blur into each other, creating a disconcerting confusion of choices and priorities in day-to-day life. A resultant duration of uncertainty and insecurity for the immigrant prevails: a liminal phase of ambivalence, in the way Bhabha has suggested in *The Location of Culture*. Mukherjee seems to seize on this period to explore its contours in all their intensity and complexity to show that this 'third space' between cultures transcends 'essentialist' binaries of self/ Other to produce an acute period of ambiguity and flux. As much as Mukherjee shows this in Tara's arrival in the US, in a dexterous move, she again exhibits the cultural encounter and its extensively disturbing effects in Tara's return to India from the US. The "exuberance of immigration" that Mukherjee comes to believe in in her own process of immigration cannot happen without the "emotional paralysis of exile" that Nelson says Mukherjee so firmly rejects (*Bharati Mukherjee* x).[6] Before such an "enthusiastic affirmation of the immigrant condition" can happen (x), an ambiguous stage of being at the crossroads is an inevitable aspect in immigration. Such narratives or "cultural fictions," as Bromley calls them, are definitely "written from the affective experience of social marginality, from a disjunctive, fragmented, displayed agency, and from the perspective of the edge" (Bromley1). Postcolonial theory observes the terms of this marginality and the politics of interaction between the centre and the periphery. Nelson has accolades for Mukherjee for "her remarkable success in forging a coherent vision out of the chaos of her multiple displacements" (x), which may be seen as the enabling effect of 'culture's hybridity' (Bhabha), or even may be related to Rushdie's sense of 'gain' in becoming "translated men" by virtue of being "borne across the world" ("Imaginary Homelands" 432). At the same time, it compels one's serious attention to the liminal

flux that enmeshes the immigrants in the hegemony (Gramsci) and interpellation (Althusser) of a 'First World,' which see them caught between the pull of assimilation with the dominant culture or alienation from it.

Displacement

The first aspect of liminality that comes to the fore in *The Tiger's Daughter* is that of an acute sense of displacement in time and space that Tara faces after reaching the United States. The Indian immigrant is at an imperial frontier, where "either exclusion or inclusion on another's terms" happens (Singh and Schmidt 45). Naturally, Tara's disembarkation from the cocoon of a protected environment of an elite Bengali family of mainstream Calcutta on to the periphery of a minority space in the 'New World' is a dislocation she is unable to handle. The cultural codes of her homeland do not prevail here. A new hegemony that she was never used to surfaces to make her apparently powerless.

As Nityanandam asserts, "A sense of rootlessness dogs Tara throughout the novel" for "[d]istance makes everything abroad unreal to her" (*Three Great Indian* 68-69). This dislocation leads to a feeling of disorientation in Tara: "Little things pained her. If her roommate did not share her bottle of mango chutney she sensed discrimination. Three weeks in Poughkeepsie and I am undone, thought Tara. Three weeks and I must defend my family, my country, my Johnny Mathis" (11). Tara is sensitive to the threat to her ethnic national identity posed by the culture of the Other. One can relate it to Bahmanpour's discussion of Jhumpa Lahiri's eponymous character 'Mrs. Sen' in the *Interpreter of Maladies*, and find a close parallel in both Tara and Mrs. Sen's predicaments. Bahmanpour comments on Mrs. Sen in her article, "Her reaction to the threat to her ethnic identity and the culture of Other is

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simply an unconscious attempt to take refuge in the past and to avoid the present through as many different means as possible" ("Female Subjects" 46). In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara looks back on the past to find in vain that nothing had prepared her for this tremendous sense of shock; "No previous test, not the overseas Cambridge School Leaving Certificate Examination, not even the labor unrest at her father's factory had prepared her for this" (11). The spatial and the temporal dislocations merge to compose the narrative of displacement.

Mukherjee's novel expresses 'de-territorialization': the losing of a familiar territory by displacement in systems of thought, culture and geography, a common strand in diasporic writing. Though this follows a re-location to the new country or a 're-territorialization,' it is within the space between the two spatial and temporal moves, between homeland and the adopted land, the known and the unknown, the old and the new, and the past and the present, that a liminal space emerges, and extends itself towards what Bhabha calls it the 'beyond.' At the frontiers of these binaries, a fluid threshold constructs the disorientation of the immigrants, in an unhinged and unanchored "protean, unidentifiable identity" (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 187). The displacement is a meeting point where the centre and the periphery merge in a vortex of ambivalence.

In *Tiger's Daughter*, much of the plot is situated in India, and throws into sharp relief the liminality of Tara's displacement. When she comes home to Calcutta after her seven-year stay in the US, she finds a liminal condition from which she cannot escape. This can be perceived as another cultural encounter. What Shobha Shinde has termed as a "dual shock" for Tara ("Cross-Cultural Crisis" 46), once in the US and the other in India, is actually the cultural dislocation and the 'collapse of

certainty' that Bhabha speaks about when different cultures meet. According to Shinde, as one finds later in the novel, Tara's trauma in India is brought about by Mukhejee's linking of a number of events together "like Tara's visit to a funeral pyre at the river bank, her meeting a small beggar girl afflicted with leprosy, the vision of beggar children eating off the street, the superficialities in the lives of her friends, the riots and demonstrations and her claustrophobic rape by the politician Tuntunwala," and the visit to Darjeeling which is " marred by ugly and violent incidents" (51).

The Ambiguity of the Present

The second characteristic of liminality that emerges is the ambiguous temporal present which displaces Tara's past of an aristocratic Bengali Hindu traditional lifestyle and the privileges of a convent school education. At Vassar, Tara finds herself "pushed to the periphery of her old world", a world which stands radically different from the 'New World' of America (10). She finds it impossible to communicate the Camac Street eliteness to the "pale, dry-skinned girls" of her "residence hall" (11). The terms of eliteness are different here. There is a new discourse she has to accustom herself to and understand and interpret. 'Third World' Tara is between borders. She is unable to associate herself with the cultural site of the 'New World,' and at the same time, with that of the 'Old World,' thus occupying a 'present' echoing Bhabha's disintegration of specificities in the liminal zone. Borders connect and also divide (Singh and Schmidt 7). Tara is at once connected to two cultures, yet divided by the same. Being at the margins of both, Tara cannot immediately assimilate with the new. She cannot live in the 'old' because she has already physically crossed its boundary, and therefore, the metaphorical context has changed. A witness to a threshold, Tara desperately seeks to find meaning in a confounding present.

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The dazed feeling that surfaced when Tara reached Vassar surfaces again, this time, ironically, in the homeland that is supposed to settle all her doubts and restlessness. Lahiri calls this the manifestation of Tara's "expatriate sensibilities – to show the extent of psychological distance created as a result of physical separation from her 'home' country and its culture" ("Nation" 52). This "psychological distance" that Lahiri points out reveals itself in Tara's varied encounters with her relatives and friends she had associated with home when she was abroad. Meeting her relatives is a trying time for Tara. To Tara's utter surprise, Aunt Jharna takes umbrage at her harmless piece of advice. "'You think you are too educated for this, don't you?'" 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?'"(36, emphasis in original). In acknowledging Mukherjee's "ability to depict complicated emotions" and "her skill in representing the sparks that are set off when tense people interact," Fakrul Alam points out "Aunt Jharna's quietly violent response" (*Bharati Mukherjee* 25). It puts Tara in an awkward position, leaving her to ponder:

> 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? The nuns had taught her to inject the right degree of venom into words like "common" and "vulgar." They had taught her *The Pirates of Penzance* in singing class, and "If I should die, think only this of me –" for elocution.
>
> Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls,

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> Protestant matrons, and Johnny Mathis? Or was it not till Madison that she first suspected the faltering of the heart? (37)

Tara is aware of a new feeling of detachment or foreignness to that which was once so familiar but to which she is now unable to connect. Tara's foreignness seems to seep into everything in Calcutta. Referring to the self-reflexive questions put by the immigrants themselves, Jussawalla asserts that "In her *The Tiger's Daughter*, for instance, the narrator, Tara, the 'Tiger's Daughter,' . . . goes home to visit her mother in Calcutta only to find total chaos: riots, goondahs . . . the pull of superficial liberalism. She begins to examine who she is and where she belongs . . . ." ("Chiffon Saris" 588-589). In her mother's prayer room, Tara forgets the next step of the rituals:

> When the sandalwood paste had been ground Tara scraped 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 not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center. (51)

This is a loss of the familiar, and a reason for much disquiet in Tara. Other fears and suspicions crowd into her. Perhaps her mother no longer loves her. Tara has married a *mleccha* 'an outcaste,' after all, and thereby 'lost caste.' Even her friends do not appreciate Tara for marrying a foreigner. Tara had thought it would be admired as an "emancipated gesture" but that was not to be (86). This gives rise to an insistent need to prove, to others and to herself, that her choices merit admiration and approval.

At the same time, Tara is critical of her friends:

> Pronob's group irritated Tara with its lack of seriousness. The group often sat on the roof of the Catelli-Continental, imagining itself successful and splendid, smoking and swearing in public to flout conventions, imploring Tara not to smile at strange old men in blazers and sun hats. They longed to listen to stories about America, about television and automobiles and frozen foods and record players. But when she mentioned ghettos or student demonstrations her friends protested. What nonsense! They knew American was lovely, they knew New York was not like Calcutta. (56)

Tara's friends are in a world fading away and slowly becoming anachronistic. Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, the gentleman who stands for the elite class in the novel, describes Tara's friends as "trapped gazelles," even though they seemed "confident, handsome and brashly opinionated" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 18). They reflect what Tara 'was.' It is the 'fetish' for colonial India. Ironically, their longing does not translate into their approval of Tara's 'white' husband. This resembles the "fetish/phobia structure of colonial relations" (Nayar, *Contemporary Literary* 169), at once liking the America of television, automobiles and frozen foods, but resenting the 'losing of caste' by Tara. Her friends think of her as unable to assimilate to her homeland. One of them remarks: "I'm telling you at the first hint of riot, Tara's going to run away to America, no?" (43). Not only that Tara cannot understand her friends, they also assume that Tara cannot understand them/ Calcutta/ India: "'*Gherao*,' repeated Tara. 'I read about it in the States.' 'You may have read about it, dear girl, but you can't possibly know what it is'" (44). Reena, a very close friend of Tara, does not find Tara 'one of them' anymore. In her eyes, Tara has become rude, self-centred and European.

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Tara cannot come to terms with the distance between herself and the present Calcutta:

> Though Tara did not believe in intense friendships, she wanted Reena to understand her need for rest. She wanted to tell her friend that little things had begun to upset her, that of late she had been outraged by Calcutta, that there were too many people sprawled in alleys and storefronts and staircases. She longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces. She hated Calcutta because it had given her kids eating yoghurt off dirty sidewalks. (105)

Her nostalgia for the yesteryears is overwhelming. Another aspect of the instability of the 'temporal present' that Tara experiences is the outings with her friends at Catelli-Continental, an apt projection of liminality that Mukherjee creates in her work. As Alam points out:

> The opening-page description of the street scene outside the Catelli-Continental, a luxury hotel that was once one of the glories of Calcutta, is indicative of the extent of the city's decline: the entrance now seems "small, almost shabby," the walls "are patterned with rust and mold," the "sidewalks along the hotel are painted with obscenities and political slogans". . . . On them are "a colony of beggars" and "shrivelled women" selling their wares. And yet the hotel could once be described as "the navel of the universe," for there was a time when Calcutta was *the* imperial city of British India, the center of commercial and political power, and the hotel the place where powerful people would assemble for tea and talk. Now the Calcutta elite still met here and went through "their daily ritual of espresso or tea" . . . but they

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> were people who talked without conviction and were increasingly under siege from people full of passionate intensity, ready to mob and brutalize them. (*Bharati Mukherjee* 17-18, italics in original, ellipsis added)

Curiously, Tara feels the brutality of the change in herself. The Catelli's eliteness has been invaded. The transfigurations in the city and the hotel seem to thrust Tara into an emotional whirlpool. One of the features of the portrayal of Tara's liminality is the fact that Tara cannot communicate her feelings with anyone (except a little with Joyonto). Events such as the 'fashion show' in Darjeeling and the picnic in Nayapur, or thoughts of urbanized city spaces like Calcutta or terrifying New York together build an incommunicable crescendo of feelings . The comments of Joyont Roy Chowdhury, "the last insulted scion of a *zamindar* family, owner of tea estates in Assam", seem to suggest to the reader a detached standpoint on the class disintegration in the Calcutta society, and its harsh reality of riots and strikes (113). The picture that Joyonto paints of Calcutta, of 'mysteries and death,' is what makes Tara acknowledge him as a kindred spirit. Joyonto is aware of being a "witness to the violent passing of a cycle of Bengali history" as is Tara (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 17). In alluding to Rupert Brooke, as Alam comprehends, Joyonto seems to have reposed faith in Tara to preserve abroad the ethos of his gradually denuding class. No doubt, this adds to Tara's perplexity where the temporal present is a conjunction of both the 'foreign' and the 'home.' Is it that immigrant Tara will have to preserve her 'home' in diaspora? Is the author, Mukherjee, hinting at this plausibility, on creating a home away from home?

At the same time, Tara's liberal values, a consequence of her American exposure, do not go down too well with other people in India. In Darjeeling, where Tara is chosen as a judge at the beauty contest, she finds herself at odds with the

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other judges. When she demands that the contestants should also pose in bathing suits, the heart specialist on the panel quickly retorts: "'Really, Mrs. Cartwright. I think your years abroad have robbed you of feminine propriety or you are joking with us. You know as well as I do our modest Indian girls would not submit to such disgrace.' The heart specialist is genuinely offended" (187). Tara is left distraught. As Somdatta Mandal comments in the introduction to *Bharati Mukherjee*, "This first novel [of Mukherjee] is a loosely autobiographical story about an Indian immigrant who is unable to adjust to North American culture, but who at the same time is painfully aware that she will never again belong to the culture she has left behind" (15). Tara is fast becoming aware of the fact that a re-entry is impossible into the home from which she had left.

In the character of P. K. Tuntunwala in the novel, Tara sees a politician trying to take the utmost mileage out of the general people, and the toppling down of class hierarchy of yesteryears. He is the new ascendant class taking over the likes of Joyonto Roy Chowdhury. Supercilious and cunning, the Marwari businessman seduces Tara during her trip to Nayapur, leaving no "apologies or recriminations" (199). Tara's "outrage soon subsided, leaving a residue of unforgiving bitterness" which she can share with none of her friends (199). Though Tara finds the Marwari abominable at first, and dangerous some time later, she falls a prey to his wiles, "attracted to a man of such obvious energy and determination" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 19), unable to steer clear of potential danger in a situation where chaos was the rule. Here, one must note Maxey's comment regarding Mukherjee's use of the trope of violence: "Her work provides consistent shocks to the reader with its scenes of violence, which includes episodes of mutilation and murder; and through

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its moments of sexual confrontation, especially rape, which remains a textual preoccupation from her first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) onwards" (71).

After returning to Calcutta from Nayapur, Tara pays a visit to her alma mater, St. Blaise's. To the nuns' ecstatic pleasure Tara shows them a photograph of David. In the nuns she traces back her "early ideas of love, fair play and good manners," but "as she saw them in their quaint formation on the steps of St. Blaise's, they seemed to her people in a snapshot, yellow and faded" (201). The "temporal differences and variation in exposure to the culture of the Other" distances Tara from what was an integral part of her identity earlier (Bahmanpour 47). Space and time have brought in borders and differences, and she is wedged in another space where boundaries merge and criss-cross each other. Memories and the present attain new meanings in a new space.

Melancholy and Confusion

Tara's liminality is brought into focus by a persistent inexplicable melancholy that corrodes her present. For her elite Calcutta class, "to be depressed was to be stupid" (84). But all Tara's confusions find expression in her depression. The elaborate parties held in honour of Tara's homecoming, the visit to relatives, the get-togethers at the Catelli-Continental hotel, the picnic at Nayapur, the trip to Darjeeling – nothing helps to relieve Tara of her baffling misery. Where family and friends, the moribund elite, quote W. H. Davies and indulge in fun, food and frolic, Tara gives to hysterics, and is outraged at their travesty of a time gone by. Alam's analysis of this incident is worth pointing out:

> A couplet from a W.H. Davies poem, quoted in the middle of a picnic arranged in Tara's honor, sums up perfectly the fin de siècle atmosphere of upper-class

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> Calcutta evoked by Mukherjee in her novels: "What is this life, if full of care,/ We have no time to stand and stare." Events such as the picnic served to assuage "their sense of panic, their racial and class fears," and allowed them to reconstruct another Calcutta, "one they longed to return to, more stable, less bitter". (*Bharati Mukherjee* 18)

Tara cannot become a part of this. Much time has passed and much space has filled in because of her life abroad, to immerse in the picnickers' revelry.

Her husband, David's letters, too, do not help. It aggravates Tara's inner turmoil as she sees a widening gap in David's comprehension of Calcutta. To him, Calcutta would be a tourist destination. David of America finds Tara's India an exotic place, and it fast becomes an effort for Tara to find contents to fill up her aerogramme to him: "David was painfully western; he still complained of her placidity. Things "happened" only when they began and ended. He wrote her that he worried she wasn't doing anything" (112). There is a constant urgency in Tara to justify herself to David. The distance between the native and the Other widens. Tara finds it an impossibility to communicate her expectations:

> So Tara confided secrets in her letters to her husband, but managed quite deftly not to give her own feelings away. She thought there was no way she could describe the visions that had failed her at the guest house picnic. Such events could not be described to David, who expected everything to have some meaning or point.
>
> It was not a toppling or sliding of identities that Tara wanted to suggest to David, but an alarming new feeling that she was an apprentice to some great thing or power. If she were pressed to tell more precisely the nature of that

> power, she would have to remain silent. It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse, this trip home to India. (130)

An upheaval gathers force in Tara. This 'trip' speaks of an individual caught in between cultures. The encounter between the postcolonial Indian and the imperial American culture creating a sense of the liminal, is re-enacted here in India, allowing as Bromley proposes, "narratives of plurality, fluidity and always emergent becoming" (2). Perhaps what Tara is referring to as the "great thing or power" is this emergence of a baffling newness that Tara herself never expected.

The Crisis of Identity

Tara undergoes a crisis of identity both in the US and in India. In the US, she is perceived as the 'Third World' stereotype by "the girls" at Vassar (11). They "identified her with the population explosion, the loop, vasectomy in railway stations," and Tara also "blossomed into a bedside intellectual" (11). Typical of the easily misplaced and misunderstood difference between the 'First World' and the 'Third World,' Tara's friends cannot understand the elite Kolkata with which Tara is herself associated. They cannot accord Tara an identity beyond the characteristic of a country oppressed, backward and festered with population explosion and poverty. This is where the struggle between the marginal in the 'First World' and the 'mainstream' in the 'Third World' comes into play. The hereditary upper class identity that was so significant in India bears no relevance to the 'Western gaze' of her inmates: "'My great-grandfather's name was Hari Lal Banerjee. He was a very plucky man.' But such remarks she found made a bad impression and soon she gave up" (11). In her adaptation to a new situation, one detects the nascent growth of a different identity. Mukherjee cites this growth, in her interview with Hancock, as an

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act of "rehousement" and "unhousement": "Unhousement is the breaking away from the culture into which one was born, and in which one's place in society was assured. Rehousement is the rerooting of oneself in a new culture. This requires transformations of the self" (19). In Tara one sees the beginning of a change which forms part of numerous little transformations that an immigrant has to go through in the process of acculturation. Tara represents homogeneity, not individuality to her American friends. This is similar to the colonial authoritative appropriation of the colonized, homogenized and helpless native. Frantz Fanon claims that it is the rejection of any individuality of the 'inferior' Other and the repeated reinforcement of this image in the native's psyche which drive the colonized to a kind of madness. Tara does not become mad, but she thrills at her new-found identity. Here, one observes Tara's tacit acknowledgement of the supremacy of the white American. In this, the dominant mainstream succeeds in gaining the consent of the native in the production of a discourse of colonial ideology, as explicated by Said (1978). Tara is in the liminal state of accepting the colonial stereotype of herself. As Bhabha argues identity is a constant displacement of positions or fixities. The 'stereotype,' therefore, acquires the displacement of any fixed notion of identity by placing the psyches of both the colonized and the colonizer in the subject. It is no surprise, therefore, that Tara's dependence on and identification with some Other brings about a crisis in her identity, a predominant feature of the liminal stage. Brinda Bose puts it well when she points out that Mukhejee's women protagonists go through an "intense struggle: with the self, with tradition, with the wonders and horrors of a new culture, with growing aspirations, hopes and desires" ("Question of Identity" 47). Both memory and the temporal present generate the liminal condition of a double consciousness in transit. The notion of "double consciousness," drawing from W.E.B.Du Bois's

analysis of the early twentieth century African-American people aware of both their 'black' identity and their 'non-white' identity (Buchanan 136), here, may apply to Tara being both Indian and non-American at the same time. Bose, in the aforementioned essay, reiterates:

> Memory evolves into a political and ideological signifier in the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee, as her protagonists alternate between the desire for remembering and the need for forgetting, with its accompanying pain. If the dominant ideology in this fiction is that of the West as colonizer and male as master, with the subaltern constituted of the new immigrants from the Third World (especially women, here), then for these characters assimilation and acceptance in the new culture appear impossible if the past is not forgotten. This forgetting, however, can hardly be accomplished without guilt and pain – and this is the rite of passage for Tara that *The Tiger's Daughter* documents." (52-53)

This informs Tara's pain and agony in the US. In India there is a repeat of a similar insecurity and suffering. The props of identity which are a consistent thread of identifications are Tara's roots of growing up in Calcutta. When Tara comes to the US this consistency is disrupted, which she hopes will be restored once she is back home. However, this is not to be. Tara is an alien in her own homeland. As Lahiri remarks, Mukherjee shows how the expatriate's "nostalgia and cultural memory" are erased by time gradually and "[o]ne then finds it difficult to adjust to the ways of life and habits in the 'home' country one has left years ago, particularly when the country goes through a serious socio-political crisis" (51).

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In India, Tara is supposed to bridge the cultural distance between Washington McDowell, the young black American guest at Reena's house and his Indian hosts. As Reena's mother puts it, "You are our lone *Americawalli!*" (151), though Tara finds herself incapable of playing such a role. To the visitor, McDowell, however she was just another Indian. When Tara meets Antonia Whitehead, another foreigner, in Darjeeling, Tara finds herself reflected in the foreigner: "In this white girl with red hair 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" (166). As Alam remarks, "Two memorable minor characters of *The Tiger's Daughter* – Washington McDowell and Antonia Whitehead – illustrate the extent of the confusion created in the contact zones between cultures", and this is not dissimilar to what Tara herself goes through (*Bharati Mukherjee* 23).

The Momentum of 'In-Betweenness'

A momentum of 'in-betweenness,' from the old to the new, from the homeland to the adopted land, from the periphery to the centre, from the familiar to the strange and vice versa seems to relentlessly gather in Tara. Contrasts and comparisons, conflicts and compromises colour the socio-cultural (as also economic and political) differences between the receiving and sending societies. In the US, 'Kali' in the suitcase gives her a temporary anchor from a perpetually shifting ground. Folded in along with her clothes, is the packaging of her beliefs nurtured in her homeland:

> She prayed to Kali for strength so she would not break down before these polite Americans. And, Kali, who was a mother nursing her infant, serene, black, exquisite, and Kali, who was a mother devouring her infant, furious,

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> black and exquisite, who sat under silk saris in a suitcase at Vassar, smiled out at her mischievously. (11)

Intense homesickness strains Tara's sense of endurance. Explanations border on the redundant. On being asked whether she could type, Tara responds to her adviser in the US, with a small story about the cocker spaniel's death at home:

> "No," she answered, tracing the blotches of light and dark with an imaginary finger. "My father's secretary goes out of his way to help us. When Rajah, our cocker spaniel, died and we were so heartbroken, he even arranged a secret night burial for him without waiting for our permission. He's always done everything, all our typing et cetera. That's why I've never had to learn, you see." (14)

The adviser cannot comprehend the import of Tara's answer. As with Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs. Sen, Tara "surrounds herself . . . by narratives of her past life in order to help herself feel at home within the safety of her narratives" (Bahmanpour 46). The sentiments associated with the dead dog seem to translate into Tara's pity for herself, aggravated with the pangs of distance separating her and home in Calcutta. Tara "complained of homesickness in letters to her mother, who promptly prayed to Kali to save Tara's conscience, chastity and complexion" (13). The unavailability of the familiar, the lack of space to lodge the customary and the habitual in the new context of her existence leave Tara distraught. The loneliness that engulfs her worsens with her inmates preparing to go home for the summer. For Tara, home is too far away for a short trip. What, therefore, takes the space of this inability to meet her parents and friends is a sense of terror: "The terror seethed in a lonely room at

Vassar. It rushed out of borrowed drapes and pictures; it bounced off desktops and lumpy armchairs" (14). Mukherjee herself speaks about the novel as follows:

> My first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter*, embodies the loneliness I felt but could not acknowledge, even to myself, as I negotiated the no-man's land between the country of my past and the continent of my present. Shaped by memory, textured with nostalgia for a class and culture I had abandoned, this novel quite naturally became my expression of the *expatriate consciousness*. ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 456, italics in original)

Such autobiographical elements are not rare in Mukherjee's immigrant fiction.

It is in the canvas of Tara's own mind that the liminality is etched out, in a chaotic combination of alienation, confusion, mental anguish and an intense sense of 'in-betweenness,' not finding peace anywhere or a home to identify with. Ananda Prabha Barat refers to Tara's inability to identify with both America and India as a "split-up psyche" ("Bharati Mukherjee" 54).

The Relentless Search for Home

A relentless search for 'home' is a crucial aspect of the liminal stage. Referring to Brah's concept of diasporic discourse, Swaraj Raj talks about the 'homing desire' of the diasporics. Raj infers that "[t]he *homing desire* is not the same as the desire for a 'homeland'. The *homing desire* is the desire to create the home *where one is*, that is in the host culture, through tangential affiliations" ("Problematics" 56, italics in original). Tara explains: "On days 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.' She had curried hamburger desperately till David's stomach

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had protested" (34). Tara's feeling of homelessness gives space to the imagination, memory and the use of myths to compensate for the loss. Raina advances an absorbing observation in his essay "Home, Homelessness":

> The sense of being located is the sense of being both home and at home. In her exciting new book, *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym puts this sense as follows, "To feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location. The object of longing, then, is not really a place called home but this sense of intimacy with the world; it is not the past in general, but that imaginary moment when we had time and didn't know the temptation of nostalgia". (16)

Tara's world is not in order. Nothing seems to be in place. The consistent presence of memories and the formative mould of old traditions problematize the arrival of Tara. A constant need to reclaim that which is at a distance is always present in the liminal. This preoccupation with a world left behind clouds the protagonist's mind preventing her from seeing a clear future. Like Bahmanpour's analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs. Sen, Tara too clings on to the past, as a result of which the liminal period is sustained as a period of indecisiveness, or even as the oscillation between polarities, the "hither and thither of the stairwell" that Bhabha talks of and as quoted in section 1 of this chapter. While in India, Tara searches for a home and eventually comes to the conclusion that it is in America that she will find her rest and peace, and a sense of belonging.

The Marginal in the Mainstream

In Tara's search for home, she seeks the marginal in the mainstream. She locates a home in the US and with David. But, ironically, it is David who sets into

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relief Tara's marginality. He wrote that he had bought books on India to know the country. For Tara, this is a disturbing revelation: "So David had bought books on India. This innocent information enraged Tara. She thought 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" (50).[7] This makes Tara wonder if David wanted to continue to "make her over to his ideal image" or if he loved her any longer (50). David's letters represented a David Tara finds hard to relate to:

> Tara could no longer visualize his face in its entirety, only bits and pieces in precise detail, and this terrified her. Each aerogramme caused her momentary panic, a sense of trust betrayed, of mistakes never admitted. It was hard to visualize him because she was in India, Tara thought. In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreignness was a burden. (62)

However, one cannot overlook Tara's innate urge and desire to be accepted into David's mould, a typical phenomenon resembling that of the fascination of the colonizer for the colonized, or the 'white' for the 'non-white' and vice versa. David becomes the Other to Tara. She becomes reduced to a space occupied by a postcolonial subaltern woman, without any individual identity. As Nagendra Kumar observes, David is too "Western" for him to understand the "the finer nuances of her family background and of life in Calcutta" and "is hostile to genealogies and often mistakes her [Tara's] love for family for overdependence" (*Fiction* 30-31).

For Tara, there is no way of showing to David what her mother represents.[8] To try to represent her mother to him would imply the interpellation of the colonial discourse.

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However, it is to be noted that during the most dangerous and despairing times, Tara remembers David. Maya Manju Sharma suggests that Tara's constant reference to David emphasizes that Tara is actually clinging to David "in an attempt to maintain her identity in a Calcutta changing beyond all recognition" ("Inner World" 10). The final moments are always reserved for David. In this, one might understand that the protagonist, after seven years in the US and by her marriage to David, has in an unconscious way veered towards being assimilated to the American mainstream. Unable to find her 'old' Calcutta, hounded by the squalor of the streets and railway stations in India, bewildered by her own confusions, Tara decides to go back to New York, to David. Her visit to India shows where her leanings are. She herself feels that the departure to the US must not be delayed any longer. "She felt she had made her peace with the city, nothing more was demanded. If she were to stay, she thought, there would be other concessions, other deals and compromises, all menacing and unbearably real, waiting to be made" (202). This is one act of Tara which is directly in contrast to Tara's passivity throughout her entire stay in Calcutta. According to Mukherjee, Tara "had to be porous and passive in order to record the slightest tremors in her culture. She had to react rather than act" (Hancock 20). Alam adds that this passivity of Tara has definitely made her the "perfect instrument for recording the discordant aspects of contemporary Calcutta" (*Bharati Mukherjee* 21). The marginal and the mainstream meet to enact a liminal space with new significations in Tara's situation.

The liminality of 'immigrant Tara' is thus created with the backdrop of Tara's friends in the Catelli-Continental, her mother's rituals, Joyonto's vision, David's letters, Calcutta's urban violence, Sanjay Basu, the assistant editor of the *Calcutta Observer* and finally America. Caught in this liminality Tara is shown to be unable to

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assimilate into either America or India, initially. She is, as in the liminal, a restless person, powerless to decide what she wants and what to make out of her own confusions. However, at the end Tara, like Jhumpa Lahiri's Mrs. Sen (Bahmanpour), takes the one final decision to go back to America much to the surprise of her parents, and possibly her own too. While in America, Tara had thought being in India would resolve her confused feelings of alienation and acculturation. On returning home, Tara looks for a final release which would help her choose her identity, finally stepping out of the ambivalent space of liminality. Like Mrs. Sen she hopes to "possibly release herself from the vicious cycle of escape and avoidance through being more open to the realm of the Other – what is definitely going to prove useful in crafting and negotiating her new diasporic identity and in encouraging her to embrace her new life in America" (Bahmanpour 46).

But, perhaps, Tara is a trifle late in her decision to return to America as she finds herself unable to break free of the riot-ridden Calcutta in front of the Catelli-Continental. "Tara, still locked in a car across the street from the Catelli-Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn't, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely" (210). In a characteristic way, the narrative ends with Tara in the street, not at any particular 'home' that she can identify herself with. Immigration has made her permanently mobile. It shows an attempt at a painful coming out of a shell, difficult and hard but paradoxically, as fluid and as amorphous as immigrant liminality.

"The novel ends as it began – at the Catelli-Continental," comments Maya Manju Sharma (12). Nothing could describe better the liminality in which Tara finds herself. Her 'arrival' has been the beginning of another journey – the journey to her own self. Liminality has its own narrative in the immigrant life. The whole process of departure

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and disembarkation from Calcutta to the US and vice versa projects the seemingly endless process of 'transculturation' for the immigrant. What one finds in this novel is not merely a narrative "about contestation and difference" but its "very textualisation" is achieved "through constructions of difference and contestation" (Bromley 3). There is much truth in what Raina says, "No amount of rationalising or explaining it away in elaborate theorising would convey the intensity, the anguish that is felt on one's pulse as one really experiences this condition" (15). In this connection Bhabha's perception of 'in-betweenness' and its reflection in the liminal zone clearly manages to take a nuanced grip on the complexity of the subjective experience of liminality. Though Rebecca Sultana in her essay, "Rewriting Nationalism" has aptly termed Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter* as 'back-to-origin' novels' yet ironically, there is no imagined 'origin' that Tara finds on coming back to India. The 'impurity' of cultures finds its juxtaposed location in Tara's own liminal identity.

III

Wife

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* is the story of Dimple Dasgupta, who nurtures ambitions of living a different kind of life made possible only through marriage. [9] A marriage would bring her everything worthwhile, a life in high society and love. Preparation for such a life meant a period of waiting, and this depresses her. The seemingly endless wait comes to an end when she is married to Amit Kumar Basu, 29, a consultant engineer, and a prospective immigrant to Canada or the United States or Kenya. Life at the Basu's for Dimple is dull and disillusioning, and so she pins her hopes on immigration to the US. She deliberately brings about her own

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miscarriage to break free of anything that would weigh her down in the pursuit of freedom and individuality, that she hopes living abroad would bring to her. However, the US has in store many surprises. Jyoti and Meena Sen are welcoming friends who accommodate Dimple and Amit in their house till Amit gets a job. Dimple's inability to acquire fluency in English and her self-consciousness about being different both from the Indians in Queens and from the mainstream Americans, lead her gradually to disappointment and then to violent despair. After shifting to Manhattan, to Prodosh and Marsha Mookerji's place, Dimple does begin to be happy but staying at home and trying to be American start to work adversely on her. All her resentment is targeted at Amit who seeks in her an Indian wife in America. Monotony, morbidity, revenge and death rule Dimple's mind, and in a disorienting impulsive fit, she murders Amit in the kitchen. Mukherjee's *Wife*, like *The Tiger's Daughter*, echoes Bromley's criteria for cultural fictions: "Excess, dream and fragment shape these fictions in an attempt to produce an act of reinscribing, of revising and hybridising the settled discursive hierarchies, by constructing a third space beyond existing political, social and cultural binaries: it is a space of revaluation" (1).

The Space of Displacement

For Dimple, this 'third space' happens to be the prospect of immigration, and her subsequent arrival in the US with her husband. She has crossed the physical border of her homeland and has stepped onto another land. However, she is still at the borders, metaphorically, between cultural codes that do not seem to share the same discourse. Dimple is situated at the liminal, a "slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of difference" (Bhabha, *Location* 235) which "makes it virtually impossible for cultural meaning to move freely and completely between any

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two or more systems of cultural differentiation" (Kalua 38). Even as both Dimple and her husband are received into an ambience mirroring India in Jyoti and Meena Sen's house, the newness of the surrounding landscape impinges upon the new arrivals. Dimple registers New York's skyscrapers, big cars and their immense noiseless speed, power, control and smoothness, so unlike anything found in Calcutta. This newness seems to correspond with what Mukherjee herself feels about entering a new city. She tells Hancock: "Newness excites me. When I move into a new city, I want to get to know it quickly, and make it my own. I want to 'possess' it through my fiction. My characters don't see themselves as lost, marginal people in an unfamiliar city. On the contrary, my characters present an unexpected 'insider's' view" (15). Mukherjee's contention may resemble what Dimple feels only at the outset. As Alam points out, "New York, and the life of Indian expatriates, at first seems appealing enough" to Dimple; everybody they know are apparently "happy and prospering" (*Bharati Mukherjee* 40). But, what Alam also notes is that Dimple fails to read the "disconcerting signs" of the news on the radio about a triple murder (Alam 40), or the wall hanging of Sita "hip-deep in pale orange flames" (*Wife* 53). Mukherjee's characters may well register the appealing newness but gradually the dynamics of the new city leave them confused and powerless to resolve the consequent crises that evolve out of this newness. Dimple's drive downtown from the airport symbolizes her moving into a threshold, unaware of the complexity that is soon to arise to confront her. The past is beginning to recede and the future is yet to take a specific shape. At Meena Sen's homely environment she begins to settle down to a fresh life. But, the jarring feeling of displacement, an invariable characteristic of liminality, assails Dimple when she enquires about Jyoti and Meena's interaction with the Americans, the 'sahebs.' Meena's answer is a giveaway; "'They're [the Americans]

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always joking back and forth. They're never sincere. And when they talk to you, you never know when they're serious – *baapré*, I get a headache trying to understand them half the time.' The admission of inadequacy chilled the air" (54). A strange territory suddenly surfaces.[10] Dimple pins all her hopes on an invigorating and 'free' life, to the extent of purposefully carrying out her own abortion. If one may speculate, Dimple's aspiration for freedom in the 'New World' represents the stereotype of a 'Third World' trying to escape a feeling of backwardness, confining tradition and primitiveness *vis-à-vis* the modernity of the 'First World.' One may also connect Dimple's deliberate launch of a new life to Mukherjee's own perspective of dislocation. Distinguishing her characters who have been spared from that of Naipaul's "'overcrowded barracoon' experience," Mukherjee points out, "My characters *choose* to uproot themselves from their native countries. For my characters, breaking away is part of maturing" (Hancock 17, italics in original). Perhaps that is why Dimple chooses to distance herself deliberately from the excess baggage of a child in the womb to pursue a serious quest for her own desires. As Maya Manju Sharma points out "Tara Cartwright [in *The Tiger's Daughter*] returns to India to recover her roots; Dimple Basu does everything she can to obliterate hers. She even induces a miscarriage so that she does not have to bring a child conceived in India into the New World" (15).

Faced with a chilling foreboding over Meena's confession about the Americans, Dimple finds herself close to a fathomless precipice. The centre has shifted in crossing over to the United States and she is at the periphery, yet to take a grip on the dominant cultural codes of the receiver society. Her displacement is like the liminality Turner refers to: "'[m]eaning' in culture tends to be *generated* at the interfaces between established cultural subsystems. . . Liminality is a temporal

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interface whose properties partially invert those of the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural 'cosmos'" (qtd. in Barrera 202, italics in original). Dimple's initiation into the new culture cannot happen without her manoeuvring this cultural blurring which lurks in any euphoria of immigration. To quote Barrera again, "Relocation, closely linked with immigration, implies the repossession of the outsider by a ready-made set of socio-political parameters" (206). At the outset, Dimple may be ignorant about this repossession but it gradually begins to loom large upon her.

The Temporal Present

The euphoric sense of arrival for Dimple has been coloured with positive hope, unlike the pervading sense of dismal disorientation for Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter*. Under Meena Sen's tutelage, Dimple can now visualize how she would be able to be a good hostess and make cakes and puddings at parties like the one Pixie had thrown in Calcutta , and how she would be able to make "witty retorts to Ratna Das" in Calcutta (55). But, this sense of self-assertion is fleeting and a period of uneasiness creeps into her life. At Vinod Khanna's party, "Dimple tried to smile brightly and look happy" (62). She finds her comfort zone in one corner and talks to people only when she is directly addressed. She is nervous and seems to be in awe of the happiness around her. Dimple does not know how to be a part of this circle of Indians in the US or how to adopt the discourse that has shaped their metropolitan bonhomie. The guests show scant interest in Dimple's opinions as soon as they get to know that she has been in America for only a couple of days. A growing sense of alienation, of being incapacitated begins to disturb Dimple. On the way back to Queens, Dimple is frightened when she sees the policemen, "they just did not look inoffensive, like the ones back home" (74).

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What had started as merely discomfort at unfamiliarity gradually intensifies into fear. The thought of meeting the Mullicks and "the terrifying Ina" is another source of anxiety for Dimple (69). The "last few days had been so pleasant; she had felt so much more alert than she had in the flat on Dr.Sarat Banerjee Road" (69). But, again, such pleasantness is only temporary. The unfamiliar jolts her confidence. The foreignness is quick to make her scared. Such chaotic fluctuation of emotions sets into relief the liminal zone that Dimple is in. Her wifely duties tell her to do the laundry herself, but Meena Sen sends off a cautionary warning: "You want to get mugged? Women in *this* building – not me, touch wood – have been mugged in the basement. If you want to get killed and worse things, then go do the laundry yourself. Don't listen to me. I tell you these people are *goondas*" (70, italics in original). Revealed in the process of getting accustomed to this novel life is a liminality which pre-empts any attempt at settling down. A balance of certainties is nowhere to be found "because of inherent contradictions and instabilities that often come to haunt the subject" (Kalua 39).

The Replay of Colonial In-Betweenness

Analysing the 'in-betweenness' in which Mukherjee's characters are situated, Brinda Bose observes:

> Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrant life in America; Mukherjee's women are brought up in a culture that presents them with such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich cultural and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the "new learning" imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other. These different

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> influences involve them in tortured processes of self-recognition and self-assimilation right from the start; the confusion is doubled upon coming to America. (50)

This is an exact state in which both Dimple and Tara (in *The Tiger's Daughter*) find themselves. In fact, this is how they are posited as liminal subjectivities in the confluence of cultures, problematized by the complexity of being 'Third World' immigrants in the periphery of an imperial hegemony. When Vinod Khanna offers to employ Dimple, it is Amit who quips, "One breadwinner in the family is quite enough" (61). Imposing traditional family values and norms, Amit becomes Dimple's moral conscience in a foreign context, leaving Dimple unable to cross traditional borders. Amit obstructs Dimple's search for freedom. Both Amit and the American mainstream represent Dimple's double marginalization. They represent the co-ordinates of power, Amit representing the gendered institution of patriarchy, while America the need to identify with that which is American.

Earlier, in India, before leaving for the US, Dimple had looked forward to new ways of identification with the prospect of being in America. But here in the US, she is caught between the imperatives of tradition and modernity. The evening before leaving for the US, she meets Ratna Das which jolts her optimism, and forces her into reflecting on the ambivalence that juxtaposes postcolonial modernity and native myths:

> Dimple thought that Ratna Das would not walk through fire for anybody. Ratna Das was modern and intelligent; perhaps you could not be modern and intelligent and still be heroic. You had to choose between being Sita of the rounded hips who could saunter through fire or being Ratna Das who was, at

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> that very moment, smiling tolerantly at the heavy man and patting his hairless cheeks. (47)

In the new land, Dimple is at the crossroads. She is mesmerized by Ina Mullick in pants and shirt, that revealed a "chillingly sexy" "skinniness" (74), and the lipstick of the "brightest red" that Dimple has never seen (75). Ina is the image of modernity that Dimple aspires to be, in spite of her belief in maintaining the traditions of an Indian wife. Attractive Ina seems to have transcended the rigidities of the traditional society and has become a symbol that beckons to Dimple an apparent sense of liberation and freedom that would fulfil all desires. When Ina offers her a "weak gin," Dimple is terrified, "more than anything in the world" to refuse it lest she incurs Ina's laughter or her anger (78). Significantly, it is in Dimple's fear of Ina's mockery that one perceives Dimple's subtle orientation towards the new culture. Ina is feared by Dimple because Ina represents a norm that Dimple does not measure up to. An imperial hierarchy gets exposed in 'liberated' Ina's representation of the West as this norm, as insightfully expressed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in describing "the West" as the "primary referent in theory and praxis" (172). Both desire and fear for the Other echo the colonial paradoxes of 'fetish' and 'phobia.' Dimple desires to be like Ina yet is afraid of transgressing borders. Though Dimple withholds her acknowledgement of Amit's presence to "uphold Bengali womanhood, marriage and male pride," it is merely the fear of rumours reaching Calcutta that makes her refuse the gin and answer Ina with, "Maybe a very weak one, next time" (78). Dimple is at a border zone which posits many-sided intriguing routes and transformations. She is in a nebulous area where conclusive decisions elide her. Her responses to new temptations and avenues of understanding reality are complex. For instance, the impact of Ina Mullick is difficult for Dimple to ignore: "Dimple kept seeing herself

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through Ina's eyes, or rather imagined she was seeing herself through Ina's eyes, and felt ashamed of her sari-swathed skinny body: it seemed so inappropriate a body for having fun on an American beach" (103). Dimple embarks on a new journey of seeking a new self for herself.

In India, Dimple had terminated her pregnancy to break herself from the stranglehold of a traditional rigid role of a wife. As Maya Manju Sharma contends, "For Dimple, as for some Western feminists, abortion is a sacrament of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood. . . . It is the deliberate repudiation of a moral code for which she has no replacement" (15). To Mukherjee, her writing "locates a moral centre. The characters themselves may be immoral or amoral, but they operate in a deeply moral world" (Hancock 14). Mukherjee's moral centre seems to be in being true to oneself and in carving out an individual identity, however much it may defy the moral signifiers of the society. Dimple chooses to seek her own singular identity even being a wife. Nagendra Kumar directs one's attention to the fact that "[s]ymbolically, by revoking her motherhood Dimple liberates herself from the traditional role of a Hindu wife of just bearing and rearing a child" (46). Here, Mukherjee seems to cast aside the traditional association of womanhood with motherhood in the process of the quest for the self.

Disorientation of Identity

One finds the fourth feature of liminality in the novel in Dimple's sense of disorientation and a crisis of identity. Except that she did not want to become a resident alien after learning about it from Ratna Das at Pixie's party, Dimple had no idea about the foreignness that would descend on her with such a terrifying impact. This foreignness apparently deprives the subject from any agency and compels one

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to move to the periphery. Brinda Bose comments, “Ethnic women in America are clearly twice-marginalized: by virtues of their ethnicity and their gender” (47). In the same essay, Bose argues that there are “two levels of marginality that we are dealing with here: the marginal protagonist, in terms of where she comes from, and the marginality of what she does not say, in terms of her covering up anxieties in order to fit more easily into the new life” (50). Dimple finds herself in a similar position. Her first attempt to become American takes her to a store to buy cheesecake. She panics on the sidewalk and with “her body taut with fear,” walks into an atmosphere which “stanked of beef blood” (58-59). Not able to read the signs of the place, to Dimple’s utter consternation, the shop man states the law:

> “*My* law. God’s law.” He presented a blood-smudged sign in a language she’d never seen. “If I wanted to break God’s law, I’d sell you cheesecake. But you see that sign in the window, right under ‘Schwartz’s’? Look at it good, lady, and don’t ever come into a shop like it and ask for cheesecake.” His face was red, and the blood-smudged card was shaking under her nose. (59)

Reduced to a source of embarrassment and ridicule, Dimple runs out of the “store, eyes closed, hands covering her mouth and nostrils” (60). Dimple’s disorientation is the feeling of nowhere. She is not an American, and not even a ‘proper’ Indian American like Meena Sen. Brinda Bose asserts:

> Mukherjee’s women do eventually find their distinctive voices, but not before they have battled violently with the images of their own selves as representations of ‘Otherness’ – exotic yet silent, capable yet repressed. More often than not, these women have grown up in Indian families which, in the wake of the British Raj, amalgated Western ideas with traditional beliefs; this

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> often finds the young women emancipated but confused. Cultural roots retain their hold in insidious ways; though in times of fear and indecision Mukherjee's Westernized Indian women return to seek the comfort of traditional faiths, they increasingly discover it to be cold – and so the quest for a new identity continues. If 'acquisition of Americanness' is an ethnic concern, spanning language, dress, and behavioural codes, then these women have another acquisition to battle for first: the acquisition, and retention, of an individual female identity that no longer needs to conform to traditional (in this case, Indian) patterns. (48)

This extensive quote sums up comprehensively Dimple's predicament. Dimple's first problem is her inability to speak in English fluently. Mukherjee inscribes power to language:

> all my novels are really about language and about how you control the world through linguistic fluency. Take my second novel [Wife], for instance, there you have a character who the more English she learns, the more at home she feels, the more self-empowered she comes to be in the new, and frightening Manhattan society. (Rodríguez 69)

Secondly, Dimple cannot be "plain" Meena Sen, who has unquestioningly settled down to a life of relative comfort and socialising among the Indian community at Queens (53). As Mukherjee asserts, "I'm looking for people who test their fates and then either discard or reclaim them, as opposed to those women, like the Meena Sens, who never test the fates and who live according to rites and rituals" (Desai and Barnstone 114). Dimple is ambitious and is ready to transcend the constricting social restrictions that she had suffered in India. She is seeking a place for herself in

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a new culture. Her dreams of a liberated Indian wife, self-assertive and confident, happy, intelligent and fluent in English, direct her to observe everything with a sensitivity that Meena Sen lacks. Alam maintains that Dimple seeks out ways to break out of the mould of the life of a middle-class Indian woman, and the imperative of motherhood, and takes as her role model not Meena Sen but Ina Mullick, who is "openly disdainful of her arranged marriage and is liberated and flirtatious" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 40), and, therefore, "more American than the Americans" (*Wife* 68). Amit's joblessness dampens Dimple's zeal in fulfilling her plans. She had looked forward to Amit landing with a "first-rate job" in the US (69). She had believed in his "intelligence and integrity" (69). But, as days passed by, she begins to see Amit losing his self-assurance. Amidst the other Indian males, Amit cuts a poor figure. In India, Amit was the authoritative husband that Dimple was accustomed to identify herself with. She is unable to accept this different dimension of Amit which emerges in the US. Definitely then, Dimple's Indian self comes to the fore when she sees Amit washing dishes in the Sens' home:

> It had been better, she decided, on Dr.Sarat Banerjee Road where Amit had been the boss. There she had experienced him in terms of permissions and restraints. Here in New York, Amit seemed to have collapsed inwardly, to have grown frail and shabby. That was the problem: he was shabby compared to the nicely suited Jyoti Sen or the men pushing toothpaste and deodorant on television. She did not trust him anymore, did not trust his high-pitched *yes* and *no* which had once seemed oracular, did not trust his white cotton shirts with erect collars. 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

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> house in Ballygunje Park. It would not be too hard, Dimple thought, to persuade him to settle in Ballygunje rather than in Kalyani. Her charms were still untested. (88-89)

Dimple has only one passport to happiness, by being a wife to an eligible husband. The new circumstances, however, shake her out of the fixed complacent position of an Indian wife. Now that the husband is disintegrating, frantically looking for a job, Dimple does not have anything to hold on to. Alam comments:

> One major obstacle in Dimple's quest for identity is her husband. Basically well-meaning but too absorbed initially in his search for economic security and later in adopting the mannerisms that will allow him to survive in the marketplace, Amit does not have the time or the sensitivity to understand the complicated changes going on inside Dimple. (*Bharati Mukherjee* 41)

A gradual dislike for Amit develops in Dimple. Her predicament becomes that of "an Indian immigrant's wife in North America, since she can neither connect with the people around her nor give expression to her feeling of rage at her old life" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 38). Living with Jyoti and Meena Sen becomes claustrophobic to Dimple. However, by the end of August, Amit's job comes through and shifting to Marsha and Prodosh Mookerji's apartment in Manhattan is a new adventure for Dimple. However, loneliness and having to sit at home with the television for company all day make Dimple listless. As Barrera points out, "In anthropological terms, the liminal stage operates as an anti-structure where the initiand in a given society experiences a blurring of social distinctions and strays from the prevalent order of the rest of the community" (202). Dimple does not have the liberty to go out to work like Amit, she cannot impose herself with motherhood like Meena Sen, and

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she is ill-equipped to be like the Americanized Inna Mullick. Dimple does not know how to deal with the new spaces emerging in this liminality, "these culturally invisible zones" (Kalua 35). Brinda Bose comments,

> To Tara [*Tiger's*] and Dimple and Jasmine [*Jasmine*], continuing to be Indian would necessitate a return to being the kind of daughter, sister, wife, and widow that tradition demanded of them – decorous, submissive, and loyal – but it seemed highly incongruous in the contexts of their present lives; becoming an American presented the possibility of power to change their fates. Such a possibility is always heady, and one can perhaps see how the exhilaration of the moment could successfully hide the underlying anxieties that are driving the women to seek the power of change. Ultimately, it is not the traditional role models that the women reject, but the fact that they can no longer reconcile the models to their circumstances. What drives them to react with violence, then, is their frustration at other people's inability to understand their changing needs and desires, now that they are no longer confined to the social and cultural patterns of their past. (58)

Dimple is exasperated at Amit's inability to understand her. Further, Dimple's quest for her identity reinforces Bakhtin's notion of the 'dialogical' as Dimple's foray into her 'self' opens up an interactivity which knows no finalisation except of breaking down (Bromley 2). After shifting to Manhattan, Dimple is uncertain about herself. Here, she is beyond the Indian ghetto, yet, Dimple slowly collapses; "Stars, Dimple recalled having read somewhere, implode: she felt like a star, collapsing inwardly" (109). Adopting from Victor Turner's observations of the liminal condition of the initiates in a ritual process, Kalua notes the "period of disorientation" that they go through, and this is not unlike that of the new arrivals in a host land, in a search for a self which

refuses to define itself, and exhibiting "protean, ambiguous and sometimes diametrically opposed attributes such as alienation, confusion, amorphousness, ambiguity and/or individuality, among other things" (37). Not knowing how to direct her thoughts, her mind finds its haven in morbidity and violence.

It is constantly towards Amit that she directs her suppressed anger and frustration. Towards Amit, who keeps busy with his new-found job, Dimple's response is that of only boredom; "Boredom is the devil's workshop or however that proverb goes. The point is you must go out, make friends, do something constructive, not stay at home and think about Calcutta"(111). But Dimple has already stopped thinking about Calcutta, "I'm not brooding about Calcutta. The trouble is, I've stopped brooding about Calcutta" (111). The liminality of this phase of her life has made her immobile. "If I *could* brood about Calcutta I'd be okay, wouldn't I? I mean, the trouble is I'm not even dreaming about Calcutta anymore" (112, italics in original). Amit misunderstands Dimple's situation. He can only think of Dimple's Americanization in a convenient way. He is happy that Dimple is becoming American but hopes that she does not become "too American" by wearing pants like Ina Mullick (113).

Amit persuades Dimple to have a sip of beer to celebrate his finding a job and her Americanization. He also asks Dimple if her dreams have become American too. "'No, of course not,' Dimple said shyly, pushing away her beer. 'I was only kidding. I'm a great kidder'" (113). Dimple has learnt to express herself in the dominant idiom of the host land, displaying a process of acculturation reflecting mainstream America. For Mukherjee, it is through language that a character gets its shape; "to me a character is who she is because of the language she thinks and feels in. My

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characters are often in the process of forgetting one language and inventing another" (Hancock 23).

Here, it is important to note that Dimple hides from Amit her gradually disintegrating self, fraught with disconcerting desires and indecisiveness. Unable to find meaning and purpose anywhere, Dimple seeks refuge in sleeping. Transitions in her chaotic feelings and thoughts have become too numerous for Dimple to take stock. She is becoming 'de-centred.' To quote Barrera, "the liminal does not irrevocably lead to a discursive center, but can operate as a permanently transitional space where referents stand in a catachrestic relation to cultural signifiers" (202). Dimple is at a vortex of desires and restraints, power of freedom and confinements of patriarchy, tugs of memory and the demanding present, and the inability to comprehend it all: all these find repose in her sleeping. Dimple is unable to establish a congenial relation with the imperatives of quotidian existence. She sleeps all through the day only to be troubled by nightmares. At times she eats cold food from the fridge without warming it up. She starts to shower only at night because that makes her feel modern. She constantly defers writing to Pixie, her friend in India, unable to communicate her feelings of ennui and angst. She does not find anyone who can understand that it is October and time for 'Durga Puja.' All she can understand is that "She could not live with people who didn't understand about *Durga Pujah* "(114). Dimple cannot "renew severed links between the conflicted, diasporic 'self' and the collective, to shape a critically imagined solidarity, a healing, out of discursive rupture" (Bromley 2).

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Interrogation of the Mainstream

Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser represent the mainstream West. It is Ina who brings her American friends to visit Dimple. To Dimple, they are one homogenous type, who have similar looks and wear similar clothes. Dimple is too shy to talk to them. She listens to their conversation about sexism and day-care centres, in awe of their confidence. In the episode with Leni Anspach, Ina's friend, Dimple finds it hard to appreciate Leni's looks. When Leni furiously vilifies Ina for flirting with Milt Glasser, Dimple finds it "horrible of a hunchbacked girl with greasy hair to say such nasty things to a faithful Bengali wife like Ina" (147). In Leni Anspach, Mukherjee draws the character of a white feminist as a "vulnerable person in her own way" (Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 51). The dominant mainstream perplexes Dimple and she finds it difficult to strike a balance for herself between her traditional wifely role and that of the "too American" Ina Mullick (112). Interestingly, while Dimple wanted to emulate Ina Mullick, she is not sympathetic to Leni. The mainstream is not entirely appealing to Dimple. This again shows up Dimple's feeling of ambiguity, and thereby the liminal phase that she is going through.

To Dimple Milt Glasser is 'America.' Milt is the means for Dimple to transcend the fixities that have imprisoned her in an ambiguous present.

> . . . Milt was full of ways to live on city, state or federal projects. Milt Glasser knew how to apply for things, knew about consulting, advising, assessing; he seemed to have a dozen careers and at least as many specializations, but he admitted he also had none at all. All he admitted was that he had friends, contacts, "marks" in city government, in the media, in the universities, in publishing, and that if large amounts of money were coming into New York in

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> any of a dozen different fields, he had a good chance of getting part of it. He was, to her, America. (174)

Milt is different from Amit. Milt does not wear suits like Amit and Jyoti, and he is also not "brilliant and dependable like Amit" (191). But, it is with Milt that Dimple likes to talk most. Milt is the space where Dimple can be herself. As Brinda Bose remarks, "Dimple is helplessly caught in the gripping quest for a new female American identity", and being with Milt gives Dimple that feeling of reassurance. Milt takes Dimple out for a pizza but Amit does not like eating out (55). Though Dimple questions her own wifely virtues and values for going out with Milt, she tries to console herself that Milt is after all Marsha Mookerji's brother and that Amit cannot raise objections to it. Dimple is caught between two norms of judgement: Milt's and Amit's, and, therefore, one American and the other Indian. This repeated confusion adds to Dimple's morbid thoughts crowding into her mind all the time. Besides rationalizing, she finds another way to deal with the guilt of going out with Milt: "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 TV series. Amit's tragedy was that he lacked extravagance; he preserved in the immigrant virtues of caution and cunning" (195).

Amit symbolizes the collusion with neo-colonial pursuits that allows him to become a part of the mainstream which is something he will not permit his wife.

However, later, it is because of her relationship with Milt that she feels that she is actually nowhere anymore; "she had no state to represent and she had failed to recreate a new one in the limits of her apartment as Meena or Ina or Mrs.Roy had done" (198). Dimple had aspired to be American with her affair with Milt. But, her

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sexual indiscretion recoils on her. Indian ethos prevails on her. It is her traditional wifely role that gnaws at her. She is in perpetual conflict between her desires and her traditions. Dimple's transgression directs one to recall the wall painting of Sita in flames at the Sens' house. Dimple, too, like Sita is unable to find any way of reclaiming her chastity. It makes her feel guilty and full of remorse. As Brinda Bose explains, Dimple achieves a kind of new birth and a new identity, "engendered by some violent fracturing of norms" and "accompanied by great pain," and the "two acquisitions culminate in a momentary ecstasy when she indulges in an afternoon's extramarital digression with a 'genuine American,' but a happy guiltless amalgamation seems impossible" (55). Bose adds, "The fact that she finds another way [her relationship with Milt] out of her miserably married state is a comment on her new life as an immigrant woman in America, which molds her personality into the shape of her future" (56).

Dimple's only refuge is of devising a new way to die. "She was so much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow without feelings. Whatever she did, no matter how coolly she planned it, would be wrong" (200). As Mukherjee perceives, Dimple's chronic depression and obsession with death or suicide is the expression of the "fragility of the psyche," and brings home the fact that how beneath a confident exterior many people "can think seriously of ending life" (Edwards, "Saying Yes" 180).

To Milt, Dimple has been an exotic. Dimple is reduced to the stereotype of the exotic Orient, the discourse which enables the persistence or the emergence of colonialism or patriarchy (Barrera 202). Milt tells Dimple, "'Everything about you is shocking and exciting and a little sad.' He slurped very loudly, like a Bengali.

'Dimple, you're the most gorgeous creature in New York – did anyone ever tell you that?' " (201). Having compromised all her values and beliefs of an 'Indian wife,' all that Dimple notices is Milt slurping like a Bengali. While Milt showed her way to escape her Bengali identity, Dimple discovers a Bengali trait in him. The border space or the "seam" which is at once a contestation and convergence that De Kock referred to, produces a complex set of situations which do not signify things that Dimple has been familiar with (Kalua 40) . A failure to understand her inclusion or exclusion in the dominant cultural codes deprives Dimple of any comprehension of the structures of such heterogeneous space of liminality. In her attempt to negotiate her own interpretations of the paradoxes always surrounding Dimple, she becomes susceptible to the freedom of violent propositions in her own space, the mind.

Violence in the Liminal

Thus, the sixth and the last aspect of liminality that this chapter discusses in *Wife* is the function of violence. Violence shapes the narrative of liminality in the novel. Brinda Bose explains the use of violence in Mukherjee's fiction:

> Violence is a key word, a leitmotif in Mukherjee's fiction, and the 'psychic violence' that she thinks is necessary for the transformation of character is often emphasized by an accompanying physical conflict of some sort . . . both Dimple and Jasmine [in *Jasmine*] are eased into the notion that if circumstances require that they do more than merely escape, they must do so to save themselves. For them, murder evolves into an acceptable signifier for discarding nostalgia and starting over; it is neither the end nor even merely the means to an end: it is a beginning. (53-54)

The violent urges within Dimple's mind reflect her frustrations and disappointments at not being able to be a wife either in Bengali high society in India or in mainstream America. The violence in American streets and passage-ways, and on TV are reflected in Dimple's mind. Susceptible to melancholy and the grotesque, she is quick to absorb violent images and conversations. This is what particularly draws Dimple to Jyoti, who in a much lesser way than her, is fascinated by news on violence. At home in India, she had beaten a mouse to death, and 'skipped' her way to a deliberate abortion, as a quest for liberation from frustrations. In the US, the violence outside and on TV fill Dimple with extreme fear. This eventually overpowers Dimple's sense of difference between reality and reel life. Dimple's transcendence of confining rigidities is facilitated with this trope of violence. Her subjectivity is shaped by violence. Her violence symbolically undermines any oppressive constraints, both in India or America. This finally leads her to murder Amit, her one final fulfilling but violent act which she had planned so long ago. To Mukherjee, Dimple finds her solutions to her angst in her "infidelity and murder" (Hancock 24). Mukherjee argues:

> 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 would probably 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 Ameicanization. (Hancock 24)

Mukherjee seems to perceive violence as a necessary way to claim agency. "The trouble with Dimple," Kumar asserts, "is that she loses touch with reality. Guilts [sic] of seducing Milt and also of keeping everything a secret from Amit vex her. She

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loses her sleep and becomes a sleep-walker like Lady Macbeth and ultimately kills Amit without actually thinking about its consequences" (57). Kumar continues, "Her 'splintered-self' finds solution to her problems only in murdering her husband. Thus, it is America which intensifies her confusion and turns the violence inside out and she ends up as a murderess" (59). Though apparently Dimple loses touch with reality, the act of murdering is grounded in reality. Borrowing from Barrera's reference to Fanon, "in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon . . . referred to madness as a colonial disease as he related it to a sense of alienation stemming from the experience of colonialism" (204), one can contend that Dimple's murder of Amit is an act of similar alienation arising from a suppression of individual identity as well as the persistence of a helplessness to become a part of the mainstream, which made Dimple immobile. Talking of Dimple's act of murdering Amit, Maya Manju Sharma contends, "Dimple's 'misguided Americanization' [which Mukherjee herself terms it as] begins when she raises the question of individual happiness, as a Western ideal she has failed to measure up to, or a right she has been denied. From a Hindu religious point of view, *Wife* shows the illusory nature of Dimple's idea of happiness, the hollowness of her American dream" (16). In another connected perspective, Brinda Bose says,

> 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 travelled 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. To her husband, who is completely unaware of this distancing

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movement (from expatriation toward immigration, perhaps), she confesses that she is troubled by the fact that she does not dream about Calcutta any more; not grasping at all the danger of this discarded past, he is relieved that she is no longer fretting and teasingly warns her about becoming "too American". . . .

If "too American" signifies a politics and an ideology that affirms selfhood in particular, then it is quite certainly what Dimple is in the process of becoming. She may still 'feel more comfortable in a sari' . . . but as Mukherjee is surely trying to imply, the violent transformations of her psyche are more dangerous because of these shrill protestations. There is a simultaneous fracturing and evolving of identity going on here, in terms of both ethnicity and gender, which is true of the experience of multiculturalism. ("Question of Identity" 56-57)

It is in murdering Amit that Dimple establishes her liminal identity in the most pronounced way, and gathers together her voice of desire and freedom in the newfound liminal space. Significantly enough, Dimple murders Amit with a kitchen knife. The kitchen has always posed a safe haven for Dimple, an identifiably definite place for an Indian wife.[11] And, it is in the kitchen that she asserts her own self by refusing to be played with like a toy any longer. It is in a domestic realm that Dimple claims her own agency, against everything that had "played with" her (212). One may view Dimple's act of violence as instability or a decentring, but it is her transcendence of the bounds that compels a relook at Mukherjee's protagonist to give her a justifying critique. In erasing Amit from her life, Dimple seems to strike at the very root of patriarchy and nullifies the contention as raised by Rebecca Sultuana that it is only Meena Alexander's 'nomadic characters' and not Mukherjee's immigrant subjects that "question patriarchal narratives of nationhood and identity"

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("Many Souls" 216). Where Amit actively becomes associated with the mainstream, Dimple is not allowed to do so. Amit's liminality finds itself worked out in his finding a job, and with it a purpose. Dimple finds no job and so no purpose to life in the US, save a possibility to live a life of freedom from the traditional role of motherhood and housekeeping. Therefore, she cannot identify with Amit or with Meena Sen. Dimple may have found some satisfaction in Ina Mullick's lifestyle, but Dimple's main aspiration lies in carving out her own identity. Thus, it is in her mind, as mentioned earlier, that Dimple finds the space to express herself, which, of course, finds articulation in a confused mass of desire, disappointment, morbidity, and violence in the liminal.

IV

Conclusion

Mukherjee differentiates *The Tiger's Daughter* from *Wife* by their respective "omniscient point of view" and "a limited third- person point of view" (Hancock 16), citing her own position in writing the character of Dimple:

> I wanted to stay close to Dimple – an immigrant wife who starts to question her traditional values – and show the immigrants' world through her. And since I was telling the story of the traumatic changes – cultural, psychological – through Dimple, the language, too, was Dimple's; it was more intense, less authoritative and stately, than in *The Tiger's Daughter*. (Hancock 16)

Yet, the two novels equally espouse and problematize the liminality that emerges in the confrontation of different cultural codes and the resultant oscillation between assimilation and alienation in which the protagonists find themselves. Elsewhere too,

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(Gomez, "On-Going Quest"), the transition from Mukherjee's first two novels, written while in Canada, to the rest of her fiction has been viewed as a transition from the expatriate's point of view to an immigrant's. However, what such perception glosses over is the 'third space' that occurs in every cultural encounter eliding all differences between 'an immigrant' and 'an expatriate,' taking into consideration the fact that immigration does not invariably imply automatic assimilation with a new culture. As Mukherjee herself claims, both novels have occurred to her in terms of characters "caught in a crisis situation" (Hancock 23), and it is this crisis that plays out as liminality. Without a serious consideration of this period and its concomitant complex cultural dynamics of ambiguity and ambivalence, no study of immigrant acculturation, is complete. Swain describes Dimple's as a "lacerated and anguished spirit" ("Dimple in *Wife*" 88). Similarly, Inamdar speaks of both Tara and Dimple as "troubled spirits, belonging nowhere in the end" ("Immigrant Lives"46). Both Swain and Inamdar seem to describe in other words the liminal phase of disorder, disturbance and disorientation.

Mukherjee asserts:

> But I do want my characters to be seen as inventing their own Americas and Canadas. The breaking away from rigidly predictable lives frees them to invent more satisfying pasts, and gives them a chance to make their futures in ways that they could not have in the Old World. We're talking, then, about relocation as a positive act. In immigrating, my characters become creators. By creating, they become more real to themselves, instead of unreal. (Hancock 24)

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Underlying this contention is the fact that borders are flexible and culture is malleable. But, in acknowledging this, one contends that if in recreating one's identity the collusion is with the colonial codes of an imperial United States, then does not Mukherjee perpetuate the binaries of the scientific West and the exotic Orient, the advanced 'First World' and the backward 'Third World'? In Tara's supposed return to the US and in Dimple's murder of Amit one may perceive these steps as a direction towards the eventual adoption of the Western culture. Both protagonists eventually measure themselves against the norm of an American identity. Dimple's crisis occurred because of her inability to become part of the US mainstream. Tara's crisis perpetuated all through her vacation in India because she could not find an 'America' in India; she looked at her homeland through eyes which have become accustomed to America.

Jody Mason in her article, "Rearticulating Violence" asserts that no doubt *Wife* is about the identity crisis amidst cultural forces that powerfully shape Dimple's "self-perception and deny her access to control of her own life," but it is also about "Dimple's ability to grasp at power through the connections that she establishes between her mind and body, despite the social forces that attempt to divide her" (par.1). *Wife* thus seems to be both of despair and agency that builds the restlessness of the phase of liminality. However, Dimple's agency appears to be from the position of co-opting power of the mainstream.

In *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mukhejee's immigrant aesthetic, as Sharmani Patricia Gabriel comments, is that of "a rejection of fixed conceptions of national-cultural identity" ("'Immigrant' or 'Post-colonial'?" 85). Gabriel points out that Mukherjee breaks the postcolonial myth of a return to an imagined 'fixed point of origin' by "reconstructing India through the perceptions of the returning immigrant" (100). At

the same time, Gabriel asserts, borrowing from Stuart Hall, that “there can be no simple or unmediated reproduction of the past of ‘prior’ identities which are ‘not re-experienced through the categories of the present’”. This eventually brings one to what Bhabha explicates in his *Location of Culture* about the temporal present striving for a beyond as much as giving place to newness in the frontiers of cultural liminality. Tara in *The Tiger’s Daughter* looks for a ‘beyond’ in America. Once her homeland, India does not meet the norms of a home for her anymore. Her sensibilities have been touched by the modernity of the West.

The ‘Third World’ regresses further into the periphery in Mukherjee’s portrayal of cultural difference. The neo-colonial politics retain their ground. Reconstruction of the identity of the protagonists gives renewed strength to the dominant power of imperialism.

Notes

[1] *Les rites de passage* (1909) was published in English as *The Rites of Passage* in 1960.

[2] Fetson Anderson Kalua’s thesis, “The Collapse of Certainty: Contextualizing Liminality in Botswana Fiction and Reportage” exhaustively discusses the term ‘liminality’ as advocated by Turner, Van Gennep, and Bhabha.

[3]Turner’s works are elaborately discussed in La Shure,

<http://www.liminality.org/about/whatisliminality>;

<http://parole.aporee.org/work/hier.php3?spec_id=19650&words_id=900>;

<http://brpatricksblog.blogspot.in/2007/10/another-paper.html >.

[4] Ahponen dwells on liminal stage of the arrival of immigrants in the adopted land and the transformations that take place in the sense of belonging thereafter.

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[5] Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter* (London: Chatto, 1971). All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

[6] In her introduction to the collection of short stories *Darkness*, Mukherjee explains her transition from staying in Canada to that in the United States as "a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration" (3).

[7] Urry provides an in depth-analysis of the constructedness of the sites and sights of the tourist.

[8] To Tara, explaining her mother to David is not an easy job. Here, one finds Mukherjee showing the binary between the West and the East.

[9] Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1975). All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

[10] Furnham and Bochner give an illuminating overview of the research on the psychological effects that arise when people are exposed to new environments.

[11] Rao and Khushu-Lahiri provide an insightful analysis of the space of the kitchen and its representation in Mukherjee's *Wife*.

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Chapter IV

Negotiating the Interstitial

This chapter takes up Bharati Mukherjee's celebrated novel *Jasmine* (1989) to examine the reshaping and restructuring of the immigrant identity. The chapter argues that negotiations in the interstitial space enable the construction of a hybrid identity and the valorization of the dominant culture. While chapter 3 explored the disconcerting perplexities that haunt migrants upon arrival in the new land leading to a liminal ambivalent identity, chapter 4 focuses on the interstitial realm between the mainstream and the marginal in the novel under discussion to understand and interpret the eponymous protagonist's strategies in easing into the 'First World.' One finds in Jasmine a determined intention, a vocal assertiveness, and a clear-headedness that direct her towards transformation of her identity. Unlike the titles of the first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, which do not carry the names of the protagonists, *Jasmine* unambiguously shows that the narrative is carried forward by the individual traits and decisions of the main character.

Jasmine claimed the attention of the proponents of American multiculturalism and postcolonial critics alike as soon as it was published in 1989. It went into reprint the same year it was published and received an acclaimed place as part of the "*New York Times Book Review*'s list of the year's recommended fiction" (Alam, *Bharati Mukherjee* 117). While celebrating the protagonist as "a one-woman figure for the South Asian diaspora" in multicultural studies, "the novel's thematic focus on Jasmine's shifting sense of herself offered the text up to the literary-critical preoccupation with identity politics that dominated the 1990s" (Warhol-Down 188). Indira Bhatt points out that *Jasmine* "created waves in literary circles" that seemed to

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project Mukherjee's "credo of Maximalism" in trying to show the large-scale effect of immigration on America (qtd. in Bhatt, "*Jasmine*" 173). The novel is definitely the most celebrated work in Mukherjee's oeuvre and one of the most critiqued novels in South Asian American fiction. Mukherjee's immigrant aesthetic is held up for analysis even as Mukherjee asserts quite vocally every non-European immigrant's rightful place in America as an unhyphenated identity. Alfonso-Forero summarizes two contrasting views projected by the novel, that while *Jasmine* "has been read for over two decades as a text that celebrates assimilation and the Americanized liberation of its title character at the expense of her native culture," at the same time it "is full of harsh criticism of U.S. policy and attitudes towards immigrants and its neo-colonial presence in Asia" (13). Varying between these two perspectives, *Jasmine* has received wide critical attention in the literary world. *Jasmine* is an extension of Mukherjee's short story 'Jasmine' published in her *Middleman and Other Stories*. The eponymous protagonist of the story is like the protagonist of the novel, in deliberately taking the initiative to steer her own destiny and claiming her right to fulfil her own hopes and aspirations.

Unlike the previous chapter where analysis is based on two novels, this chapter focuses only on *Jasmine*. Given its extensive critical reception, the novel demands an exclusive treatment also necessitated by the complex exposition of the chapter's topic, 'negotiating the interstitial.' The discussion of this chapter is spread over three sections. Section 1 gives a brief overview of the notions of 'the interstitial,' the 'negotiated code' (Stuart Hall) and 'hybridity' (Bhabha) as employed in the context of this chapter. Section 2 deploys the implications of these concepts in the analysis of Mukherjee's *Jasmine* with reference to the 'First World' centre and the 'Third World'

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postcolonial periphery. Section 3 highlights the main findings of the analysis in the preceding sections and paves the direction of the thesis for chapter 5.

I

Negotiated Code, Hybridity and the Interstitial

According to the eleventh edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, the word ‘interstice’ gets its meaning, ‘a small intervening space,’ from its Middle English roots, derived from the Latin ‘interstitium,’ and ‘intersistere,’ which mean ‘stand between’ (Soanes and Stevenson 744). Thus, the adjective ‘interstitial’ implies ‘of, forming, or occupying interstices.’ As Fenkl elaborates: “It [an interstice] generally refers to a space between things: a chink in a fence, a gap in the clouds, a DMZ [demilitarized zone] between nations at war, the potentially infinite space between two musical notes, a form of writing that defies genre classification” (5). It is this ‘in-betweenness’ that the interstice occupies. Hence, the interstitial has its own identity.

An interstice is created by borders. The corollary is that without borders no interstice is formed. The interstice, thus, lies between two borders, boundaries which demarcate two separate entities and outline their differences. The interstice, therefore, is a differentiating zone, and by itself is separate from the zones it separates.

The politics of boundaries begin from the fact that they keep things within as well as without. Borders necessarily qualify categories of ‘difference,’ even while “bordering,” as Houtum and Naerssen point out, brings about “othering” (125). Where the ‘inside’ ends, the ‘outside’ begins. Therefore, boundaries or borders are points of distinctness, confrontations and convergences as they flow into each other.

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Simultaneously splitting and joining, crisscross of axes, borders belie any simplistic binaries. Meanings produced in the interstitial space at once carry the influence of that across the border. In other words, borders are not impermeable.

Alternatively borders can be termed as margins, and hence the adjective 'marginal.' In literary and cultural theory, marginal or marginality, as Brooker explains, refers "to the place of repressed or subordinated textual meanings but also to the position of dissident intellectuals and social groups (women, lesbian, gays, blacks) who see themselves at a remove from the normative assumptions and oppressive power structures of mainstream society" (152). This location, Brooker continues, can lead to alienation or even to "a position of advantage from which the dominant society can be critiqued and disrupted" (152). The trope of the margin has its theoretical roots in psychoanalysis, ideology and deconstruction, and finds its predominant use in postcolonial theory. Extending its relation to the 'centre and periphery' binary, this debate on the binaries has led to the concept of a fluid centre, and the transcendence of differences by such notions as hybridity and diaspora. Though the centre itself may seem to be the locus of power and the "marginal therefore indicates a *positionality* that is best defined in terms of the limitations of a subject's access to power", yet, "[s]tructures of power that are described in terms of 'centre' and 'margin' operate, in reality, in a complex, diffuse and multifaceted way" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 135, italics in original). Negotiations between these two positions are underpinned by the politics of power that enable the subversion of this hierarchy.

In the global world today where contemporary borders unendingly overlap each other spatially, temporally and culturally, change and perpetual flux characterize culture. Where transnational migrants in a new land have the choice to assimilate or

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adapt to the new culture or even reinforce their ‘earlier’ identity, survival in the new location implies “constant negotiations with the new social environment as well as their former or other social environment” (Houtum and Naerssen 132). As an illustration of this, Houtum and Naerssen refer to Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, where the author “eschews the binary trap of bordered from within and bordered from outside” placing the protagonist, Jasmine, in a “sequential quest for identity in an alien land” “as she shuttles back and forth between these binary positions of insider out and outsider in” (132). Pramod K. Nayar writes in his *Postcolonial Literature*:

> The borders of nations, communities, even families (dispersed across the globe) have become blurred in the late twentieth century. With increasing flows of people and money, culture and lifestyles, the very nature of the border is suspect (except, perhaps, for officers manning immigration booths at airports across the world), but especially in cities in ‘First World’ nations. An understanding of the enormity of displacement, of the right to cross borders and the need to police borders is necessary to read the best diasporic writing today. (190)

Borders, displacement and diaspora have thus become serious issues of the geo-politics of today. In *Culture and Truth*, R. Rosaldo says:

> More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and irruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. Along with ‘our supposedly transparent’ cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded

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> not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production. (qtd. in Kalua 35)

Intersection of borders has become the mark of quotidian existence. Characterized by postmodernity, poststructuralism and postcoloniality, contemporary borders in a global world refuse any rigid cartography.

Drawing upon the migrant situation in the global world today, Homi K. Bhabha perceives borders as those interstitial in-between spaces which allow new identities to be translated and constructed. Quoting from Martin Heidegger's "Building, dwelling, thinking," Bhabha begins his introduction to his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*" (1, emphasis in original). Shaobo Xie in his review article, "Writing on Boundaries" looks at Bhabha's analysis of the "cultural in-betweenness of the postcolonial world" using the "postmodern concept of difference in laying the theoretical grounds for articulating the hybrid colonial subject," and perceives Bhabha's emphasis on the "multi-positionality" of the subject as an implication of "a gathering of differential moments" (155-156). Extrapolating from Bhabha's essay, "DissemiNation," Xie states, "There are no longer homogeneous cultural spaces and times" and "culture is no longer a clearly-bordered mosaic, but an overlapping of boundaries instead, which constantly calls forth the struggle between the dominant and the emerging" (158). At work in Bhabha's conception of culture is the notion of the pedagogic and the performative. While on one hand the pedagogic aligns with the unitary historicity of origin, the performative "continually reintroduces the effects of time, specifically the ongoing process of any identity becoming what it is, and therefore never being quite identitical with itself" (Huddart 90).

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Therefore, as Xie aptly interprets Bhabha, “The people of a nation are doubly inscribed as pedagogical objects and perfomative subjects, and their duality as such leads to a counter-narrative against the historicist narrative of the naturalistic continuity of community” and it is “in between pure contingency and historical necessity, and between endless deferral of meaning and transparency of the sign” that Bhabha establishes the “possibility of agency” in minority discourse in a national terrain (159,160). Xie further elaborates, “In conceiving agency as the activity of contingency, Bhabha turns the postmodern indeterminacy into a space of reinscription and negotiation, for indeterminacy makes subversion and revision possible, opening up ‘possibilities for other times of cultural meaning’” (161).

Jasmine, the immigrant, no doubt, finds herself in this contingency. She becomes a hybrid of the performative and the pedagogic aspect of culture. What propels her to actively seek a reinscription of her identity? How does she do it? For that it is important to understand the dynamics of ‘negotiation’ available for an immigrant in a new culture.

Similar to the encoding and decoding of television discourse as illustrated by Stuart Hall in his seminal essay ‘The Television Discourse – Encoding and Decoding’ (Brooker 176), the immigrants have a choice to act within the ‘hegemonic’ or ‘dominant’ code of the mainstream culture. However, the ‘polysemy’ of numerous possible meanings of a message implies that, to quote Hall, “There can never be only one single univocal and determined meaning . . . no law to ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning . . . in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer” (qtd. in Brooker 176, ellipsis in original). Thus, if the immigrants do not respond to the ‘intended’ or ‘preferred meaning’ of the mainstream, they will have to function within what Hall calls the ‘negotiated code,’

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neither directly accepting nor opposing the 'encoded hegemonic meaning.' 'Negotiated code,' Hall elaborates,

> contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definition . . . while, at a more restricted, situational level, it makes its own ground-rules . . . reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions.' (qtd. in Brooker 176-177, ellipsis in original)

Negotiated code as response to discourse is studied within the purview of Cultural Studies, and also in terms of feminist film studies as part of Gender studies and in terms of the dominant "male gaze"(Brooker 176-177). Negotiation is central to postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory negotiates the dominant code of Western hegemony and problematizes colonial discourse. Calling "Literature of immigration" as "a variant of postcolonial literature," Janet M. Powers points out that it "complicates the reader's task by introducing multiple cultural codes" (89). Thus, it is in the interface of these multiple cultural codes that negotiation takes place.

Postcolonial theory adopts concepts like 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' (Bhabha) and negotiates colonial discourse, disrupting the binaries of self/Other. Mimicry is the superficial imitation and mockery of the colonizer by the colonized native, and this duality is what results in hybridity (Nayar, *Contemporary Literary* 170). This 'in-betweenness' of hybridity's 'third space' is the site of contestation, difference and negotiation of power and politics (171). Culture is interpreted here and agency restored or subverted. Hybridity is seen in postcolonial writing as "a strength rather than a weakness" and it rejects the uni-directional flow of exchanges between two cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies* 137). This "mutuality"

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allows the development of "complex cultural palimpsests" culminating in such "fruitful metaphor in the idea of cross-fertilization between . . . constitutive elements" (137-138). Hybridity allows the continuation of the traditional as well as the new, but, what is contingent upon temporal and spatial contexts is the "degree to which" hybridization occurs or that which of the constitutive factors weighs more (138). In the context of this chapter, it is the interface between the mainstream host culture and the immigrant postcolonial periphery that is referred to as the site of hybridity, and what is investigated in the course of Section 2 is the process of the protagonist's formation of hybridity and its consequent ramifications.

It is important to see how Mukherjee's protagonist negotiates this 'Third Space' in adapting to the mainstream. What are the strategies Jasmine engages in brokering her place in the adopted land? Definitely a marginal, both as an illegal migrant and one from the 'Third World,' how do race, ethnicity and gender foreground Jasmine's periphery? How does Mukherjee's narrative manoeuvre the cultural transactions that occur in such an interface? Does it reinforce stereotypes or does it subvert the ideology of an imperial centre along with racial supremacy? Why does Jasmine 'travel light,' or defiantly move away from being in the 'collective' cultural or ethnic domain? What politics do Jasmine's strategies unravel? Where do Jasmine's negotiations lead and leave her? Why is violence so important to Mukherjee's fiction? Why is the 'idea of America' overwhelmingly predominant in the protagonist's mapping of her immigrant journey? These are some of the questions that the following section strives to answer.

Section 2 begins with a summary of the plot of *Jasmine* and continues with a detailed exploration of the issues pertaining to 'negotiating the interstitial.'

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II

Jasmine

The novel, *Jasmine*, is primarily the story of a twenty-four year old woman named Jasmine, the protagonist, who grows up in Punjab, India but finally ends up in the US as an illegal immigrant.[1] Jasmine is a pioneer in every sense of the term. At only seven years of age in her village in India, she challenges an astrologer's prediction of early widowhood and banishment from the country, and chooses to carve out her own destiny. In Hasnapur, supported by her mother and her school teacher, Masterji, to continue her education, she pursues her love for her studies and the English language. Her aim is to be a doctor. Against the backdrop of the Sikh nationalist movement, Jasmine's life takes various unexpected turns. She marries Prakash Vijh, a student who plans to go off to America or Germany to continue his studies and then find work there. Prakash's aspiration for modernity coincides with the modernization of India, a decade after independence. Prakash tries to inculcate this 'progressive' attitude in his wife and changes her name from Jyoti to Jasmine. In a terrorist attack, the Sikh nationalist group, the Khalsa Lions, kills Prakash just as he is leaving for the US. Jasmine vows to fulfil her dead husband's ambition of becoming a student at Florida International Institute of Technology. She decides to go to Tampah and lay herself down on a bed of fire in the college grounds in her white sari. She believes in this way she would be carrying out the most honourable duty befitting an Indian widow. She reaches the Florida Coast after an excruciatingly long, illegal and painfully hazardous journey, only to be faced with another shocking ordeal. She is raped on the first night in the foreign land by the sea captain who ferries Jasmine and other fellow immigrants to America. In an act of retribution Jasmine kills the captain, and chooses to travel light and try her chances with life,

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destiny and work towards the fulfilment of her hopes and personal desires. Her first American day starts with denying death and destruction. She is helped by Lillian Gordon, a Quaker lady who facilitates estranged and helpless refugee women find some foothold in their misery-torn lives. Jasmine finally reaches Prakash's mentor, Professor Devinder Vadhera in Flushing, Queens, New York.

The Indian community life stultifies her and she finds employment with Taylor and Wylie Hayes to look after their small daughter, Duff, in the vicinity of Columbia University. But fate plans it otherwise: Jasmine sights Sukhwinder, her husband's murderer and to escape him she flees from New York to Iowa. In Iowa she begins her life anew in a bank but ends up moving in with Bud Ripplemeyer, a fifty-year-old banker. Though she carries his child and waits for the baby to be born, she defers marrying him. She also plays the role of a mother to Bud's seventeen-year-old adopted Vietnamese son. While Jasmine and Du find common ground in their Asian origin and are therefore both 'exotic' to others, each of them feels the rumblings of a future somewhere else. Thus, while Du decides to go off on his own to Los Angeles to be with his sister, Jasmine chooses to go away with Taylor and Duff who come to take her to their future together in distant California. Jasmine uses the 'creative' interstitial space of being an Indian in the US, and negotiates a new identity for herself. As Michael Fischer says, "Negotiating is the long drawn out process that any immigrant goes through" ("Orientalizing" 35).

Individual over the Collective

Jasmine privileges her individual preferences over the collective imaginary. Her journey to the US is solely the result of her individual decision. Spending her time as a widow with her old widowed mother in all its austerities in feudal Hasnapur,

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Jasmine is pricked by the voice that she felt was actually an exhortation from the dead Prakash: "Think Vijh & Wife! . . . There is no dying, there is only an ascending or a descending, a moving on to other planes. Don't crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism. That Jyoti is dead" (96). And, Jasmine understands that she has to move on and fulfil what Prakash set out to do: go to America, which now has become for her "[a] matter of duty and honor" (97). Thus, equipped with "illegal documents" and faking her age as nineteen (98), she turns her back on everything that is 'home' and familiar, and leaves for the US. Jasmine was supposed to spend the rest of her life with her mother, "stay together, two widows shopping and cooking for each other, keeping the shrines of their husbands alive," as decided by both her mother and grandmother (97-98). But, it is the "longest line" from India to the US through the most circuitous route that Jasmine finally takes (99).

Yet, it is not the first time that Jasmine resolves to follow the dictates of her own mind. Earlier, she married Prakash in a "no-dowry, no-guests Registry Office wedding" (75). She continued her education against the strongest opposition from her father and her grandmother. She challenged the astrologer's warning when still a seven-year-old, and asserted that her "starshaped wound" was her "third eye" giving her the power of "a sage" to control her destiny (3-5). Thus, the resilient individual streak in her personality becomes the site that enables her with power.

On landing in America when she is raped by the captain, Half-Face, she assumes the role of the Hindu goddess Kali, and slits Half-Face's throat. She finds that death is being denied to her again, having been spared the first time when Prakash was killed in the bomb blast. Sati is the mission that takes her to the US complete with her white sari and Prakash's suit. However, her humiliation and "defilement" at Half-Face's hands leads her to murder him and burn the suitcase of

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her mission (117). The role of the ideal Indian widow turns into the role of the individual adventurer, set to break new frontiers on her journey ahead.

Jasmine's distinct sense of her self and respect for it, leads her to specific instantaneous decisions, choosing life over suicide, will over fate, which ultimately help her find succour with Lillian Gordon. Gordon becomes her first real encounter with an American that leaves on her a lasting impression. Jasmine proves different even here from the other refugee women, and soon adapts herself to training on being American. Lillian names her Jazzy.

She passes her test to evade being suspected as an illegal, and then leaves for Prakash's mentor's place, Professor Vadhera. The Vadheras give Jasmine her second refuge. The Vadheras, like Meena and Jyoti Sen in Mukherjee's *Wife* offer the domesticity of the Indian household. Jasmine is reduced to being the widow she was in India. Jasmine is unable to fit into the Vadheras' lifestyle of Indian food, movies, dress, language, and sleeping and eating habits and schedules: the typical defence of a diasporic community. To her dismay, she finds it difficult to fit into her American clothes and her English starts "deserting" her (144). The English language is a way to claim the world and is the repository of power, and Jasmine is gradually losing her hold on this passport to her life in America. Similarly, it is important for her to don her American outfits:

> I could not admit [at the Vadheras] that I had accustomed myself to American clothes. American clothes disguised my widowhood. In a T-shirt and cords, I was taken for a student. In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like. To

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> them, I was a widow who should show a proper modesty of appearance and attitude. If not, it appeared I was competing with Nirmala. (145)

Here, Mukherjee institutes a direct contrast between an India which closes its door on widows and their lives, and a US where there is renewed opportunity and hope for a stunted married life. With the Vadheras, Jasmine feels her "married life and chance at motherhood were safely over" (147). Professorji and Nirmala's conjugal life speaks of the same rigid traditions followed in India: "He was following an ancient prescription for marital accord: silence, order, authority. So was she: submission, beauty, innocence," a shell from which Prakash had taught Jasmine to break free (151). This is a characteristic portrayal of a 'Third World' as seen by the West, a 'Third World' where women can only be suppressed, oppressed and silenced.

Jasmine, defiant and resisting all such 'Third World' constraints, decides to strike a new path, risking the security of her restricted life. She negotiates with Professor Vadhera and procures a green card, the money for which she promises to repay at the earliest possible. "Disappointments tumbled out of me. I told him I wanted a green card more than anything else in the world, that a green card was freedom" (149). It is a risk that she is willing to take rather than suffocate herself in the confines of the Indian diasporic community:

> Flushing was a neighborhood in Jullundhar. I was spiraling into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness. Some afternoons when Professorji was out working, and Nirmala was in her shop, and the old Vadheras were snoring through their siestas, 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. In Flushing I felt immured. An imaginary brick wall topped

> with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time. Without a green card, even a forged one (I knew at least four men in our building who had bought themselves resident alien cards for between two and three thousand dollars), I didn't feel safe going outdoors. If I had a green card, a job, a goal, *happiness* would appear out of the blue. (149)

While boredom is the surface reason for running away from where she is "safe, a cocoon to hatch out of," what Jasmine asks of herself is, "Can *wanting* be fatal?" (142). Jasmine wants more than just Indianness and in doing so, she concedes, "I'd just abandoned whatever chance at security I had in the world" (161). Lahiri points out that it is the "ghetto mentality" that poses as an obstruction for Jasmine to fulfil newer aspirations ("Nation" 55). Lahiri refers to Mukherjee's advocacy against the "adoption of a ghetto mentality" as conceived by Salman Rushdie (55). To quote Rushdie, "To forget that there is a world beyond the community to which we belong, to confine ourselves within narrowly defined cultural frontiers would be, I believe, to go voluntarily into that form of internal exile which in South Africa is called the 'homeland'" (qtd. in Lahiri 55). Jasmine tries to negotiate an opportunity that rises above this ghettoization, and seems to echo Mukherjee's own belief in the cultural gain that immigration offers. Jill Roberts comments that "Mukherjee . . . like her hero Jasmine, seeks to escape the closed immigrant communities that preserve bounded cultural signifiers" ("Between" 89). Jasmine does not see any prospect of happiness if she continued staying with the Vadheras. It would be as if she had not taken off from putatively regressive India.

To Jasmine, "Flushing was not the downtown of dreams I'd conjured from the aerogram back in Jullundhar. And Professorji was not a professor. He was an

importer and sorter of human hair" (151). Professor Vadhera does not live up to Jasmine's expectations. At the same time, being a characteristically sharp observer, she notices that, "It was not exaggeration to say that the security of the free world, in some small way, depended on the hair of Indian village women", referring to the imported Indian hair which forms Professor Vadhera's business (152). It seems as if, "A hair from some peasant' head in Hasnapur could travel across oceans and save an American meteorologist's reputation. Nothing was rooted anymore. Everything was in motion" (152). The idea of a world in flux finds reflection here. Jasmine has an insight into this notion of mobility even while the Vadheras are stuck in a stagnant life sans the thrill and adventure of the US to which Jasmine aspires.

With the green card in her possession, she sets off to make her way and life in the US. Throughout fast-changing spatial and temporal terrain that Jasmine traverses she is prodded by her own personal quests and desires. Hers is the adamant refusal to succumb to paralyzing circumstances and to set her chances in favour of mobility, hope and survival. Her transactions with situations are urged by the individual aspiration and to refuse all which she thinks is regressive and normalized. Jasmine rejects the norms of the traditional Indian society. In the US, the Vadheras deny her the freedom of the adventurer and seeker. Bold Jasmine is attracted to independence and distinctiveness. All the time, she seems to break new frontiers.

Even from the Hayeses Jasmine flees to Iowa on sighting the man who murdered Prakash. In Iowa it is not long before she moves in with Bud Ripplemeyer, and becomes pregnant. When Bud is shot by a bankrupt farmer and he becomes crippled, she takes care of him. She also looks after their adopted Vietnamese child, Du. But Jasmine does not marry Bud. It is with Taylor and Duff, the Hayes' adopted

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daughter that Jasmine decides to settle down in distant California leaving Bud behind. Her choice is her individual fulfilment and not duties and responsibilities. In this connection, Alfonso-Forero in the abstract to her doctoral study, "Translating Postcolonial Pasts," makes a point by associating a link between "the gendered and cultural identities" of immigrant women and the subversion of their postcolonial identities "in the establishment of a new, negotiated identity." The novel is about Jasmine's attempt to move away from her postcolonial past.

Travelling Light

Jasmine's independence and individuality come from her rejection of excess baggage in a relentless journey. The immigrant is always associated with the metaphor of the journey. As Avtah Brah notes, talking of diasporas, "At the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey" ("Thinking" 443). Since Jasmine's goal is to make a home here in the US, she is not unlike the diasporic individual. But she is one with a difference. She does not burden herself with nostalgia or the paralyzing effects of memory. Jasmine has learnt to travel light, either to enable her to survive, or to assimilate with the new culture. She, as Lahiri points out, adopts the "American frontier mentality" "willing to court constant changes in life" and in doing so, she "repudiates the rooted and conservative patterns of the old countries" (49). This is the way she negotiates her past, and does not allow it to weigh her down. In Jasmine's own words, she seems to be always fleeing from it: ". . . I had a past that I was still fleeing. Perhaps still am" (34). Jasmine might be fleeing her past but as John K. Hoppe observes that "Jasmine is continually evoking that past and re-fashioning it and herself" ("Technological" 139). Hoppe further says that in doing so Mukherjee is set on the same platform with other "cross-cultural writers like [Wilson] Harris" and keeps a "ceaseless, flexible dialogue between cultures" afoot all the time

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(139). The past of the old homeland and the present of the 'New World' weave together to a show a direction for the future that Jasmine desperately longs to claim. In the process, she becomes a cultural hybrid that is more intent upon learning the skills of the 'New World' rather than holding on to remnants of nostalgia.

Jasmine is adaptive and adept at learning. Memory becomes a convenient instrument to resort to at will. It is a site of agency for her. Roberts argues that while in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* there is an attempt made for "the recovery of lost fictions, myths and origins to 'redefine' and 'regenerate,'" in Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and her other novels the focus on Hindu mythology "is designed less to recover an ancient sensibility than to erect new foundations" (88). Jasmine is driven by the goal to be American and every negotiating step is towards that direction, be it retrieving clips of past experiences or dealing with the present circumstances.

Remembering the widow in Hasnapur who taught her how to "haggle prices down," Jasmine reflects that "I knew even then I was witnessing permissible rebellion." Jasmine carries 'the rebel' with her (47). She does not allow Indian customs and traditions to constrict her freedom in the US, and she learns how to handle the past from seventy-year-old lady Lillian Gordon:

> She had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you. . . . 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)

What can deform Jasmine? That which is regressive. With the Vadheras, Jasmine does not grow:

> I felt myself deteriorating. I had gained so much weight I couldn't get into the cords even when I tried. I couldn't understand the soap operas. I didn't know the answers to game shows. And so I cooked, shopped, and cleaned, tended the old folks, and made conversation with Professorji when he got home. (148)

To quote Lahiri again, in Hasnapur it was a Jyoti who was "allowed little social mobility" (49). In the US, with the Vadheras it is the same. But, away from them, Jasmine can break through confining circumstances and rise upward. Thus she distances herself from the Vadheras, to whom she is still the Hasnapur widow and eligible only to be their domestic help.

Interspersed within her philosophy of travelling light, is the issue of fate and chaos theory. Jasmine is well aware of the insidiousness of fate. "Fates are so intertwined in the modern world, how can a god keep them straight?" she rhetorically asks (15). But Jasmine goes by her will to defy fate. When as a young girl at Hasnapur in India she had killed a mad dog, when she had gone against the dictates of patriarchy to continue her studies, when she had gone ahead with her registered marriage to Prakash, Jasmine knew that she had "succeeded in blocking" the threats of the astrologer under the banyan tree (76). Similarly, in the US, Jasmine is not deterred by the twists and turns of fate. She subverts fate to align it with her own aspirations. It is another way for her to travel light. In the process, she attempts to utilize all opportunities that are in front of her. When at the Hayeses, Jasmine seizes her opportunities and strikes roots in the new land:

> I felt lucky. My pillow was dry, a launch pad for lift-off. Taylor, Wylie, and Duff were family. America may be fluid and built on flimsy, invisible lines of weak

> gravity, but I was a dense object, I had landed and was getting rooted. I had controlled my spending and now sat on an account that was rapidly growing. Every day I was being paid for something new. I'd thought Professorji out in Flushing was exceptional, back when I didn't have a subway token. Now I saw how easy it was. Since I was spending nothing on food and rent, the money was piling up. (179)

Interestingly, here with Taylor's family Jasmine sees the prospect of not to travel ahead, but to settle down. One may ask, has Jasmine reached her goalpost? With a part-time job for Jasmine in Columbia in the Mathematics Department, it is again another opportunity for Jasmine. In the Indian Languages Department she is used as a "Punjabi reader" and a tutor to some students (180). She uses this extra money to pay "Professorji in a single check" (180). Jasmine has thus 'lightened' herself. She frees herself of her debt to Professor Vadhera and hitches her wagon rather to the pursuit of her happiness.

Pursuit of the Idea of America

It is the pursuit of the 'idea of America,' an idea which privileges freedom and individual identity over traditional taboos, stigma and responsibilities, that prods Jasmine to negotiate with the mainstream and strive for the ideals of being 'American.' Bradley C. Edwards says that it is Jasmine's rejection of any patriarchal authority and astrologer's bleak predictions, and instead "claiming spiritual empowerment" for herself with the "title 'sage'" that go to show "independence of spirit that leads to Jasmine's Americanization" ("Autobiography" 174-175). Mukherjee has stated, "By American I mean an intensity of spirit and a quality of desire," and Jasmine seems to exemplify the same spark of independent thought and drive for

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fulfilment of independent desires both in India and the US (qtd. in Edwards, “Autobiography” 175).

In India, to Jasmine and Prakash, America symbolized freedom; a ‘New World’ which could automatically give everything new, even new fate to have a new life. “Listen to me, Jasmine.I want for us to go away and have a real life. I’ve had it up to here with backward, corrupt, mediocre fools” (81). This is Prakash trying to express his aspirations to go out of India to America. America is contrasted with the backwardness of India that does not allow genius and excellence to thrive. It was Prakash who had ignited the spirit of the modern in her and fascination for the technological. Even the American aerogramme is a temptation to leave India:

> How velvety the paper felt on my forearm and wrist! Our aerogrammes were rough and fibrous, you had to gouge your sentences into the paper. CELEBRATE AMERICA, the American postal services commanded.TRAVEL . . . THE PERFECT FREEDOM. (83)

America allows “minting” of money, and necessary comfort and luxury, as Professor Devinder Vadhera, mentor and benefactor to Prakash, wrote to him:

> Day by day our Jullundhar graduates are rushing to this country and minting lakhs and lakhs of rupees. They stay in nice houses with 24-hour electricity and no load shedding. They have running hot and cold water. They and their wives also are liking to work. They enjoy all manner of comforts and amenities. I see the onrush of the dunderheads from our college. When will I see my truly best student blooming in the healthy soil of this country? (84)

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It is to this America that Jasmine has made her way. But New York presents her with an astounding reality. She finds beggars there and wonders if she has missed the America or Professor Vadhera: "I felt I'd come to America too late, I felt cheated" (139). The taxi driver in Queens who was a doctor from Kabul complains of bitterness: "Bitterness seemed to buoy him, make him special" (140). Yet, Jasmine thinks differently: "I would not immure myself as he had. Vijh & Wife was built on hope", the hope that Jasmine believes America will deliver (140). Jasmine seems to pursue what Mukherjee expounds as the 'American Dream': ". . . not American Dream in the sense of 'Can I have a bigger car' . . . but that sense of discovering for yourself what you believe and who you want to be" (Desai and Barnstone 110). Jasmine wants to fashion her life anew.

For this, Jasmine adapts to American culture at various points. When she picks up Lillian Gordon's daughter, Kate's marine iguana, Sam, she is doing something different:

> I picked him up and held him. Truly, I had been reborn. Indian village girls do not hold large reptiles on their laps. They would scream at the swipe of a dry tongue, the basilisk stare of a beady eye. The relationship of an Indian, any Indian, to a reptile, any reptile, is that of a fisherman to a fish. (163)

Jasmine is not the Indian village girl here. Looking at Sam, Jasmine thought: "Sam, I thought, we're both a long way from home, aren't we? What'll we do? Look after little girls? There's no going back, is there?" (164). Jasmine has left home, and she cannot go back. She has to create a home here.

In the Hayeses, Jasmine feels at home, becoming an American:

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> I became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue across the street from a Barnard College dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child; Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family. (165)

With $ 95 a week, Jasmine begins a new life with the new family. Taylor is an immediate attraction for Jasmine:

> He smiled his crooked-toothed smile, and I began to fall in love. I mean, I fell in love with what he represented to me, a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her, and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking, even when she didn't understand it. It seemed entirely American. I was curious about his life, not repulsed. I wanted to know the way such a man lives in this country. I wanted to watch, be a part of it. He seemed wondrously extravagant, that Sunday morning. (167)

This is the transit point for Jasmine. Jasmine identifies her wants. Taylor's behaviour transcends class, and Jasmine is no longer the servant of the Indian Vadheras. To Jasmine, being American means being able to live up to Taylor's beliefs and lifestyle:

> The love I felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful. In Flushing, I had lived defensively in the midst of documented rectitude. I did not want to live legally if it also meant living like a refugee. (171)

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It is to this goal that Jasmine adapts herself, something that America will allow her to have: a personality with positive traits and a sense of humour. In India she was widowed, and it is because of her mission for her dead husband that she falls into circumstances of rape, and so became a murderer. All these negative connotations seem to be associated with 'Third World' India.

Differences surface in the cultural gap between the Hayeses and Jasmine, and Jasmine wants to understand and bridge this gap. Jasmine does not understand how Duff, such a little child, can sleep on her own, and how Jasmine can sleep alone. To Jasmine, the development of a strong sense of individuality and independence in American children is bewildering. Jasmine also finds it difficult to make the Hayeses understand that a separate room for her is not needed. With Duff, however, the gap is bridged to a certain extent:

> She was the only American, at the time, that I was capable of totally understanding. For her, I was a wise adult without an accent. For me, she was an American friend whose language I understood and humor I could laugh at. And she laughed at mine. I did have a sense of humor. (173)

Little Duff's innocence welcomes Jasmine, and Jasmine is able to communicate most easily with her. This is an important point where Jasmine's gradual Americanization is hinted. Jasmine's accentless English and sense of humour has enabled her to be one like other Americans. This hints at the proclivity that Jasmine already had in her to be American. It is from Duff that Jasmine learns about "the stores, the neighbourhood, shopping" (173). Jasmine learns fast.

> I took in everything. Every morning, the news sank into my brain, and stayed. Language on the street, on the forbidden television, at the Hayeses' dinners,

> where I sat like a guest and only helped with the serving (and, increasingly, controlled the menu), all became *my* language, which I learned like a child, from the first words up. The squatting fields of Hasnapur receded fast. (174)

As Jasmine's Americanization progresses, the homeland begins to recede further into memory. Here, one may question if Mukherjee is trying to perpetuate the binaries of the West and the East.

Jasmine is a "caregiver" to Wylie (175). It makes Jasmine feel like a professional and a part of the family, not a "maid-servant" like the Mazbi woman in Hasnapur (175). But, Jasmine also observes:

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

It is a lesson Jasmine learns very well. Because this is what she does when she eventually leaves Bud to go off with Taylor. Even Wylie stops loving Taylor. When Wylie confides this to Jasmine and that she is in love with an economist named Stuart Eschelman, Jasmine does not know how to take it:

> I realized for the first time in at least a year that 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? (182)

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Jasmine is confounded by Wylie and Taylor's cultural codes. It is only later that she finds the perspective: "The Claremont codes still bewildered me" (183). Yet, Jasmine had much appreciation for it. "Claremont Avenue was a brave new world for me" (184).

With Wylie gone, Jasmine's life takes a new turn.

> The truth is, we were happy, happier than when Wylie'd been around filling up the apartment with her restlessness and unspoken guilt. Now the rooms seemed warmed by a mute intimacy. My life had a new fullness and chargedness to it. Every day I made discoveries about the city, and in the evenings, when I listed my discoveries to Taylor he listened carefully, as though I were describing an unmapped, exotic metropolis. (184)

Looking after Duff is an opportunity to Jasmine to tutor herself as well as Duff. "I wondered if anyone had asked Wylie enriching questions, if I was creating the foundations for impossible yearning later in Duff's life" (185). Wylie's absence gives Jasmine another avenue to know the American culture. On hindsight, Jasmine recalls:

> Taylor didn't want to change me. He didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness. My being different from Wylie or Kate didn't scare him. I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses' big, clean, brightly lit apartment, I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase. (185-186)

Jasmine seems to justify Mukherjee's advocacy for forgetting the past, and being a pioneer in seeking newer worlds. Her use of such phrases as "bunker oneself" and "sheathe the heart" and linking them to cowardice are ways of what Mukherjee herself castigates as debilitating states of expatriation. It is also important to add Ruth Maxey's observation here. Maxey argues that Mukherjee's choice of language evokes images which are "semi-personified terms" like the " 'neutered isolation of exile'" and "'the smothering tyranny of nostalgia'" which definitely urge the immigrant to give up the past ("'Messiness'" 66). It is the present, not the past, which holds out promises and hopes. Taylor proves to be someone in whom Jasmine reposes her trust: "This was a man I had observed for over two years, who had been unfailingly kind, never condescending, always proud of my achievements. I would listen. And then I would do" (187). Mukherjee paints a very easy passage for Jasmine's Americanization.

This rapid Americanization and her smooth life with Taylor and Duff do not last. The temporariness of life and events that characterize American life which Jasmine herself predicted comes true. Jasmine discovers Sukhwinder who had killed Prakash. Jasmine realizes that she is exposed to harm without anybody to protect her. She is still an "illegal" in America (189). "I had been until that time an innocent child he'd picked out of the gutter, discovered, and made whole, then fallen in love with," says Jasmine of her life with Taylor (189). But, now, Jasmine confesses everything to Taylor: "the marriage, the bombing, the murder" (189). And Jasmine decides to go to Iowa.

> A crazy kind of logic made me pick Iowa to run away to. Duff's mother had had Duff, Wylie'd told me, at an Elsa County hospital. Duff, conceived in impulse and error, had given her mother a chance to go to college and me the

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> chance to break out of Flushing. Iowa was a state where miracles still happened. (197)

Jasmine's 'foreignness' becomes most highlighted in Iowa. She finds another Lillian Gordon here in the form of Mother Ripplemeyer. She helps Jasmine to get a job in a bank where her son, Bud, gets attracted to exotic Jasmine. Bud leaves his long married wife, Karin, to live with Jasmine. Even with Bud's child in her womb she is exposed to an America that does not elate her. As Alam explains, Jasmine is disappointed by the traditional Baden where she finds conventional farming like that in Punjab (108). She is racially taunted here. And Karin calls her a "gold digger" and compares her to "a tornado" (195, 205). Further, Bud cannot overcome his fascination for Jasmine's "foreignness" even as their neighbour, Darrel, harbour another exotic attraction for her (26). Alam points out that in trying to grope for ways to break free of this Iowa, Jasmine finds inspiration in Du who leaves her and Bud to join his sister in California (*Bharati Mukherjee* 109). Thus, when Taylor arrives, Jasmine chooses to leave Bud in her pursuit of "adventure, risk, transformation" in the "free country" that she finds America to be (qtd. in Alam 108-109). Thus, the narrative proceeds to reclaim Jasmine from the periphery and make her a part of the centre.

On Jasmine's part, she has already identified herself as "an American and no longer as an immigrant," as pointed out by Janet Powers. Powers observes that "in Bud's farm, Jane, like Karin, identifies the family values as 'puritan,' yet for the first time uses the first-person plural: 'We're puritans'" (103). Powers also maintains that in eventually rejecting Karin's description of her as a "destructive tornado" and rather acknowledging herself as "greedy with wants and reckless with hopes," Jasmine has shown the characteristics of "fluidity and speed of transformation, qualities of both

the American character and its landscape" (103). Further, as Lahiri points out, Mukherjee seems to instil into Jasmine a celebration of the "frontier myth of America" so as to shape Jasmine as one in the process of assimilation with the historical and cultural framework of America (48). Thus, it is American history that takes foreground and naturally, India is reduced to a backseat. John Higham writes in *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (1975):

> In the absence of a truly rooted national tradition, Americans have been united – it might be argued – by their commitment to the future. And the future-looking orientation of the American people has shaped the most notable American traits: idealism, flexibility, and adaptability to change; a dependence on the self and the immediate family more than the wiser community; a high respect for personal achievement; a tendency to conform to the values of peers and neighbors instead of holding stubbornly to ancestral ways . (qtd. in Alfonso-Forero 5)

Nothing better describes Mukherjee's Jasmine. The writer seems to inscribe all the attributes noted in the quotation above in her heroine in order to justify her pursuit of America. This also becomes a ruse to ensure that she does not look back on India or wallow in the throes of 'Third World' disadvantages and lack of privileges. It also indicates that Mukherjee's Jasmine is trying to break free of postcoloniality in being a forward-looking American rather than being burdened with a 'post-colonial' engagement and search for roots.

Naming and Transforming

Jasmine's negotiations with new cultures come across in her identification with the rapidly changing names.[2] As with diasporic identities that "constantly produce

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and reproduce themselves through transformation and difference," so also is immigrant identity (Stephen 11). The play of names is a central motif of the novel. Jasmine reflects, "My grandmother may have named me Jyoti, Light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter" (40). It is important to note that Mukherjee attributes the positive characteristic of fortitude only with the American Jane, and overlooks the bold young Jyoti of Hasnapur who challenged the astrologer's predictions, and fought death when a mad dog attacked her. With each name, therefore, is attributed a new context and its consequent ramifications. "In the white lamplight, ghosts float toward me. Jane, Jasmine, Jyoti" (21).There is a gradual change, from Jyoti to Jasmine, which seems to imply a change from light to the headiness of the fragrance of the flower, Jasmine. But on entering the foreign space, she is cast in a Western dye. From Jazzy, it transmutes to Jase and then to Jane. "Like Prakash, who transforms her into a city girl, Lillian Gordon transforms her into Jazzy, an American girl" (Stephen 56). Each name, points out Lahiri, implies a "progress towards the culture of the West" (50). To Lillian Gordon, "Jazzy" is spirited and vivacious (133). Fascinated as she is by technological innovations, it is no surprise that Jasmine compares herself to the revolving door that she sees for the first time in a department store: something which is "always open and at the same time always closed" (133). Also, Jasmine's life has become like the escalator, something which is "always moving and always still" (133). In these similes Jasmine underscores her interstitial position, with open choices and an independent will.

Though Jasmine is trained by Lillian Gordon to enable herself to be hired as a domestic, Lillian Gordon tells her that she does not look like a "picker or a domestic" (134). While leaving for Kissena Boulevard, Fushing, Queens in New York, Lillian Gordon tells Jasmine: "Now remember, if you walk and talk American, they'll think

you were born here. Most Americans can't imagine anything else" (134-135). She also adds, "'Quite uncharacteristic,'" she said, 'but impulsive and sincere. You're a very special case, my dear'" (135).

Taylor Hayes calls Jasmine Jase.

> Jase was a woman who bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants. On my day off I took my week's salary . . . and blew too much of it in stores along Broadway and even in the big department stores.
>
> I should have saved; a cash stash is the only safety net. I'd learned that if nothing else from the scrimping Vadheras. 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 to movies and lived for today. In my closet hung satin blouses with vampish necklines, in my dresser lingerie I was too shy to wear in a room I shared with Duff. Profligate squandering was my way of breaking with the panicky, parsimonious ghettos of Flushing.
>
> For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver, there is a Jase the prowling adventurer. I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces. I prayed my job as Duff's "day mummy" would last forever. (176-77)

Jasmine thrills at her American pulse. 'Jase' was the fulfilment of yesteryears' dreams. Mukherjee explains the connection between identity and the significance of names:

> I have always been aware of how a name can give you a certain sense of freedom or restriction. I am using the names as reincarnations; to name

> yourself is to say, “I’m going to be this person for the time being.” Then, how people react to you is something, of course, outside your own control. (qtd. in Rodríguez 69)

And, Jasmine does have her rebirths again and again towards assimilation.

Jasmine is Jane to Bud. As she says, “In Baden, I am Jane. Almost” (26). Jasmine has assimilated much. But her Indianness is a marker which she cannot dispose of, and transformation is not an easy process: “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of our dreams” (29).

Jasmine tries to juggle her identities within these names. What has she become, she wants to know. Here in Iowa, when Bud alludes her to “Calamity Jane” or “Jane as in Jane Russell, not Jane as in Plain Jane,” it is a “plain Jane” that Jasmine wants to be even as “Plain Jane is a role, like any other” (26).

While replying to Dr. Mary Webb who believes in ‘channeling,’ Jasmine says that she has also “travelled in time and space” like an eternal soul that visits the world (127). Jasmine likens that to her own personal life:

> Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff’s day mummy and Taylor and Wylie’s *au pair* in Manhattan; *that* Jasmine isn’t *this* Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (127)

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Identities are fluid. Everything merges into each other. It is difficult to seek something essential of one identity. Jasmine's identity changes with each woman she becomes: "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). Jasmine identifies herself with many roles:

> I still think of myself as caregiver, recipe giver, preserver. I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve, be allowed to join, but I have created confusion and destruction wherever I go. As Karin says, I am a tornado. I hit the trailer parks first, the prefabs, the weakest links. How many more shapes are in me, how many more selves, how many more husbands? (215)

To Darrel, she is "Juh-ane," and he asks her to leave with him to New Mexico (217). Jasmine seems to be significant to everyone she comes in contact with, transforming them while being transformed herself. This is, of course, part of Mukherjee's credo: of immigrants transforming US and the US transforming the immigrants. Further, relating this to reincarnation in Hindu cosmology and the transformation of the immigrant identity, Mukherjee explains:

> My way of dealing with it has been to say, like in my novel *Jasmine*, we are reinventing ourselves a million times. I like to think that Hinduism is a kind of geophysical vision, rather than a religion, in the conventional Western sense. When we talk about reincarnation it might be as simple as saying that once the body dies and is cremated, the charred bits going up in smoke become something else. They are absorbed in water or are absorbed on the land. I don't know. (qtd. in Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 46).

Jasmine goes through a series of transformations. Pointing to Mukherjee's work, Chen and Goudie calls it "a *bricoleur*, parts are used and reused and shaped and reshaped, much like the character of Jasmine's identity. As with time and space in the novel, things do seem to recur though with a difference, even as Jasmine suggests she's given up one identity and moved on to another" (78, italics in original). This celebration of transformations that Mukherjee's work displays in the exuberance of the immigrant condition is justified by her as the celebration of the 'resilience' of Third World immigrants and not their victimization. It also reflects Mukherjee's belief in the US as "a place of constant change" (qtd. in Edwards, "Saying Yes" 163). Mukherjee has herself explained its importance: "Change is the norm here. We expect change. Every other country I've lived in values fixity, and regrets change" (qtd. in Edwards, "Saying Yes" 163). Brinda Bose aptly adds that the "very essence of *Jasmine* resides in the concept of endless possibility" and this is successfully claimed with "change and adaptability" as "key to survival" (58). It has been Mukherjee's emphasis that non-European migrants should also be accepted as mainstream Americans, and therefore, Mukherjee discards a hyphenated identity. Jasmine proceeds towards an un-hyphenated identity. Thus, with change in identity is change in names of the mainstream. Lahiri has pointed out that hyphenization implies a "subordination to a white 'centre'" which Mukherjee rejects as part of her struggle against multiculturalism, as expounded by Mukherjee in her seminal article, "Beyond Multiculturalism" (56). Yet, it has to be conceded that even without a hyphenated label, there is a hybrid identity that emerges for Jasmine that inclines more towards the West.

Gender and Violence

An important feature of all Jasmine's negotiations throughout the novel is the aspect of gender and violence.[3] Violence, as Samir Dayal points out, is marked from the very beginning of the novel, describing "a scene of fortelling: an astrologer predicts her [Jasmine's] early widowhood and subsequent exile" ("Creating" 67). Mukherjee projects violence as an inevitable facilitator for change and sexuality as "empowerment" and "metaphor for liberation" (qtd. in Rodríguez 67). Bose finds a gradual escalation in violence in Mukherjee's fiction, from the seduction and political riot in *Tiger's Daughter* to Dimple's killing of her husband in *Wife* and to Jasmine's "reincarnation as an avenging Kali" in killing Half-Face (53). Mukherjee herself believes in 'murdering' for rebirth or transformation (Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 37). The "psychic violence" that the author herself finds in her own immigrant situation is reflected in Jasmine's life as physical violence: "Because she is an undocumented, poor alien, she necessarily goes through a kind of physical harassment that someone like me was exempt from, " the author states (qtd. in Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 37).

Mukherjee situates 'sex' as an agency for liberation from a patriarchal society. Jasmine is repeatedly sexually assaulted on the shrimper that takes her to the US. She is raped on her first day in America. But, the incident of rape by itself makes her turn away from suicide, goading her to take revenge. She becomes Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction of evil, an act of self-assertion and progress. One sees here the creation of the mythic space where sex and gender become enablers of action. Differentiating between Jasmine and Dimple (of her earlier novel *Wife*), Mukherjee explains that Jasmine is different: hailing from the "more action-oriented" cultural background of Punjab, and Dimple from a more culture given to "reflection,"

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Jasmine's acts are more often than not "instinctual" (qtd. in Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 51)[4]. Thus, action, agency and violence are foregrounded in the novel. To a large extent it appears to be due to the "messiness of rebirth as an immigrant," to use Mukherjee's own words from "Immigrant Writing" (qtd. in Maxey 65). Mukherjee empowers her immigrants (Maxey 66). Snehasis Maiti points out that in *Jasmine* the protagonist moves out of the "gender-defined role of *The Tiger's Daughter* as well as *Wife*" as "somebody's daughter or wife and is ready to face the world on her own" (95). Yet, it must not be overlooked that Jasmine's first lesson on subverting patriarchy was received in India. She witnessed how her mother facilitated her further studies even with "the thwock of blows" and bleeding upper lip (52), which Edwards terms as "silent activism" that "emblematizes Mukherjee's conception of non-Western feminism" ("Autobiography" 177). But unlike her mother, Jasmine is not silent. She is vocal enough, be it through her actions or her statements and makes her circumstances her agency to fulfil her individual aspirations.

In America, as Brinda Bose cites Minh-ha's particularly perceptive explanation, it is impossible to dislodge the "ethnic" and "female" from each other when reconstructing a new self (59). To abandon the notion of a traditional woman's life that is subservient to man, Jasmine "needs to discard her ethnicity too – the only way that she can cope with the freedom of choices thrust upon her, intellectual and sexual, is to see herself within the construct of a new 'American' woman" (59). Thus, sexuality, gender and violence correlate together in Jasmine's attempt to renew her life that is distanced from the past that she has come to burn in the US in the form of self-immolation. Jasmine does immolate but not in physical terms. She reincarnates into the American Jazzy and soon pushes the frontier ahead.

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III

Conclusion

Warhol-Down mentions scholars like Anu Aneja, Sangeeta Ray, and Kristen Carter-Sanborn who have criticized Mukherjee's "backward gaze" on India (Aneja), casting India as "a regressive world" (Ray) and Jasmine's questionable " 'discovery' of an American selfhood" (Carter-Sanborn) (189). Warhol-Down also points out that postcolonialists have seen Mukherjee as sustaining orientalism through *Jasmine*, stereotyping the 'Third World' woman and "glorifying the position of women in North America by contrast" (188). In privileging her individual aspirations that coincide with being American, Jasmine finds an opportunity to jettison her homeland memories and culture, and take up new ones. This distancing is definitely convenient for Jasmine which Mukherjee feels is the basis of an immigrant sensibility. For Jasmine, the other side of the border is much more fascinating. Being in this interstitial space where Jasmine finds the imperative of choosing between cultures and beliefs, she readily accepts the West. Her justifications are many as is seen in the analyses in section 2. Although Jasmine tries to find out who is the real she among the many names with which she is attributed, she finally chooses Taylor's 'Jase.' Taylor has symbolized America to Jasmine. Taylor has accepted her in her totality unlike Bud who is afraid of her foreignness. Taylor gives her the breathing space to be who she is. In carving such a character in Taylor, Mukherjee surely is sketching the portrait of what she thinks ideal America is, and the America that welcomes immigrants readily. Mukherjee has, to use the words of Alfonso-Forero from a similar context, given "an overly optimistic spin on the process of Americanization while obscuring that immigrants often assimilate under great external pressure" (8-9). This is also where critics have raised their voices against Mukherjee's muted treatment of racism that is

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rife in America. Debjani Banerjee rightly points out that Mukherjee's "valorization of America as a locus for positive change in novels like *Jasmine* problematizes her position as a postcolonial intellectual" (176). Mukherjee, of course, has time and again refused the category of postcolonial. However, even if Mukherjee does not accept this nomenclature, it cannot be denied that she uses postcolonial India and Indians as the material base for her creative work.

Jasmine's marginalized condition as an undocumented migrant is there for all to see. Her green card, too, is illegally secured. However, the question of her immigrant status does not run into any problem. Most of her encounters with American people are, to use Stephen's term, "benign" (52). She is warmly accepted by the Hayeses and in Iowa not much time lapses before she is in a relationship with Bud. Even though there are stray incidents where her foreignness comes to the foreground negatively, Jasmine never faces a crisis on this count. The major difficulty that was posed in the US was only by an Indian, the Sikh terrorist, and not by any American. Her ethnicity has only facilitated her in getting a job with the Hayeses and in becoming the carrier of Bud's child. Even Darrel, their Baden neighbour finds an exit from his troubles with the prospect of running away with Jasmine to Mexico. For Du, she is almost a mother-figure and a fellow Asian who understands their 'Third World' background and its ramifications. For Karin, Bud's ex-wife, Jasmine has cared for crippled Bud in a way that Karin could never have. For Jasmine's two most admired women, Lillian Gordon and Mother Ripplemeyer, she is a special case. All these show America's acceptance of Jasmine, and seem to underscore what Mukherjee has claimed she has tried to do: to show the presence and the transitions etched by immigrants in the socio-cultural fabric of America.

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Anne Brewster comments that “Bharati Mukherjee’s discourses on migrants in the U.S. positions them not on the margin of contemporary American culture but, rather, as exemplars of a hegemonic nationalism” (1). Brewster sees this as a kind of “neo-nationalism” representing the ‘new’ America rapidly changing under the influence of immigration, and *Jasmine* articulates, according to Brewster, this neo-nationalism. Brewster is perceptive in comprehending the fact that Mukherjee identifies herself with the American nation rather than as a diasporic postcolonial (6).

Though Jasmine is a postcolonial hybrid, and has come to the US with the explicit purpose of performing a Hindu/Indian ritual, it takes only one instance, that of defilement by Half-Face, to make her turn her back upon her roots. From this point begins the making of her hybrid and American self. Jill Roberts contrasts the attitudes to displacement shown by Silko’s *Ceremony* with that of Mukherjee’s *Jasmine.* While in the former, the protagonist find optimism and “renewal” in being connected to the roots, in Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* the protagonist looks forward to “disconnectedness” with the homeland for a sense of “empowerment” (87). Jasmine’s choices, Roberts points out, reflects those of Mukherjee. Mukherjee has claimed that “new identities” are “a strategy to gain autonomy,” and becoming an American is an opportunity to evolve “from one being into another” (88).

Hybridity underplays the binaries of the self and the Other, and Jasmine’s negotiations with the mainstream help her to deconstruct the distance between the centre and the periphery. Jasmine creates her own space which enables her to manoeuvre her present, subvert the otherness of exoticism and translate her circumstances into opportunities. She disrupts the dominant code and yet constructs a new code of survival with myths from her homeland, and the larger implications of fate and chaos in the universe to chart a life which escapes the destruction of her

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self. No doubt, Jasmine's is a hybridity that "suggests the impossibility of essentialism" (Stephen 12). She seems to take the advantage of a multicultural America even while trying to erase differences by hybridization.

What emerges eventually is the unhyphenated 'Jase' that Jasmine finally acknowledges. She becomes what prospective American immigrant Prakash wanted her to be, a non-feudal Jasmine (as mentioned above), as implicated in the title of the novel. But she goes further ahead to resist all that is retrogressive and claims the 'First World' American dream. Jasmine seems to have become successful in fleeing from 'backward' 'Third World' India that is relegated to a distant past, both temporally and spatially. No wonder then that postcolonial critics perceive Jasmine's initiatives to be suspect and her strategies to have a definite agenda. Drawing a difference between Mukherjee and Alexander on the stand on immigrant assimilation, Rebecca Sultana comments that "Whereas Mukherjee indulges in an unremorseful assimilation, Alexander is perplexed about her position" ("Many Souls" 245). Sultana also points out that "[u]nlike Mukherjee, who finds the immigrant experience exhilarating, Alexander's experience is more muted" (217).

Sultana also categorically differentiates Mukherjee's characters from Meena Alexander's by citing the fact that Alexander's characters, unlike Mukherjee's, do not accept "unquestioned assimilation into the Western Metropolitan center" and reasons that Alexander's characters resist because of "the effect of several external factors, such as a reaction to perceived racism, a desire for a nostalgic past, and, most importantly, a strong bond with women, familial or otherwise, who urge each other to explore their cultural roots" (216). Mukherjee's Jasmine does not do anything of that sort.

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Jasmine's strategies of negotiating the interstitial space between homeland culture and the new social space are those that appropriate the Other with little resistance. She has become a hybrid who is more assimilated into the dominant community. Her use of violence allows this make-over. In claiming an unhyphenated identity, Jasmine attests to the necessity and significance of the melting-pot theory of assimilation which has received severe criticism in the context of acculturation from the 1990s. Such assimilative strategy only aims at homogeneity akin to the imperialistic categorisations of the East, the Orient, the Other, or even the 'native' with all their negative connotations, which demands a subservience to the hegemony of imperialism and the dominance of neo-colonialism. It is against such generalizations of the colonized and 'the peripheral' that postcolonial theory has been relentlessly struggling. But, Mukherjee's *Jasmine* only sustains the marginality of the 'Third World' and the Orient.

Notes

[1] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (New York: Grove, 1989). All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

[2] Warhol-Down offers an excellent analysis of the changing names of the heroine in the novel and the implications of these in the transformation of Jasmine's persona and the effects of these on her chances in the US.

[3] Wong and Santa Ana offer an extended discussion on gender, sexuality and violence; Srikanth makes a few excellent points as well in her study. A comparative study of the protagonists in three novels *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, and *Jasmine* in connection with sexuality is available in Maiti, and Vandana Singh.

[4] This view of the Punjabi and Bengali cultural traits appears to be quite unabashedly essentialist.

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Chapter V

Becoming a Cultural Citizen

This chapter aims at exploring the idea of cultural citizenship as reflected in the portrayal of the protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's novels, *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and the sequel *The Tree Bride* (2004). The immigrant protagonist, Tara, in both the novels, seeks to retrieve her own roots to endorse the fact that her identity is constituted in being neither an Indian totally nor an American wholly, but in the convergence of cultural citizenship. This is quite in contrast to Jasmine, as explored in the previous chapter, who resolutely celebrates her Americanness. It leads to the reconstruction of the protagonist's postcolonial 'Third World' identity in a transcultural paradigm constituted from the matrices of globalization, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. This matrix enables a cultural citizen to be an 'insider' to the adopted socio-cultural space even while maintaining membership in her own cultural community, whether in the diaspora or in the territorial homeland. While in *Jasmine* there is a deliberate agenda in relegating India to the forgotten past, in the two novels under consideration in this chapter, sustenance of both Indian and American cultural citizenship are shown as natural and necessary. This, of course, makes it necessary to revisit Mukherjee's reassessment of the relationship between the immigrant and her erstwhile homeland even while she stakes a claim to the mainstream community of the US.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first gives a brief overview on the notion of the 'cultural citizen,' the second and third sections are analyses of Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* on the basis of the larger theoretical framework of the thesis with particular reference to the first section of this

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chapter. The final section concludes with inferences drawn from the preceding sections.

I

The Cultural Citizen

According to Chris Barker, citizenship is a “form of identity by which individuals are granted a sense of belonging, social rights and obligations within political communities. Citizenship articulates civil society and the state” (436). In trying to answer his own question, “So where did culture meet citizenship?” Toby Miller suggests “that three overlapping concepts have characterized the discourse of citizenship: the political, the economic, and the cultural, with migration the governing term today” (“Introducing” 1). Calling ‘cultural citizenship’ “a textual, political, and activist category that flows . . . from transformations taking place” in the process of globalization (1), Miller succinctly lays out its concerns:

> Cultural citizenship concerns the maintenance and development of cultural lineage through education, custom, language, and religion and the positive acknowledgement of difference in and by the mainstream. This discourse developed in response to the great waves of cross-class migration of the past fifty years and an increasingly mobile middle-class culture-industry workforce that has been generated by a new international division of cultural labor. (2)

Extrapolating from Miller’s definition, Pramod K. Nayar explains in his *Postcolonial Literature*:

> Exiles tend to hold on to their traditions in an almost desperate effort to retain/reclaim their ‘original’ culture. This is a process of acquiring, in the age

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of widespread migration, 'cultural citizenship'. . . . The term encompasses the meaning of legal belonging (as a citizen), but also other forms of belonging, such as community. Caught up in a 'national' culture in whose cultural life the migrant community may have little or no role to play (this is especially the case with first generation immigrant communities – since their participation in the adopted nation's life may be minimal), the community clings to its own customs and cultural codes. The migrant seeks a cultural citizenship within her/his own community while also seeking legal citizenship within the nation. (195)

Thus, belonging is seen not simply in terms of legal citizenship but also in terms of cultural lineage. Delanty points out that culture, identity and citizenship coming together under one umbrella is a recent development in political discourse.[1] In the latter part of 1980s, the distinct functions of multiculturalism and citizenship were not maintained any more. Further, he says,

Migrant groups have become more and more a part of the mainstream population and cannot be so easily contained by multicultural policies and, on the other side, the 'native' population itself has become more and more culturally plural, due in part to the impact of some four decades of ethnic mixing, but also due to the general pluralisation brought about by postindustrial and postmodern culture. . . . The focus on production and social class, which informed Marshall's account of citizenship, has given way to greater interest in subcultures based around leisure pursuits and consumption. (60)

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The “multi-ethnic nature of contemporary western societies” has had to confront the reality of multicultural diversities brought about by the phenomenon of intense global migration (Brooker 169). Multicultural policies that play only on ‘difference’ have, therefore, been compelled to face the pressures of undertaking a more positive and tolerant role in incorporating racial and ethnic minorities without paramount stress levied on a dominant culture. While making a comparative review of *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* edited by Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman and *Culture and Citizenship* edited by Nick Stevenson, Delanty comes to a tentative conclusion about what is or should be cultural citizenship:

> cultural citizenship is an extension of the trajectory traced by Marshall of civic, political and social citizenship. . . . It is not exclusively about rights and freedoms but also concerns the articulation of identity/ belonging and other components of citizenship, such as participation and responsibility. Cultural citizenship is particularly relevant to the area of communication (media, virtual reality, popular cultures) and in the context of globalization is a form of citizenship that extends beyond nationality. (66)

Thus, the concept of citizenship has evolved from a narrowly defined concept to a broader cultural category through the changing geo-political world phenomena of globalization and transculturation, overriding the boundaries of the nation-state. What is brought to the fore is the supranational notion of rights ranging from individual human rights to minority and group rights. In the context of minority rights, James Nickel on reviewing Will Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, opines that:

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> Kymlicka believes that special rights for minorities are needed even in democracies that respect the human rights of individuals, because leaving questions about the status of minorities to majoritarian decision making renders “cultural minorities vulnerable to significant injustice at the hands of the majority” and “exacerbate[s] ethnocultural conflict.” (qtd. in Nickel 480)

Homi K. Bhabha also emphasizes the importance of minority rights as a corollary to the disruption of national narratives in the hybrid culture of the contemporary world (Huddart 124). Working against the notion of the “well-defined and bounded cultures out there in the world,” Bhabha’s views on the notion of cultural rights suggests that the “minoritarian identity” is not an excess of the “majoritarian identities” or in effect “national identities” and, therefore, minoritarian identities need not be “constantly assimilated” (129-131). From international agreements to the Universal Declaration of human rights, Bhabha argues, there is a too ready assumption that “nation-state organizations” are “natural” (131). Bhabha’s concern has been for “people who are, for various reasons, between nations legally, culturally, or otherwise”, and hence one can draw its importance to the significance of minority rights, cultures and discourse (131). Hybridity “rewrites” cultural rights not within the constructed discourse of national narratives (131), but in its “‘partializing process’ and a ‘metonymy of presence’” (qtd. in Huddart 130). For Bhabha, “the minoritarian is not a matter of essence (pedagogy) but of practice (performance)” thus emphasizing the practical implications of the cultural rights of minorities in national narratives (132). What one understands is that minoritarian narratives cannot be sublated/appropriated within national narratives without giving their rightful individual identity (133). Huddart explains that “[i]n the context of cultural rights, Bhabha’s work requires us to retain both the performative and the pedagogical dimensions of culture” (133).

Immigrants from a postcolonial ‘Third World’ nation-state are minorities as well as marginals in the capitalist ‘First World.’[2] Diasporic affiliations can be maintained through transculturation effected by globalization, negotiating displacement and homelessness by making a ‘home’ in the adopted land. Transnational migrants are those who voluntarily build and sustain various contacts across many national boundaries (Sahoo and Maharaj 1:3). Sahoo and Maharaj quote Glick-Schiller et al. to define transnationalism as “[a] social process whereby migrants operate in social fields that transgress geographic, political and cultural boundaries” (1:3). They point out further that the transnational migrants are labelled according to the “intentions and paths traversed by them” (3). For instance, Grant uses the notions of either “shuttle migrants” or “cultural commuters” to signify migrants who “travel to and fro with no intention of staying anywhere permanently” (qtd. in Sahoo and Maharaj 1:3). Levitt “has argued that the ‘impact of transnational migration differs from, but must be understood within the context of, the heightened globalization in which it is embedded. Changes prompted by migration and globalization mutually reinforce one another’” (qtd. in Sahoo and Maharaj 1:3). Thus, globalization is not simply the flow of capital through the porous borders of a global world, but is also the apparatus for transnational communication between cultures. Nayar comprehensively describes the phenomenon of globalization:

> Globalization, especially in the twentieth century, is the expansion of trade, the development of transnational and global communication networks, the diminished role of the nation-state, the rise of transnational, cultural, economic, political networks and the increased circulation of Western consumer products and cultural artifacts. (*Postcolonialism* 192)

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What has been true in the twentieth century is only reinforced in the twenty-first with more intensity and in different forms. Echoing M. Weiner, Sahoo and Maharaj observe, "The end of the twentieth century has been characterized by two contradictory trends – controlling immigration on the one hand, yet encouraging the mobility of capital and goods on the other" (1:1). One result of this global mobility of capital is 'glocalization,' defined by Roland Robertson as "the creation and incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of the world as a whole" (40). Among many other effects are the "globalization of the Third World economy," "greater hybridity of Third World citizens," "a facile and commercialized multiculturalism," and "the erosion of the powers of the nation-state in the age of multinational capital and newer forms of imperialism by bodies like IMF" (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 193). As a result, a new form of colonialism has emerged with globalization and has become an urgent issue in postcolonial theory. This is "the ethical and intellectual concern with domination, power and subjugation" wreaked by cultural imperialism and the global economy (193).

Another emerging trend surfacing from the 'borderlessness' arising out of globalization and transnationalism is the notion of the 'postnational' advocated by critics like Appadurai (1996) and Habermas (2001). Quoting Harty and Murphy (2005), Nayar points out, "Postnationalists argue in favour of 'transnational identities and citizenship practices that transcend boundaries of national political communities'" (*Postcolonialism* 196). Ali Behdad traces it to the "nationalism and national consciousness" of Frantz Fanon and the 'cosmopolitan' of Bhabha and Appadurai (*Postcolonialism* 196).

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The postcolonial transnational immigrant emerges as a transcultural individual, veering towards cosmopolitanism, a state which, says Amanda Anderson, “endorses reflective distancing from one’s cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures, and customs, and a belief in universal humanity” (267). Cosmopolitanism is “an intellectual-cultural condition” while transnationalism “refers to a new geographical condition/location,” deduces Nayar (*Postcolonialism* 178). Thus, cosmopolitianism may work well with elite, best-selling writers of the transnational novel, who can cut across race and other constraining elements, but, in an insightful comment, Nayar points out that for the “Third World migrant labourer in New York city, there is no cosmopolitanism” (183).

For the increasingly “globalizing–globalized” postcolonial immigrant (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 163), the homeland becomes a ‘cultural memory’ that may be retained as integral to the cosmopolitan or kept at a distance. The ‘homeland memory,’ therefore, gets shuttled around taking on the different hues of the many displacements of the immigrant. It becomes transformed and, therefore, transforms the cultural contexts of the immigrant. If ‘First World’ metropolises have undergone changes because of the immigrant population, so have the ‘Third World’ postcolonial nation-states, where globalization has initiated the phenomenon of glocalization. This mutual mutation is the most contemporary phenomenon of the world today. This has directly resulted in an intense rapid cultural hybridization, common to the process of 19th century colonization by the West, and is now seen in the late 20th and 21st centuries in the very backyard of the colonizers in the form of ‘transruptions.’

The ability to effect comprehensive mutual transformations in the “receiving society” by the immigrants is referred to as “postcolonial agency” by Nayar, “the ability to appropriate and *modify* any culture and contexts” (*Postcolonialism* 186,

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italics in original).[3] Nayar argues that this is the "function of the parasite, and is fundamentally 'transruptive'" and quotes Hesse (2000) to define 'transruption' as a "series of 'contestatory cultural and theoretical interventions which in their impact as cultural differences, unsettle social norms and threaten to dismantle hegemonic concepts and practices'" (186).

Drawing from Nayar's analysis of Jane Jacob's work (1996) on situating the 'cultural parasite,' it can be argued that the immigrant is no more 'an outsider' to the socio-economic-cultural and even political (considering the fund-raising dinners to create vote-banks) dynamics of the host nation. The postcolonial immigrant is now assimilated in a way where ethnicity becomes a primary 'event' of 'consumption' and brings about 'change' in the 'First World' (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 184). As a result, "the host modifies itself in response to the actions of the parasitic guest, even as the guest modifies its behaviour to suit the host" (185). As a result, to talk of US multiculturalism, the intensity of a culture in flux has had no choice but to acknowledge the presence of the outsider as an insider in whatever form or way, and to whatever extent (even though the post 9/11 dynamics in the US has tilted towards restoring the binaries of 'them' and 'us').

Bharati Mukherjee has often claimed that changes are effected in the US mainstream by non-traditional immigrants ("Beyond Multiculturalism"). It is her literary agenda to make their presence felt in a dominant culture, as explored in chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis. In chapter 5, it is to be seen how postcolonial transruptions have sought their sustained participation in the mainstream culture even as these interruptions/ interventions/ interjections/mediations sustain the exotic Other. What is the immigrant politics that plays here? *Jasmine* seems to be an attempt at disconnecting these interlocks between the homeland and the host

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society, whereas *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are seen to re-affirm the immigrant's stake in origins and roots.

Desirable Daughters and *The Tree Bride* offer a diasporic 'homeward bound' propulsion along with the cosmopolitanism of the 'Third World' postcolonial, an 'insider-outsider' to the 'First World.' It is not the migrant labourer or the victimized and the exploited that is presented in the two novels. Tara, who is the protagonist of both the novels (*The Tree Bride* being a sequel to *Desirable Daughters*), belongs to the upper class elite of Kolkata, India. Retaining some semblance of the characteristics of the diasporic in the immigrant host land, viz., nostalgia for the past, alienation to the new location or culture, an earnestness to preserve the homeland culture, a perpetual dilemma over growing acculturation or assimilation into the new culture, and a consciousness of one's ethnic identity, Tara, at the same time, seems to incline towards transcending the boundedness of a national identity. While in *Jasmine* the protagonist becomes an advocate of "neo-nationalism" in the US, in these later novels of Mukherjee nationalism is apparently relegated to the backseat as the transnational and the postnational emerge (Brewster). The transnational in the contemporary world is characterized by the ability to "absorb multiple cultural traditions" (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 178). Nayar refers this to as the emergence of "a new form of the 'Third Worlder' – whom Anna Kurian terms the 'global Indian' – one who travels in multiple cultures and worlds with *equanimity*, engages with new cultural practices and is already transculturated" (178-179, italics in original). This "new stability, self-assurance and quietism" as Young describes is what distinguishes protagonist Tara and her husband (*Colonial Desire* 4), Bish (in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*) from the 'interstitial' restlessness and incessant mobility of Jasmine or even the liminal ambivalence of the protagonists of

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The Tiger's Daughter and *Wife*. However, as will be seen in this chapter, the cosmopolitan erasure of nostalgia for a lost homeland is not entirely acknowledged by the two novels taken up for study, even with Mukherjee, the writer herself vociferously emphasizing nostalgia as part of the expatriate's sensibility and not of the immigrant. An immigrant makes a necessarily painful break with the past, Mukherjee claims, as mentioned in Chapter 4 of this thesis. The two novels here in this chapter show, rather, and in spite of Mukherjee's claims to the contrary, that while being displaced, the diasporic nostalgia and preservation of homeland culture are equally powerful currents in the process of different acculturations of the postcolonial in the 'First World.'

Postcolonialism's founding principle of colonial resistance was 'anticolonialism' through a return to pure culture. Later, it acknowledged the impossibility of such a return and comprehended the reality of hybridity of all postcolonial cultures. This has led to postcolonialism's new focus on cultural citizenship. Cultural rights of minorities including postcolonial immigrants provide them with agency. Will Kymlicka contends,

> there are "polyethnic rights" that apply mainly to immigrant groups, distinctive religio-ethnic groups, and minorities without territories such as African-Americans. These include rights against discrimination, rights to financial support and legal protection for distinctive cultural practices, rights to education that recognizes the cultures and languages of minorities, and exemptions from laws, such as dress codes, that disadvantage groups given their religious and cultural practices. The purpose of these rights is "to help ethnic groups and religious minorities express their cultural particularity and pride without it hampering their success in the economic and political institutions of the dominant society." (qtd. in Nickel 481)

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An acknowledgement of such rights in the host nation facilitates the preservation of their ethnic and diasporic characteristics in the immigrants. Drawing a connection between the concept of diaspora and multiculturalism in the United States, Monika Fludernik states that ethnic minorities in the US could form diasporas only after the emergence of pluralism and multiculturalism, and therefore, a development has proceeded from the melting pot assimilation and salad-bowl theory to hybridity and identity politics (xvii-xviii). Fludernik also asserts that this implies a development "from individualism to communitarianism, from American citizens' understanding of themselves as unique individuals possessing rights and obligations to a newer conception of self as situated within an ethnic and cultural community to which one belongs" (xvii-xviii). Mukherjee's novels, as explored in this thesis, also trace this development. This is accompanied with a concomitant change in Mukherjee's own stand on non-European immigrants' interaction with mainstream US, from a necessary assimilation with the mainstream to retaining cultural, political or even economic loyalties to the homeland.

Desirable Daughters and *The Tree Bride* deal with the diasporic immigrant protagonist Tara in the metropolitan context of the US where cultural citizenship is constructed. The notion of the cultural citizen becomes relevant to this study because legal citizenship is too confined a territory to discuss civic life. As Sunaina Maira points out, "the rights and obligations of civic citizenship are mediated by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as religion, as apparent in the post-9/11 backlash" (222). Thus, cultural citizenship attains a significance that makes it "an important construct to examine" in a globalizing transcultural and, yet, a fast homogenizing world (222). The prismatic instrument of postcolonial theory enables this investigation. This exploration is a development from the limited world view of

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'homeland-adopted land' binaries of an earlier phase of Mukherjee's immigrant oeuvre, discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis. "Postcolonial studies is integral, now, to critical globalization studies because it is a theoretical approach that grounds cultural practices in geopolitics" says Nayar (*Contemporary Literary* 181); thus, the role of postcolonial studies cannot be overemphasized in the matrix of globalization, transculturation and cosmopolitanism. In *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* what will be interesting to observe are the colonial-imperial strands that get exposed in the roots search by the protagonist for a reconstruction and understanding of an identity which compels an acknowledgement of homeland traditions and memories.

II

Desirable Daughters

Desirable Daughters is the story of Tara's search for her 'Indian roots' to make sense of her identity even while being in America.[4] Tara is named after her ancestor, Tara Lata Gangooly, who at the age of five is married to a tree, "*the god of Shoondar Bon*, *the Beautiful Forest*" in Mishtigunj, Dhaka (Bangladesh) in the year 1879 (16). Now in the twenty-first century United States, Tara, the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters* undertakes a journey, metaphorical as well as real, to trace her ancestral roots, a journey which symbolizes the building of her own consciousness in America. Tara is the youngest of the three sisters, Padma being the oldest and Parvati, the middle sister. Having divorced the successful software magnate Bishwapriya Chatterjee, "the reigning genius of Silicon Valley", Tara moves out of their safe haven in Atherton with their son, Rabi to Upper Haight, San Francisco, and volunteers at a preschool in the neighbourhood (269). Andy, a Hungarian Buddhist contractor and yoga instructor, lives-in with Tara. At thirty-six, Tara is a 'Californian,'

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educated and free and detached enough to observe and unveil the connection between herself and Tara Lata Gangooly, also known as the Tree-Bride in the novel. The sudden appearance of a nephew called Chris Dey jars Tara's life out of order, spiralling into one crisis after another. The chaos in Tara's life also leads to Andy leaving Tara. Bish, who had seemed to have failed in his duty as a householder, eventually comes to Tara's rescue. As Tara's California house is bombed, Bish literally carries Tara over the burning embers and in the process gets severely burnt. Later Tara reflects, "Sometimes, *bishey bish khai*, the only antidote for poison is poison" (304). "Bish," meaning poison in Bengali, as Bishwapriya Chatterjee is called in the US and later by Tara herself, becomes a saviour by suffering for what he had only unleashed: his patriarchal Indian moorings, and his revolutionary innovation of accelerated internet communication.

The Episodes in India: the Early Indian Influence

> *And so my history begins with a family wedding on the coldest, darkest night in the Bengali month of Paush – December/January – in a district of the Bengal Presidency that lies east of Calcutta – now Kolkata- and south of Dacca – now Dhaka – as the English year of 1879 is about to shed its final two digits, although the Hindu year of 1285 still has four months to run and the Muslim year of 1297 has barely begun.* (*Desirable Daughters* 5)

This is Tara, the narrator and protagonist speaking about the family wedding of Tara Lata Gangooly, the Tree Bride. The wedding and the Tree Bride have become an integral part of her identity today. This is also the Tara, the Indian American, 'an insider,' located in the US, acknowledging her history. This is also the same Tara who speaks of a past in terms of the Hindu calendar time-line with her being

currently situated in the 'present' of an English calendar. This sets the fulcrum of the novel, the interweaving of the past and the present, the West and the East, and the American and the Indian. This connectedness transcends all barriers of time and space, to establish, what is in common parlance today, a global overarching network.

Tara is overpowered by memories of her Indian past. They are such an intense presence in her consciousness that she responds physically to them: ". . . I'd been having hot Calcutta flashes, moments of intense recollection, smells so strong I sneezed" (280). They occupy immense space and time in her quotidian existence. Their juxtaposition with life in America calls attention to 'cultural membership' that Nayar talks of or the 'cultural citizenship' that Toby Miller has explicated, with which an immigrant often identifies.

Tara, a divorcee now, having stayed in the US for almost sixteen years after marrying Bish Chatterjee, associates herself with an American identity, and has "... *yielded to that most American of impulses, or compulsions, a 'roots search'*" (17,emphasis in original). This has led her to trace her lineage to the Tree Bride: "*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. Your consciousness? they tease, and I tell them, No. Yours.*" (5)

Tara is the narrator of her sisters' stories. Significantly, it is actually her own consciousness that gets revealed in this exploration: a globalized cosmopolitan immigrant from postcolonial India trying to assess her connection to her ancestry in India and Bangladesh, and to her ethnic identity in her adopted homeland, the US. Both figure inextricably in her current life in the US.

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Judie Newman aptly points out:

> What kinds of story are adaptive therefore in a broadband world? Mukherjee explores the oppositions of tradition and modernity, descent versus consent, through the microcosm of a sibship, three sisters, as its members adapt to different environments, as "family" stories and "global" plots jockey for position as priority narratives. Mukherjee uses the dynamics of a group of sisters to explore the way in which a story is claimed, transmitted or denied, how even in the apparent homogeneity of three almost identical sisters divergent roles are created, and what the political consequences are of a place in a sibship, envisaged as a literary and social model largely replacing "vertical" lines of descent. ("Priority Narratives" 247)

The entire narrative of *Desirable Daughters* is predicated upon the backdrop of Tara's ancestor, the Tree Bride.

> In the mind's eye*, a one–way procession of flickering oil lamps sways along . . . In a palanquin borne by four servants sit a rich man's three daughters, the youngest dressed in her bridal sari . . .* I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness. (3-4).

Amidst the description of a past episode rises the narrative voice to qualify it and give vent to the 'affect' of the moment. Nayar in his *States of Sentiment* speaks about the "affective response" to suffering that establishes a relationship of sentiment between the perpetrated and the perpetrators (74-75). Here, it is the little

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child, Tara Lata Gangooly, who is perpetrated upon by rigid traditions. A century later, thirty-six year old Tara in the US takes note of this enormous weight of socio-cultural mores on the little girl, imprisoning the individual in a world of gloom and oppression. Tara's lineage speaks of oppressive rituals and customs that deny freedom and fulfilment of individuality, which Tara almost successfully subverts by divorcing Bish, the 'best husband' available. Such overwhelming patriarchal power and suppression of the individual spirit enrages Tara, "the affective response" vented out even after the distance of a century and national borders. The constant reference Mukherjee seems to bring to the fore is that Tara is located in a very different socio-cultural set-up in the US, and, yet, is integrally connected to her past. Tara reacts to this distant past.

Tara is not only related to the Tree Bride but also shares the same name with her. It may be mentioned that 'Tara' in Bengali implies 'a star.' This perhaps hints at the brightness and beauty of a 'desirable daughter.' Tara's name-sake is a connection that Tara cannot ignore: "*All of my life, or at least ever since my mother told me the story of Tara Lata the Tree Bride – and that I had been named for her- I have felt, for no discernible reason, a profound connection"* (16). The Tree Bride is married to a 'tree,' "*He is the god of Shoondar Bon, the Beautiful Forest, come down to earth as a tree to save her from a lifetime of disgrace and misery*" (16). Thus, in a dramatic twist of fate, when her husband to-be dies of snake-bite, Tara Lata Gangooly is married to a tree and is spared widowhood. Returning to her father's house as the newly married bride of the 'tree,' "*she grew up and grew old in a single house in an impoverished village in the poorest place on earth, and in the house, the world came to her. She lived there seventy years and gradually changed the world"* (17).

Tara Lata Gangooly subverts tradition to become a pioneer in the Indian Independence movement and a formidable enemy of the British. She becomes a refuge for the 'freedom fighters': "*an Untrained Nurse, Spiritual Healer, and Inspiration to Generations of Peace-loving and Peace-seeking Individuals from Around the World . . .*" (20). According to Mukherjee, fate is "dynamic" (Krasny 128). It creates the circumstances but it is the individual who decides her/his actions, and thus lends character and power to that fate. The Tree Bride effectively undermines the suppression of her individuality and carves a niche for herself.

The Process of Transformation in Tara

Protagonist Tara's fate has brought her to the US. Tara married "Bishwapriya Chatterjee, a first son from an outstanding family" at the age of nineteen, with an "M.A. First Class from the University of Calcutta" (23). Notwithstanding her qualifications, it was but natural as an Indian wife to expect her to worship Bish "as a god according to scripture" and to identify herself as nothing else but his wife (23).

Tara has come from a family of "*'bhadra lok,' the gentlefolk, the 'civilized' folk,*" exuding power and prestige in the society (7). As Tara narrates,

> To be a Calcutta bhadra lok, as we Bhattacharjees were, was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement, and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born, and from which we have made our separate exits. (22)

Tara renders here a comprehensive description that constituted her Indian identity before leaving for the US. She is married within this circle of 'bhadra lok,' "A very

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predictable, very successful marriage negotiation" (7). Tara exults in this new-found bliss. It poses as "the liberating promise of marriage and travel and the wider world" (81). Her unbounded enthusiasm saw no limits: "Bless Daddy and Mummy, they found me the only man in the world who could transport me from the enchanted garden of Ballygunge to Stanford University in the early 1980s, which has to count as one of the intellectual wonders of the modern world" (81).

Coming from an elite background, Tara faces no dramatic culture shock travelling from one set of privileges to another. Tara is at home in the dominant English language and is also familiar with the multicultural cosmopolitan environment that she finds in the 'First World.' Tara and her sisters were already oriented towards the West: "Calcutta girls of our social set who attended convent schools and aspired to successful marriages with foreign residence were never taken to desi Hindi movies . . . Even today, I have never been to a 'Bollywood' spectacular, despite their recent popularity in the West" (113). Her convent school education has equipped her well for a future in the US:

> For Hindu girls, entry to 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)

The Catholic school reinforces the power of class. Their upbringing has permitted exposure to the outside world facilitating a smooth exit for the three sisters from a Calcutta struggling with the onset of communism.

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The Bhattacharjee household too was an environment that stoked the Western orientation: “the American songs beamed across the subcontinent from Radio Ceylon. When I was six, she [oldest sister Padma] was reading the movie magazines and knew the juicy scandals. When I was nine, she confided a career ambition to be, somehow, a performer, to act or to dance” (29).

One can see how the same Western influence leads to a proclivity towards the Occident, and yet, Padma’s confession, paradoxically, reflected an undercurrent against the conservative rigidity of class, caste and confinement. As Tara recalls, much later, upon arriving in the US as a newly-wed,

> In India, we didn’t have outside influences like the media, or lax schooling, or cars and dating and drugs. We didn’t know family breakdown. Our families existed inside an impenetrable bubble. Anyone entering or exiting was carefully monitored. We honored the proprieties. There was no rebellion, no seeking after individual identity. Why would there be? We three sisters were treated with absolute equality, and we responded in total unanimity. (44)

Tara highlights the collective consciousness that predominated in her Indian upbringing. Even after marriage, she identifies herself as an Indian wife. She becomes an object of interest to the Americans. To the Americans, or to the West, an arranged marriage was unthinkable. When Tara tells her Indian stories, they are received with awe and disbelief by her American friends. In the process of her narrative itself, Tara becomes an Other to them. And, Tara revels in her exoticism and in exploring American freedom and individuality. In course of time after motherhood, Tara’s world becomes fixed to Atherton with her duties of looking after their son, and a ritual visit to India each winter.

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After the initial exhilaration of exoticism, Tara gradually finds that "the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled" (82). If she wanted to drive, there was no place to go to. If she wanted to work, that would mean that "Bish Chatterjee couldn't support his wife" (82). It was with Meena Melwani, another young Indian wife like Tara from the highly sophisticated Atherton community, that Tara finds a spirit akin to her. Taking "delicious little sabbaticals" from duties of "conscience" (82), as a mother and as a wife, Tara and Meena explore the avenues of freedom that America allowed: "driving out to the beach or to the open fields south of San Jose, into the mountains, or simply walking through the Galerias and eating burritos in the Mexican food courts" (82).

Tara's looks catches the eyes of others, even cine-directors; Indian women are orientalized: "'You have charisma,' the woman said to both of us . . .," when Tara and Meena are in a mall (85). It kindles their urge to find their own identities: " I didn't show up for the audition, but I kept that card for years, sometimes feeling that the casting director with the dyed black hair held the only key that could possibly fit my complicated lock" (85). Tara has become aware of the complications of a tangled identity by now. Meena asserts herself by taking her own decision: "As it turned out, Meena Melwani was the only woman in our little subcommunity of South Asian Wives of Silicon Valley to walk out on her husband and son for another woman; in her case, her Guatemalan cleaning woman" (85). Tara senses her capability of identifying herself without Bish's reference: "In my Atherton life, the mall was where I was at my boldest. I felt pretty and predatory; I sensed come-ons in casual stares. I wasn't Bish's wife; I was a mall siren" (84). The writer consistently plays on the appealing features of her protagonist and her sisters. Along with eliteness, this kind

of narcissism gives easy passage to immigrant Tara to find her place in the mainstream, even at the cost of being the Other.

Tara's identity shows the first signs of Americanization in her very act of narration.

> Bengali culture trains one to claim the father's birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh, her home. Although she has never seen it, my mother's desh is Dhaka, by way of Mishtigunj, the village even few East Bengalis have ever seen. When I speak of this to my American friends – the iron-clad identifiers of religion, language, caste, and subcaste – they call me "overdetermined" and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises 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)

Tara is trying to grasp the difference between the formation of an individual identity of her American friends, privileging even their identity crisis over Tara's 'fixed' identity, already cast in the categories of "religion, language, caste, and subcaste" as mentioned in the above quote. This kind of analysis brings about changes in Tara. She is no more a new Indian bride. Maturity leads her to confront troubling questions and constant interrogation:

> In India, every word relating to family carries a special meaning. . . I'll always just be Tara. Children are taught to call every family friend "auntie" and "uncle," or, in our language . . . It's how a family-based culture sees the world, outward from the protective weave of relatedness, suspicious of anything that

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> can't be fitted inside it. Close friends, or the vaguely connected... much to the consternation of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. (36)

The basis of her Indian identity was relationship of interdependence and collectivity. In America, it is that of independence and individuality, as unambiguously exemplified in *Jasmine*. By asserting that Tara would remain only 'Tara,' she trades positions. She is identifying with the American culture.

Sixteen years later thirty-six year old Tara's perspective has undergone much change. Like her American friends, she too finds a marriage by arrangement "amusing" and "appalling" (26). Tara looks at it from the detached perspective of an onlooker. Now she understands that she had compromised with her individual self to have let her father decide for her the "[b]est boy, best girl" matrimonial match (44). The acceptable and expected behaviour was conformation. Today, priorities have changed for Tara. It is individual choice that propels Tara. Once again, Mukherjee valorizes individuality that characterizes America. The Tree Bride adequately displayed it, and Jasmine exhibited it with great flamboyance. The Tiger's Daughter, Tara, shows this in her final decision to go back to David, and Dimple in *Wife* murders her husband in an attempt to rise above a collective consciousness.

In *Desirable Daughters*, Tara tries to unravel these complex strands that have gone to form an identity that suited a 'green card' holder for a marriage alliance. She begins to question her convent school education and its value in a world that demands much more than celebration of class, caste, traditions and marriage. Tara is made aware of this by Parvati's letter:

> Where does our kind of convent-school education get us? I'm not putting down Loreto College or Mount Holyoke, but I didn't learn any skill I can now

> put to use to earn money. Please don't think that I'm criticising Daddy's ideas of education for us. He didn't expect us to ever want to work, let alone to have to work for money. Only middle-class women went to coeducational classrooms and studied useful things like law or medicine or engineering. Mummy even thought having to make a budget was demeaning. If you have to worry about money, you're already poor, wasn't that one of her sayings? Maybe that's why they withdrew to that ashram in Rishikesh. India changed on them. We were changing on them without even knowing it. (105-106)

Parvati's letter to Tara is very revealing. It is the factorization of the making of the consciousness of Tara and her sisters. It also reveals the gradual changes that occurred in the Bengali upper class society and the realities that ensued. Before Tara's parents took recourse to retirement in the foothills of the Himalayas, Tara was married off and thus she could avoid the breaking of the 'old' world that steeped Calcutta society in communism. This recalls the waning of old world values very graphically demonstrated in Mukherjee's *Tiger's Daughter* when the protagonist finds it difficult and distressing, after a seven-year stay in the US, to adjust to a riot-ridden Calcutta, as discussed in chapter 3 of the thesis. One finds this a common background in Mukherjee's fiction where a liberated individuality is shown to nurture and thrive not in a 'socialist' India, but in a 'capitalist' US.

New developments shape Tara's life. After having been accustomed to the joint-family system in India, the changes in Tara's life start with settling down to a nuclear family with Bish and their son, Rabi. After a decade of marriage, Tara becomes a divorcee and a single parent. After a few liaisons with other American men, she lives-in with Hungarian Andy. This trajectory shows Tara become a daring, self-seeking individual.

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Living in with Andy, Tara's "balding, red-bearded, former biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor, the man Bish calls 'Tara's mistri'", Tara's carpenter is a portrayal of one exotic meeting another, in accommodating America (26). It is commonplace to live-in, deserving a casual question, as Tara's friend Mandy puts it, "Oh, and is Andy still in the picture? I'm thinking placesettings, not nasty heartache.Ciao!" (86). To Tara, it is an act of individual assertion. Even her affairs with other men after her divorce with Bish are something of an individual statement. Rajini Srikanth quotes Ginu Kamani on the aspect of desire in South Asian American writing:

> "In American culture, individual sexuality has now evolved to a place where, more often than not, the desirable ideal of sexuality is opposed to pleasure-less repression. But in other cultures, including South Asian, individual sexuality is still rigorously opposed to family control, and pleasure/repression are tertiary topics at best." (*World Next Door* 110)

However, Kamani is not reinforcing "the mainstream impression that in non-Western cultures women are forbidden from expressing sexual desire for pleasure alone" through her stories (Srikanth 110). Rather, Kamani makes desire an agent of freedom. Tara seems to do the same in carving her American identity, in her 'boundless' freedom after her divorce. In linking sexuality to Tara's American identity formation, Mukherjee uncovers the sense of liberation that Tara finds in identifying herself with America. This is resonant of the politics that informs the sexuality of South Asian/Indian women in Mukherjee's novels.

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The Crises

Tara's desire to locate her own individual identity embroils her in two major crises in the US. First, after her divorce Tara finds her role as a single parent confounding: what beliefs does she impart to Rabi? How does she give Rabi all that he deserves? Much training and inculcation has gone into her upbringing. Tara's problem is that she is unable to choose what cultural apparatus she should provide for Rabi's growth. Tara's second crisis occurs when a Chris Dey, allegedly an illegitimate son of her eldest sister, Padma, emerges in her personal American 'diary.' In both the situations, Tara is confronted with a number of dilemmas leaving her groping for answers, inextricably linked to her own identity. In trying to solve the complicated tangle of her life, Tara gets a broad canvas of her own consciousness.

Tara suffers from the guilt of not keeping up with her traditions:

> All the tender frustrations of dealing with unvarying ritual, the sweet sameness of daily life where anything new or unplanned can only bring disaster, and the guilty irritation of ancient bonds between the bhadra lok and chhoto lok, the master and servant, fills me both with pride and dread, because I have not fulfilled my duties, and I have not passed them on. As far as I've drifted from the path of piety, or even of family, their names suddenly swell by dozens, the hundreds, filling my heart, brain, memory, soul, and if I were to speak at that moment, my words would have come out choked. . . ." (246)

It is the same thread of guilt that makes Tara feel that she has not been able to bring up Rabi properly. Andy ventures to provide some help:

Andy was in a zone, talking to himself. “He’s on the edge, babe. All this fighting is just piffle and puffle. That’s what thirty years working construction has taught me: It’s piffle and puffle. I fix the piffles and I look for the piffles. “A PIFL is a Previously Identified Fault Line.” Someone calls me to retrofit his house, I bring all the slide studies and everything I’ve added to them, and say, ‘You’re sitting on a piffle, my friend. Here’s how we correct it, here’s what it will cost you, and here’s what I can guarantee.’” A PUFL, a Previously Unidentified Fault Line, is a killer. “I walk around the place, I walk up and down the street, I go inside, I study cracks in the sidewalk, I do some ultrasound on his foundation, I run a soil analysis, and I have to tell him, ‘You’re not safe, but I can’t tell you where it’s going to come from or how strong it’s going to be, or how I should try to protect you. I just know it’s out there.’”

He sat up suddenly, staring down at me. “The scar that Rabi has on his arm. That scar’s a piffle. It’s gone and it can’t come back. He should wear it proudly, which is what he’s trying to do. Tara, sweetie, put all that Calcutta shit to rest. Your marriage is over. Growing up like a princess is over. They’re cold faults, understand? You’ve got to separate what’s over and gone from what’s still out there.

“Thats’s what I’m trying to do,” I said. ” (92- 93)

Andy has no idea of the cultural mores in which Tara was brought up. Andy’s is a point of view that reflects Western scientific advancements in psychology and seismology. Tara’s is traditional. All along till now Tara has not been able to give up the protectiveness of the Bhattacharjees that seemed to have secured a protected

zone for her. Even after sixteen years of being in the US she tries to take recourse to it for safety. In Andy's terms it is a "PIFL" that she has been leaning on. It will not work in the American context. Tara has become aware that there is more needed for a second generation Indian-American Rabi than the Bhattacharjee upbringing. That is why she is scared. At the same time she is apprehensive of the fact that once she lets the shadow of the 'Bhattacharjees' disappear, everything that has been her foundation would capitulate to nothingness . Andy warns of another danger, the "PUFL." If Tara does not accept the current reality and the fact that things have changed, she may have to incur much more danger, one that may strike her from an unknown territory. Tara senses her precariousness. She is at pains to understand Rabi:

> I wanted to say, son, help me compute the effect on you of our not-quite belonging. If only we were one of thousands, grazing placidly in the middle of a vast herd, protected by our markings. I've strayed to the edge of the herd where the grass is tall and the predators are hidden. "I'm not saying I'm not to blame, Rabi." (88)

Tara has defected from the collective herd in defying traditions. The risk of a new terrain and the apprehensions of a new sense of belonging make Tara perceive herself as a flawed mother.

The appearance of Chris Dey also complicates matters between Rabi and Tara. Rabi cannot understand why Tara has been so suspect and hesitant to call Chris Dey family:

> Isn't family a big Indian thing?"

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"That man isn't family!" I exploded.

"Are you sure?"Rabi smirked. "Have you talked to Padma-mashi in New Jersey?"

"I spoke to Parvati-mashi last night. That man's a crook!"

"Oh, everyone's a liar and a crook except the perfect Bhattacharjee sisters."

The smirk again. *He hates us,* I realized. *I am not exempt from his hate.* (89)

Tara senses that something fragile is beginning to give way. All through she has been desperately trying to protect it. Rabi steps on this vulnerability. He blurts out his grievances against the family that Tara is so protective about:

> . . . he hurled the mug against the far wall and began a rant. "I can't believe you're treating *Chris* like a liar and a criminal. 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 she won't lift a finger to help him. Who's going to give Chris the benefit of the doubt? He's the wrong religion for you guys and he's the wrong fucking caste for the great Bhattacharjee family, and now you want to get him deported – he knows you won't stop till you've destroyed him. Parking him in an orphanage isn't enough, is it? You'd like to flush him down the toilet like some piece of shit that stuck to your shoe, wouldn't you, but he's not going away. (90)

Rabi's assault is on the Bhattacharjees' fragile 'glass house.' In Rabi's vitriolic outburst, the hypocritic snobbery of the Bhattacharjees is exposed:

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> Our sister act sets off Rabi's anger like nothing else. He promises me some day to write a play about two Indian sisters on the telephone. While they promise to support each other through the bad times and to share the good, to visit and to travel, they deny any problems in their lives but point out the flaws in everyone else's. Their children are brilliant and loving and well behaved but everyone else's are selfish little monsters. Their husbands are faithful and successful while everyone else's scandalize the community. His play will show the Indian family as a turgid Ganges of hypocrisy. Sooner or later, everything empties into it. It carries the swill and stench of repression, it pollutes everything it touches, and still, people plunge into it for purification. Where he sees evil incarnate, I see – on my good days – high comedy. (93)

Tara finds it difficult to be objective about something that has become a part of her consciousness. For Rabi, it is the detached observation of a second-generation immigrant. As Stanley M. Stephen interprets,

> Rabi is born of Indian parents but is bred in the American culture. Owing to his exposure to the host culture, he evaluates his parents' culture objectively. He is angry with Didi for refusing to acknowledge her son through Ron Dey. He mocks at the hypocrisy in the relationships between Tara and her sisters. (*Bharati Mukherjee* 127)

What are the dynamics of raising an Asian/Indian American child? On one hand, Tara had prided upon her individuality and her single-mother status, and on the other hand, now, she does not know why her convent school education and life at "Ballygunge Park Road" have not come to her rescue (84). She could only blame herself, "Poor Rabi. I am not worthy to raise a son" (84). Rabi's severely critical

attitude shows that it is his American outlook that could make him raise such questions. Further, Mukherjee takes a dig at 'Third World' India, thereby projecting her unvarying attitude towards a caste-based, class-based traditional society found explicitly portrayed in *Jasmine* as also the other novels explored in chapter 3. Tara wavers without the support of both Rabi and Andy:

> I didn't have a husband, and Andy was remote. I feared my son and his friend. My sisters wouldn't take me seriously . . . Which movie was playing around me in San Francisco? The person who might have solved it all, my oldest sister – assuming I could even raise the question- wouldn't call back and couldn't be reached. (114)

Tara helplessly fumbles for a solution to her confusions. Sisterly bond fails her and she is left groping for some support.

To add to Tara's confounding complications, on her visit to Rabi's school she learns that he is gay, and Tara's worldview undergoes a change.[5] Mukherjee's portrayal of Rabi's homosexuality shows, as Vinay Lal in *The Other Indians* comments, the "maturation of South Asian political culture" in the US (78). One could bring a comparison with *Funny Boy* (1994), Sri Lankan Canadian writer Shyam Selvadurai's first novel, which weaves in sexuality and the concept of the nation (Srikanth 118). Just like Arjie (Arjun) Chelvaratnam, a teenager, comes to terms with his sexual orientation, Rabi is trying to let his Indian mother acknowledge his sexuality. In contrast to Parvati's sons in India, Rabi is a 'queer.' In doing so, Mukherjee deftly throws light on the larger, broader perceptions of Rabi who finds the monks of the Vivekananda order similarly 'gay.' His comment on these monks is not comprehended by his grandfather. The writer has drawn an appealing character

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in Rabi who could cut across cultural differences providing a converging world-view. Speaking of the connection between nation and sexuality again, Srikanth talks of Gopinath and Alexander in this context:

> Gayatri Gopinath and M.Jacqui Alexander both speak to the connection between matters of sexuality and matters of nationhood. Gopinath's essay "Funny Boys and Girls" discusses the ways in which gays and lesbians "queer" the nation, by establishing bonds that extend beyond the physical borders of South Asian nations to create a sense of queer South Asian transnational citizenship. Many queers, Gopinath writes, are not welcome as full citizens in their countries of residence; thus, this transnational citizenship constitutes a necessary locus of belonging. (121)

One finds Rabi establishing this transnational bond for a sense of belonging. Mukherjee seems to suggest that it is Rabi's American upbringing that has facilitated this exchange. Srikanth further explicates on Alexander:

> Alexander notes that sexuality is, in fact, central to the construction of the nation: "Erotic autonomy signals danger to the heterosexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship or no citizenship at all. (121)

Thus, Rabi's homosexuality problematizes the diasporic loyalty, caught in-between the homeland and the new culture. As Srikanth perceptively puts,

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> to engage sexuality within the context of national politics is to enrich our understanding of the connections between individuals and the systemic structures within which they live. In this connection, Monique Truong's novel *The Book of Salt* (2002) provides a confirmation of the link between queerness and fragility of belonging – either in the nation or at home. The novel's homosexual Vietnamese protagonist, Binh, leaves home and nation to escape his father's wrath at his son's sexuality. Although the rejection by family is primary, it is contained within the larger rejection of eviction from nation. (122)

For Mukherjee, it is not a matter of escaping but one of confrontation and acceptance. Rabi comes to a broader acknowledgement of his homosexuality, noticeably, in India. While for Tara, it is the socio-cultural landscape of the US, and not of India, that helps her broaden her approach to life. Mukherjee locates Indian-reared Tara's acceptance of homosexuality in the US while American-born Rabi's widening of perception takes place in India: a veritable cultural exchange, with undertones of the binaries of the West and the East. While returning from the PTA meeting at Rabi's school, Tara reflects that her "filtered gaze" (167) opens up to new realities. At the same time, Tara suspects that Bish would only hold Rabi's sexuality against her: "effete Bhattacharjeeness or my excessive Americanness" (167). While Tara appreciates her own unproblematic acceptance of Rabi's homosexuality, she is critical of Bish and his patriarchal Indian ethos.

Prior to her appointment in Rabi's school Tara had braced herself for a recurrent adventure with Rabi's unconventional school:

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> for the semiannual confrontation with the consequences of my difficult love for this country. I would not have survived in an unstructured environment; how dare I subject my son to it? Out of structure, Bish created greater order. Out of order, I created chaos. Out of chaos, one hopes, Rabi will create something resembling a new American consciousness. (155)

What Tara has called 'unstructured' is the lack of regimentation of rigid customs and traditions. But it is 'American' Tara who took the risk of admitting Rabi to an 'unconventional' school. Now, Tara pins her hope on Rabi's convergence of order and chaos for the making of a new consciousness, a confluence of the West and the East. This is also Mukherjee's hope from multicultural America that has undergone far-reaching economic and socio-cultural transformations from the presence of non-European immigrants.

Order and chaos, a recurrent theme in the novel, is a platform for the making of a cultural citizen. Culture being fluid and ever changing to the 'beyond' as Bhabha asserts (dealt with exclusively in chapter 4 of the thesis), order and chaos seem to be the perennially changing forms of culture.

Tara's hopes follow her anxieties. Raising Rabi has not been easy:

> What kind of school is this? How could Dr. Mike know the insults, the contempt that passed so easily from Rabi's lips? I wanted some sympathy, I wanted my own counselor. "The last five years haven't been easy for him," I said. *For me. For me*. "His father and I divorced, which is rare enough among Indians." *I was brave. I stood up for myself and my son*. "If we''re unhappy, we're expected to suck it up for the kids' sake or our reputations. We worry what our parents will think, when they're halfway around the world and we're

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> middle-aged adults." *It's never for ourselves.* "He's had to make some big adjustments." *And recently, he's been hanging out with murderers in drug clinics and lying about it.* "Sometimes, I feel like I don't know him at all." (163)

Tara is almost hysterical here. She feels the stress of a single parent post divorce, bereft of cultural and emotional props. Tara is at once aware of the fact that she is caught between two completely different cultures, the Indian and the American.

When Chris Dey makes himself comfortable with Rabi and infuriates Tara with his easy casualness, Tara banks on Bish's advice to remind Rabi of some responsible behaviour: "How could you've been dumb enough to fall for this man's stories? After all your father's lectures, how could you've been stupid enough or reckless enough to let a total stranger into the house?" (35). Through Rabi, Tara reveals that she is still attached to Bish in a serious way or to the Indian belief system as the following quote shows: "I gasped before I could stop myself. 'We're not that kind of a family! Boys from good Indian families don't run away!'" (92). In this defensive retort to Andy, Tara is surprised to find within herself the strong undercurrent of the Indian value-system that directs her life.

Rabi rejects Tara's intention to provide stability, and tries to find his own identity. Through Rabi the novelist stages a reflection of what diasporic Tara is trying to do, a construction of culture in an adopted homeland. The 'parent-teacher meet' in Rabi's school turns out for Tara a revelation. Rabi becomes an agency to display the perennial flux of the diasporic self. He restores to the novel an apparent anchor in which the reader finds a juxtaposition of both the West and the Orient. Tara's acceptance of Rabi's homosexuality is also an acceptance of a new awareness of her self. And, Rabi is not marginalized. Rabi cannot be marginalized. Tara has been

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hovering between the mainstream and the periphery, while Rabi is a stable blend more inclined towards Americanization.

If Mukherjee presents Tara as unable to handle her crises, the writer accords Rabi maturity and balance. If Tara and her sisters are guilty of colonial appropriations, there seems to be not a vestige of it in Rabi, which is rather difficult to believe. Of course, Rabi receives his education from a radical school. Underlying this nuanced comparison is the writer's attempt to portray a liberal American society, facilitating pluralism and radical thought.

Coming back to the above quote, Tara's childhood at once leads her to assess her parent-child relationship with Rabi. By admitting Rabi to such a school, she feels she has at the same time abandoned the inherited values ingrained in her by her parents. She wonders if she has imparted the right values to Rabi. Caught in between cultures, she does not know what her cultural resources are. Tara's "problematic and transformative potential," to use Srikanth's words (122), of her diasporic self makes her unable to locate herself and her priorities.

Fast on the heels of this crisis comes another crisis for Tara, piling complications on the former:

> When a young man claiming to be the illegitimate son of her sister approaches Tara, she begins to probe her family's past, leading her deeper into historical mysteries that have created the foundation of her identity. Mukherjee tells Krasny: "I am coming to terms, as is Tara the narrator, who though is much younger than I am, with what my Indian heritage has left me as residue and what America I have discovered, and discovered as empowerment, and knitting the two together so that I know who I am in ways

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> that I didn't want to know when I was writing my earlier novels." (Edwards, *Conversations* xviii)

This is indeed a development in Mukherjee's personal immigrant aesthetics. Chris Dey compels Tara to confront the deeply ingrained cultural mores and beliefs. The encounter with Chris Dey is a rude shock to Tara. Chris Dey cannot be ignored, "it becomes a real propulsion for the plot in terms of finding out who he is and what he really represents" (Krasny 129). It jolts Tara out of her own complacency of being a pristine Bhattacharjee that cannot be adulterated. Further, as Mukherjee points out, while there are "private" anxieties to be taken care of, other problems embroil the individual in "larger schemes" (129).

Tara is taken unawares by the picture that Chris Dey configures to show that he is an integral part of the Bhattacharjee family. Chris Dey has come as a threat from which Tara finds herself unprotected:

> Now, I was regretting my sanitized upbringing. The plot and the participants in my San Francisco drama belonged more to Bombay than to Calcutta, and the India that had stayed on, not the one I had left. I had a state-of-the-art alarm system, but not an armed chowkidar outside my door, no half-wild dogs inside. (114)

Tara feels unable to handle the situation. She has not been trained to tackle such crises. Tara thinks that Chris Dey has more to do with people back in India, not one who has set up house in a foreign land. Here in the US she finds no technology to protect her from such a potential threat to her vulnerability. She cannot accept that Chris Dey could be her nephew:

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> My suspicions were based on ancient prejudices. He doesn't look Bengali! He doesn't look artistic and refined, meaning, I guess, he doesn't look like a half-Bhattacharjee. Andy's prescription was reasonable, very New World, very democratic: It's none of my business. (137)

Tara's world seems to collapse: "Everything is collapsing, there's no one to stop it, and no one to save me, no one cares" (91). She does not know where she belongs:

> I needed a friend to talk to. I didn't have a single close friend in San Francisco. Meena Melwani and her Guatemalan partner had drifted off my radar. The Atherton wives treated me as a pariah. I didn't belong in India or in the Silicon Valley Smug Indian Wives' group anymore. Parvati was more than a sister; she was my only confidante. (109)

Tara had broken many borders. Therefore, Tara is at the moment in 'nowhere land.' The only person that she can communicate with is her sister, thousands of miles away, in India. She finds no succour in all of America. The crisis that Chris Dey set rolling was for Tara too much to handle alone. Everything that the Bhattacharjees stood for or represented – caste, religion, class, traditions – has come crashing down on Tara: "Everyone knew the rules and the rules stated caste and community narrowed the range of intimate contact. The Deys, as their name proclaimed, were not only Christian today, but had sprung from a Hindu caste that was not even Brahmin. Friendship, yes; marriage, never" (32).

The Deys were Hindu, converted to Christianity. An alliance between the Hindu Brahmins, the Bhattacharjees was impossible. Yet, Chris Dey claimed that he was the son of Tara's eldest sister, something Tara had no clue about all her thirty-six years.

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The Three Sisters

Integrally linked to the crisis that the appearance of Chris Dey has created, is Tara's relationship with her two sisters. The title 'Desirable Daughters' refers to Tara and her sisters, and their status of desirability in the marriage market. All three have been groomed in the upper class Bengali elite environment of Calcutta. Mukherjee reiterates, "They're brought up to be identical because according to the patriarchal father, they should have no opinion not given to them by him, and they're supposed to wear identical clothes, speak in the identical accent" (Krasny 128).

Though Padma resides in the US, Tara is very closest to Parvati and is unsure of her relationship with Padma: "The gap between youngest daughter and oldest, the disparity of our marriages and the paths our immigration have taken, have made us strangers. Her reaction to my divorce (that I had brought shame to the Bhattacharjee family had been her refrain) had hurt" (94).

Yet, it is from Padma's illegitimate son, Chris Dey, born out of her illicit relationship with Ron Dey, a Christian, that Tara perceives the biggest threat to everything that is dear to her. Tara is baffled by this sudden appearance of a Chris Dey. Her trust in an impermeable caste/class system that in which the Bhattacharjees self-righteously basked, begins to crumble. Tara feels unpleasant episodes have been swept under the Bhattacharjees' carpet. Tara tries to broach the topic with Padma:

> I rehearsed a conversation that had not taken place. Didi, *I'm* not the problem here. My complications are mine, my messes are of my making. I don't blame Daddy and I don't blame Bish and Calcutta, and the nuns might not have equipped me for San Francisco but they're all gone, that world is gone, we're

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> 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)

Tara has travelled all the way to meet Padma in New Jersey to find out the 'truth' of Chris Dey. It is a mystery that urgently required solution. Indian cultural mores have been ingrained into all the sisters and the patriarchal dominance that went with it. As Mukherjee explains, "the culture or sentimental education of these sisters was geared to repressing their individual personalities because if you make your decision, that means the patriarch has lost control. And of course he has; only the family members pretend that everything is fine, and they hide the consequences of rebellion by the sisters" (Krasny 128). Tara is trying to come to grips with this new revelation: she has already broken the norms by her own divorce and her American lovers. That Padma is supposed to be the mother of an illegitimate child has brought to the surface a new reality.

Padma is remote and inaccessible to Tara. Tara tries to understand Padma by placing herself in Padma's position:

> I couldn't picture my nineteen-year-old self giving in to social pressure. Maybe I was more stubborn than her. Or maybe I was just lucky that I had been born when fathers had become weaker, society was already in shambles, the nuns in retreat. The fault line ran directly through my family, separating sister from sister, the forward-looking from the traditional and the adaptable from the brittle. (133)

The three sisters might have been brought up identically within the rigid confinements of caste, class, and religion, yet, individual differences, what Tara calls the ‘fault line,’ decisively separate one from the other. Changes in times and contexts perhaps would have urged Tara not to have succumbed to patriarchal pressure to which Padma had yielded. The perceptible differences among the three sisters have marked their identity. Padma is the most traditional, and disappointed with Tara’s divorce, sense of style and single status. Tara has changed and so have her priorities. She feels lost to her ‘Indian radar.’ “I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a once-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and reemerging as something wondrous, or grotesque” (195-196). In many ways Tara has Americanized, but Harish Mehta, Padma’s husband, has by far outmanoeuvred her:

> And I, who prided herself on a vigilant but enthusiastic adjustment to American life in all its perverse temptations, felt that night that I’d been bested. Harish Mehta was the American. He’d tied his future to a star, and the star was growing brighter by the day. Like my sister, he’d blotted out all that was inconvenient or didn’t fit. They only worried about me, they said, divorced and alone and raising a boy by myself, so far from the comforts of home. (183)

Harish’s personal failures as an entrepreneur have all been relegated to the background by Padma’s success. Their life is propped by an artificial environment where the only language of communication is English. Their diasporic engagements are limited to projecting the glitter of the oriental Indian culture. Working for Danny Jagtiani, a Sindhi businessman, Padma exhibits her designer collection to the upper class Indian conglomerate. It is in liaison with Padma that Danny successfully sells

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'India' to the diaspora. Lucent Mahal, where the party takes place, is reminiscent of the Vadheras in *Jasmine*. Life has come to a standstill here, in a make-belief India. On the other hand, the 'model minority' is displayed by the expensive cars with the expensively dressed people eagerly trying to keep their homeland alive amidst them. In a perceptive comment, Vinay Lal observes:

> Whatever the negotiations, however imperceptible, that always take place whenever culture is evoked, there is a tendency among many Indian Americans to reify Indian culture as something that is eternal, rooted to timeless traditions, imbibed with mother's breast milk, a comfort zone of certainties, a repository of known moral values – in short, something that is a rather good thing. (78)

The highly educated and the highly rich Indians in the US gather at the Ghoshal's party. Significantly, this is seen as mainstream India, and the socio-political dynamics of the Indian diaspora in the US. Padma is a key figure in the organization of this representation of the homeland in the US. In fact, Padma "enjoys her life as an icon of her ethnic roots" (Stephen 122), through preservation not through adaptation.

Tara has adapted to the context of the new location. In the party, she falls into the category of the divorced Indian lady: "The divorced Indian lady combines every fantasy about the liberated, wicked Western woman with the safety net of basic submissive familiarity" (188). Tara understood that "[i]f nothing else came of this trip, at least I would know I belonged in California" (194). Tara wanted to find out where her own loyalties were. While Padma has become more traditional, by adopting a

thoroughly Indian lifestyle, Tara chooses to come back to the cosmopolitan multicultural California.

This trip has revealed much. Tara could also grasp much of Padma:

> Didi was sitting just inches away, a firm identity resisting all change, at least from a distance, on a brief inspection. But under scrutiny, fractured, like cracks under old glaze. Up close, I didn't recognize her. I didn't know who she was. I was following the cracks, fascinated by their complexity, not the simple, shining face. "Puffles and Piffles," Andy once called them, but I never thought that previously unidentified fault lines could refer to my sister, or to me. (196)

The 'puffles' caught Tara unawares. As Anita Balakrishnan points out, "*Desirable Daughters* is a narrative where the protagonist Tara tries to understand the metaphorical earthquake that shakes her conservative Bengali Brahmin family to its roots" ("Tara-Lata's Footsteps" 261). For Padma or for Tara, the effects of growing up in the 'sanctified' Bhattacharjee precincts get reflected in these 'piffles and puffles.'

Padma's evasion in the Chris Dey's matter was complete. After all, as Parvati wrote in her letter to Tara, for the Bhattacharjees 'evasion' was the "Golden Rule of Family Life" (97). Padma, along with Harish, accepts only that which is convenient. Those that do not fit into their scheme of things remain unacknowledged. Tara returns to San Francisco with the understanding that she does not belong to that society (Vandana Singh 208).

Tara's relationship with Parvati also gets complicated with the appearance of Chris Dey. For Parvati, nobody should dare to be so audacious as "to insinuate" that

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"a Bhattacharjee daughter" had faulted by transgressing the rules of caste, class, religion or culture (61). According to Parvati, it must have been the American influence which has incited Tara's inquisitiveness. Parvati blames the anodyne comforts of Tara's American freedom for her seemingly self-created problems. Parvati is dismissive of Andy too. Tara had to remind Parvati, "First of all, Andy is Hungarian, not Polish, and he is a live-in lover, not a 'flirtation'" (110). To this Parvati replies, "So, it's even worse than I thought" (110).

Settled in Bombay and married to Auro, Parvati is the ideal Indian wife. She nurtures fixed notions of culture much in contradiction to the perpetual flux that appears to have seized Tara's life. Parvati fails to understand Tara even considering the fact that Parvati too had stayed in the US for some time. The norms of refinement that Tara had learnt being a Bhattacharjee had guided her all along. Tara's struggle has been basically to fathom the implications of those norms in the context of the US. In overstepping these limits, she has disembarked on a 'rootless' terrain of moral and cultural liminality

Tara understands that the ultimate focus of the "transcontinental" relationship the Bhattacharjee family maintains is "to stop time to when we were the Bhattacharjee sisters of Ballygunge Park Road, three pretty virgins in pastel saris, three unfurling buds on a massive tropical tree" (53). Slowly, this realization enables Tara to come to terms with change and its effects on life. Tara's situation is both of an insider as well as an outsider to the American culture.

Tara, the 'Outsider'-'Insider'

Besides craving for individual freedom and an independent identity which results in her divorce, Tara is an outsider to mainstream American values. Even though

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Tara attempts to become an American, yet, old beliefs find their way into the present. There is no escaping the fact that she is diasporic. She senses her belonging to a particular part of the world very far away from her immediate context. When still new to the US, it was difficult for Tara and her friend Meena to accept American solutions to their problems. Tara understood that American magazines did not solve problems in their immigrant lives.

Much later after sixteen years, Tara finds that she is denied an individual identity and her ethnicity casts her as one from the 'Third World' and a marginal. Ultimately she has to confront homogeneity: "Nafisa's mother and I don't speak the same dialect. We don't even speak the same language. I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien" (87). India or Calcutta seemed remote to her friends. Not only was it difficult for Tara's American acquaintances to imagine a place like Calcutta, as mentioned earlier, they were also unable to understand the dynamics of an arranged/Indian marriage or even the "wealth" Tara came from: "they hear only 'Calcutta' and immediately feel sorry for me" (26-27). Tara is unable to make them understand the complexities that run beneath the Other. For Tara, the external and the internal, the surface and the undercurrent do not have a happy conversation. Tara is in-between; she is pulled by both sides. If at one moment she appreciates the beauty of the American landscape in front of her, the next moment she is hoping for the Indian to come into view: "I almost expect the chattering of monkeys, corn and peanuts smoking on open braziers, the tinkling of women's bangles and Buddhist prayer wheels" (24). Mukherjee here definitely acknowledges the nostalgia and cultural memory that haunt the immigrant. It is to be noted that *Jasmine* is almost a constant disavowal of this connection.

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Tara is at pains to understand where she belongs. Even though she knows she is not the only Indian around, Tara becomes aware of the fact that she stands out: “All the same, I stand out, I’m convinced. I don’t belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don’t want to belong” (79). Where does Tara want to belong? Is it to a ‘place’ or to a ‘notion’? If territoriality does not make her belong, what does? Does she find belonging ‘in’ herself, a self that is both Indian and American?

Significantly, prior to the appearance of Chris Dey and the emergence of complications with Rabi, Tara had prided upon being at home in the house that she had modernized. Tara felt closer to the mainstream beliefs and lifestyle. Drawing a parallel between modernization and preservation, Tara uses the metaphor of her house to explain her comfort zone, security and being able to settle down with an American identity:

> My house is a simpler affair. I’ve had to invest heavily in emergency retrofitting after the1989 earthquake, which led to modernization and more preservation . . . After all the work, I felt for the first time in my life totally at home, unwilling to leave. I am one with the neighbourhood, a young woman like so many others on the street: ethnically ambiguous, hanging out in the coffee shop, walking dogs, strolling with boyfriends, none of us with apparent sources of income. It’s a work-at-home neighbourhood where the older arts and newer technology seem to have come together. (25)

Tara has blended with the new landscape. Having stayed for around sixteen years in the US she is now an insider to a system that was foreign to her earlier. Even though Tara lacks a certificate to teach, she volunteers and donates “time and money” (78). The school caters to multicultural America, with “ninety percent [being] Asian, Latino,

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and African-American" (78). But the teachers are "European-Americans" and Tara is one among them (78). Tara seems to be relieved that she is 'invisible' amidst the "rhetoric of modern San Francisco" and categorically states,

> I am not "Asian," which is reserved for what in outdated textbooks used to be called "Oriental." I am all things. When the little kids climb on my lap to be read to, or just listened to, I don't think they see me as anything different from their parents, the school nurse, or their teachers. (78)

Here is an ideal picture of a US setting, sans racism, sans categorizations, but a well-knit social fabric where ethnicity does not conflict with 'white' America, which the reader recognises as a feature in the novel *Jasmine*. Tara merges with the America that has been shaped out of centuries of immigration.

> Playing with the preschool children who teach me nursery rhymes in languages I don't speak or inside the bookstore on Haight Street where I immerse myself in heavy tomes on history of science or cosmology, I feel not just invisible but *heroically* invisible, a border-crashing claimant of all people's legacies. (79)

One asks why Mukherjee is portraying such ideal state of affairs whereas reality speaks otherwise. Multicultural America is racially tinged, and ethnic differences are not always celebrated.

Having identified with America, Tara is also a part of the global technological world, with Rabi teaching her the wonders of the internet: "Rabi taught me how to find addresses the world over on the Net. He thought he was preparing his Luddite ma for the twenty-first century" (112). Tara has picked up the casual informality of

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the Americans too and is appreciative of it: “Indians and most Europeans shudder at the breezy informality of American strangers . . . It’s obnoxious, but easily retracted and never frightening” (37).

It is the same desire to be a part of mainstream America and behave like one which makes Tara, later in the novel, approach the police for the sudden appearance of her alleged nephew, Chris Dey: “I’d wanted to be the good San Franciscan, tolerant, accepting, open to possibility, not judgmental, not quick to condemn” (142). This idealised picture shows vigilance, and alertness and the inside system that works in the US.

As seen above, Tara’s fascination for the modern is worth noting. Here, modernity is shown to be a part of being an insider, an aspect of mainstream America and of the globalized Indian. Mukherjee sets into relief not just an Indian but one who is globalized. This is an Indian under the all-embracing “umbrella” of imperialism (Hardt and Negri, 199). Mukherjee also juxtaposes modernity with gender. In doing so the author foregrounds the viability of the American cultural context as a platform to understand the individual self of the woman and the importance of fulfilling her desires. Though Tara thinks that she will never be a modern woman, she exults in being one, with a live-in partner, a divorced husband, working and raising a child on her own, and carving out an identity for herself as a volunteer in public life. Being ‘modern’ is a recurrent motif in the novel. Like the modernization of her house that would prevail against a Californian earthquake, Tara perceives the need for modernity as an essential ingredient in her quest for her individual self.

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But, in spite of being modern, Tara cannot dislodge the Indian lineage that has been so integral to her:

> Yet I'm still too timid to feed my Ballygunje Park Road identity into the kitchen Garburetor. That dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case, confidently labeled by father's religion (Hindu), caste (Brahmin), subcaste (Kulin), mother-tongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta), formative region of ancestral origin (Mishtigunj, East Bengal), education (postgraduate and professional), and social attitudes (conservative). (79)

This passage significantly throws light on Tara's sense of being equally an insider and an outsider. She cannot negate a past even in what seems to be a modern and pluralist America. The constant vacillation between the past and the present, the Indian and the American facilitates the outsider/insider debate. Importantly, this shows the process of Tara becoming a cultural citizen. Against the background of globalization, the outsider and insider intersect to construct a new identity. Tara's predicament seems similar to that represented by Michael Ondaatje, the diasporic Sri Lankan Canadian novelist. As Srikanth puts it, "the curse of being an outsider, or an occasional insider – that one cannot know where one should stand and what one should see" (80). It shows the pull of the roots, which both the narrator and author cannot give up. The Tara of India and the Tara in California are embroiled in a conflictual relationship. It is this perennial dilemma of where to draw the line in retaining Indian values and yet inculcate the best of America that gnaws at the immigrant predicament. The orientations seem to swing between the 'insider yet outsider' quandary; between Tara's internal dilemmas and conflicts and the external Americanization.

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Referring to the epigraph of the *Desirable Daughters*, Newman alludes to the evocation of tradition by Mukherjee, “both as impossible to follow, and as a felt necessity” (“Priority Narratives” 247). Further, Newman explains,

> Mukherjee commented to Barbara Lane that this Sanskrit verse, adapted by Octavio Paz, translated by Eliot Weinberger, and passed to her by a Bolivian graduate student in Berkeley, embodied “the globalisation that we really want to prize . . . that we can take from each other’s heritages what we need and sew it together into our heritage.”
>
> The opposition between the narrow traditional path and the broad, pathless present is embodied in the contrast between the opening scene of the novel and its broadband present. (247)

Tradition is characterized by an adaptable flexibility as well as an adamantine rigidity. By the end of Tara’s narrative, she gradually perceives the need to reject rigidity and adapt her traditions to her present American context. Reconciling the two strands of culture has proved to be too demanding for Tara. To attempt again a comparison between Mukherjee and Meena Alexander here: though Alexander’s writing has not corroborated that “hopeful celebration of differences that a cosmopolitan writer such as Appiah invites and welcomes”, Mukherjee’s work seems to endorse Appiah, along with the connectedness of nation-states and borderlessness (Srikanth 86). This is the way she deals with the proximity of the insider and the distance of the outsider.

Mukherjee seems to be haunted by this connectedness and by convergences. Mukherjee claims :

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> Tara is caught between ideas she has inherited about how time operates or how destiny operates, and her gradual Americanization and her exercising of free will. But, for her, the world is full of magical coincidences. She thinks, “All right, if I’m to find the clue to mysteries in my life when I’m psychologically, emotionally, psychically ready, the clue will come and I’ll be able to recognize it.” But Bish, her husband – whom she in one of her misadventures and self-searches decides to divorce and then try to get back together with – is an engineer, is logical, is rational, and that’s the other aspect of Hinduism and thinking about destiny: There are no coincidences but convergences that are mathematically provable if you can figure out the right equation. All events are computations and permutations, and so if you’re mathematically correct, you’ll be able to figure out all you’re given, Bish would say. Facts. As an information designer, he wants to put together all this messy pile of facts until it makes sense. So, information design is a way of explaining what appears to us as a chaos. (Elam 132)

Bharati Mukherjee’s own immigrant reality might have proved useful in Tara’s narration. As Srikanth says, “There is no denying the sheer dramatic force of writing that grows out of lived experience. The testimonial perspective makes for powerful insider accounts that bear the automatic stamp of legitimacy and authenticity” (165). What Mukherjee writes is a celebration of the immigrant voice. But what is also to be wary of is whether she has allowed her experiences to be appropriated by the mainstream voice.

An outsider making herself/himself comfortable is a situation of transruption (as explained in section 1 of the chapter) when Tara and Bish look for a ‘proper’ school for Rabi:

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> And so, when we were blessed with a son in Atherton, California, Bish looked for a school like the ones we'd known in Calcutta, and not finding one, created it. There were by then sufficient numbers of Third Worlders in Silicon Valley from Hong Kong, Singapore, India, and Pakistan, suffering from the same nostalgia and anxiety over their children's future, to endow a school and to lure the proper kind of regimental schoolmasters from their retirement cottages on islands off Vancouver, or sheep stations in New Zealand, or even hill stations in India. . . . (151)

Bish is the perfect example of an Indian from the 'Third World' staking his claims in the 'First World' with technology being a passage for this facilitation. The global, the technological, the national have shaped the global Indian Bish, who makes his way in mainstream America. In Bish, is an immigrant whose agency is in transruption. In Tara, Mukherjee applauds American 'free will' and independence, but holds her belief in coincidences as a non-rational superstitious trend of thought that is non-American. In the latter Mukherjee privileges Bish's enlightened theory of convergences over coincidences and his logical sensibility. In other words, Mukherjee has shown the interdependence of the diasporic and the mainstream, and the inevitability of cultural exchange. Americanized Tara appreciates Bish's mathematical precision even while yielding to the hypnotic power of fate and the supra-rational. The often referred to metaphor of the snake goddess seems to stand for universal fate, an uncontrollable destiny, and the globalization that is at work, as if on a vengeance: "she used her identity as queen of snakes to call our self-protective little lives into question by injecting them with venom and demanding reverence through the infliction of unexpected pain" (304). There seems to be, at the back of

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Tara's mind, a ferocity of fate which knows no borders, no precautions but demands for acceptance and humility:

> Goddess Manasha, the cobra deity of East Bengal, will find a way to strike, no what precautions, what window shades, are put in place . . . But expand the universe just a few degrees, remove it to Calcutta from a village in East Bengal, speed the calendar ahead a hundred years, and the same snake, to fulfil its destiny, must take a different form. (29- 30)

The 'best boy, best girl' that was fixed by fixed notions of culture and caste did not stay in wedlock. Goddess Manasha or fate, or a search for an independent identity and the acceptance of the fluidity of culture, struck the marriage even though divorce was something not talked about in the ancient Indian customs: "Ancient Hindu custom had nothing to say about the etiquette between divorced couples" (256). A wedge of confusion and unfulfilled desires drove Tara and Bish apart. Tara moved away from Bish, the global Indian entrepreneur whose serious oversight was the lack of respect for an individual, his wife. His failure in marriage turns out for him the greatest and only failure: "Although his life was cited everywhere as perfection itself, he had failed in his fundamental duty . . . He had failed in his dharma, the basic duty of a man in the householder phase of his life, to support and sustain his marriage" (265).

For Bish, "American contingencies like divorce simply had not occurred to him. You married, you had a son, you provided for the family, and if you provided very well, everyone was happy. Or at least unhappily bottled up" (260).

Tara's choice of divorce is a choice of adaptation to change and fluidity of culture. The past assumes a mysterious role every moment of her waking life. How

does Tara reconnect with India? Starting out as a cosmopolitan, an outsider as well as an insider, the diasporic predicament, where does Tara end? What does Tara privilege? Tara has been in a perpetual ‘in-between’. Why is it so? Tara is not simply an individual but a cultural identity too. That is why she is riddled with doubts as to where she is standing or what she is looking at. She cannot dissociate herself from the cultural contexts that have shaped her all along. She is preoccupied with notions about her homeland that she had left behind. Tara’s has been an oscillating between the Indian and the American all the time, trying to find a logical stable position in which she can catch her bearings. Her acceptance of ‘fluidity’ leads her to Bish again.

The Return to Bish

Tara’s crises make her look at Bish in a new perspective: “I only wanted Bish to stay with me. Because he knew I wasn’t after his money or his status. I might very well have been the only appropriate woman in the world for him” (268). Andy does not solve Tara’s insecurity. Tara understands that in spite of being the much sought-after technological genius that Bish has evolved into, he still does not belong to America. Tara senses that this is what she shares with Bish, thereby belonging to the same world as Bish belongs. Time and experience have made Bish comprehend Tara’s search for her self: “One time, you mentioned the loneliness inside of marriage and I did not understand what you were saying” (266). This is Bish’s confession. In spite of the divorce, Bish has been protective of Tara, as an Indian husband (in Hindu belief system, as Tara points out, there is no discourse for divorce; once married, one stays married). All these make Tara understand Bish, the Silicon Valley magnate, the global Indian, the householder, and the Indian husband. She also understands that Rabi, their son, is the new American consciousness that

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she had hoped would build. She realizes that in Rabi's coming of age, she can see the Indian, the American and the global integrally becoming a whole. In accepting this, in accepting Bish in all his failures and successes, and in accepting her lineage and the American independence of thought and individuality, she has become like Rabi, a cultural citizen. The narrative seems to come full circle, in privileging Hindu traditions in spite of the American setting, just as the reversal to tradition from colonialism by Tara Lata Gangooly's father, as Mukherjee explains:

> In this case, what I was using the tree bride ceremony for – and she is married to, a five-year-old bride is married off to a tree because her betrothed dies of a snake bite on his way to the wedding pavilion – is to show how the nineteenth-century, westernized lawyer, father of the bride suddenly realizes that there are ways of resisting colonial pressure by going back and learning to cope with and understand the purpose of Hindu traditions. (Krasny 124)

Bish finds his solutions to his one failure: not understanding Tara and their eventual divorce, by returning to tradition. Tara's solution is of acceptance: the Bhattacharjees, the Chatterjees, the upper class 'bhadra lok' that they had been, cannot remain untouched by fate, by the venom of the snake-goddess, Manasha. They cannot escape the larger dynamics of life even while absorbed fully in their small personal selves. Tara's divorce, Rabi's homosexuality, Chris Dey's appearance, and her complex relationship with her sisters, all are signs of the invincibility of fate and the futility of class, caste, religion or nationality. Looked at from another perspective, no one can escape the geopolitical dynamics of contemporary life. Globalization and transcultural network have made the world smaller. And, there are positive and negative effects of it.

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The Bomb Blast

At a time when Tara is finally coming to understand the trajectory of her consciousness, her modernized house is shattered by a bomb. To her rescue comes Bish who carries her to safety. In the process, Bish is grievously hurt. This is a reflection of the global terror network that Mukherjee had extensively explored in one of her non-fictional narrative *Days and Nights*. Earlier Sgt. Jasbir "Jack" Singh Sidhu had confirmed that the impostor Chris Dey was a member of the criminal Dawood gang in Mumbai. This is the adverse side of globalisation and transcontinental networks, efficiently routed by such network programmes that Bish had initiated; "With his friend Chester Yee, he developed a process for allowing computers to create their own time, recognizing signals intended only for them, for instantaneously routing information to the least congested lines" (24).[6] It coiled back on Bish and his family. Newman avers, "Modern connectivity has its darker side," and refers to its reiteration by Manuel Castells:

> Manuel Castells has highlighted the emergence of global crime, the networking of powerful criminal organisations across the planet, as a relatively new phenomenon; in his argument, criminal penetration of financial markets constitutes a critical element in a fragile global economy, and an essential feature of the Information Age. (qtd. in Newman, "Priority Narratives" 252).

From chaos to order in Tara's life proceeds another chaos. Tara turns to the "core belief" of the Hindus, the two time frames, of the gods and of the mortals (279). Tara assuages her fears of "dissolution" by "one that ticks in God Brahma's eye," that which "moves in cycles" (279). Tara believes that after dissolution, "there will come the needed rebuilding" as it follows in "Brahma-time"; Tara finds "strength" in this

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(279). “After misery and meanness, an eon of bliss, purity, and perfection” (279). The passing moments do not go in vain. To Bish’s question, “What is the value of a passing moment? he asked. “What is the value of groups marked for extinction?” Tara replies: “‘Their beauty,’ I answered without hesitation” (280). This is Tara’s comprehension of passing time and history and the connectedness of the world. Tara leaves for home where her history began: to India and to Mishtigung. In Parvati’s apartment, they talk of the Tree Bride and of her courage. Tara narrates, “I’m like a pilgrim following the course of the Ganges all the way to its source” (289).

Tara’s search leads her deeper to the consciousness of the Tree Bride, the consciousness behind the desirable daughters. With her parents in Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges, Rabi stumbles upon a book by Sir Keshub Mitter. In chapter 3, the title read, “The Man Who Married His Daughter to a Tree” (305). He finds another, which spoke of “The Betrayal and Death of Tara-Ma, Tara Lata Gangooly of Mishtingunj” (305). Tara finds her direction. She ventures to Mishtigunj, and in the “winter night of East Bengal” she and Rabi find the trail ahead of them, “lighted by kersosene and naphtha lamps,” nothing short of a “miracle” (305). It is believed that Rabi understands because he is at once at ease with the West and the East. He has earned the pride and “approval” of his grandparents in Rishikesh (Stephen 128), and his grandfather asserts, “To find God, our Rabindra doesn’t need to wear a sacred thread” (297). His grandmother adds, “Home is where you belong, Rabindra” (297). The sense of belonging seems, according to Mukherjee, to cut across all borders.

Through such juxtaposition of the Indian and the American, Mukherjee invariably exhibits the differences between the West and the East. Tara vacillates between the American individual and the exotic Other. Tara’s immigrant experience as also that of Mukherjee’s is seriously affected by the norms of the mainstream. Does one

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conclude that there is an appropriation of their voices by the mainstream? An evaluation of this will be reflected in the final section of this chapter.

III

The Tree Bride

The Tree Bride (2004) is a sequel to *Desirable Daughters* and Tara, the protagonist, continues her journey of roots search.[7] Tara knows that there are larger designs than her own personal relationships that connect her world in an integral way. Tara traces her lineal descent to Tara Lata Gangooly or the 'Tree Bride,' as she was commonly referred to. As narrated in the prequel discussed above, Tara Lata Gangooly was on the verge of getting married in 1879 when the bridegroom was fatally bitten by a snake. Thus, the five-year-old bride would have been doomed to live a cursed life of widowhood had her father not married her off the same night to a tree. So began the story of the Tree Bride. The young girl, with a tree as her husband, lived in her father's house, and became an important part of the independence movement of India against the British. Later revered as 'Tara-ma' by the Indians, she was eventually imprisoned by the British, and died in prison after a few days, her mysterious death alleged to have been the work of the colonial authorities. The body was not found and no funeral rites were performed.

Her namesake in the US reunites with her now severely crippled husband Bish. Tara is pregnant again, and has begun "to suspect that this pregnancy was going to be tangled up with history" (22). As she tends to her recuperating husband and tries to get together their lives, she gathers the pieces and coincidences of her life to reconstruct her own identity as well as the life of the Tree Bride. When Tara Lata's ghost beseeches her to help the release of her soul, Tara with her family goes to

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India to perform the last rites. On Bish's insistence, Tara remarries him before coming to India for the cremation. Tara and Bish witness that there are no coincidences in the universe but only convergences. Nothing is ever lost. Everything stays connected transcending all borders. Tara's cultural citizenship finds adequate reflection through this narrative.

Tara, the Immigrant/Diasporic

Where does Tara belong? Tara is an outsider to mainstream America. She is an Indian immigrant who has reached the status of a resident alien in her adopted country, the United States of America. Tara is diasporic, an immigrant who endorses a home outside the adopted land, India, to which she returns at intervals as visits to her parents, in-laws, and her sister, Parvati. She maintains some of the cultural practices of her homeland India in the US. And she is imbued in the US with the stories that have shaped her identity from her childhood to the point when she got married in India. Of a 'Third World' origin, she is new to the culture of the 'First World' when she arrives in the US with her husband, soon after her marriage.

Tara has had to contend with the cultural memory of her homeland which remains both accessible and inaccessible: "I knew Mishtigunj. We've been trained to think of Mishtigunj as home in ways that our adopted homes, Calcutta and California, must never be. Ancestors come and go, but one's village, one's desh, is immutable" (29). The memories and stories substitute a now non-existent past which has transformed shape and context. Tara is filled with nostalgia for something that has disappeared, perhaps a lost world:

> I was reminded again of Calcutta. Yes, in my childhood it was Calcutta; "Kolkata" is a different time and space. Some days, everything radiates from

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> Calcutta, then I can go for weeks, dreaming myself a native-born Californian. I remembered visiting my grandparents in the outer suburbs. Early every morning in their neighbourhood, bells would announce the arrival of the goala, the cowherd and his cow. Servants would empty from the shuttered houses with brass pots to collect the fresh milk, then boil it three times. Before it cooled, my sisters and I would come down for our breakfast. What the humidity hadn't done to the canisters of cornflakes, the hot, pungent milk would finish off. (34-35)

Tara looks back on an ordinary day in the past, a familiarity that stays on in her mind. This indicates a possible reason why Tara attempts to trace the history of a consciousness that has marked its presence in her sisters, Padma and Parvati as seen in *Desirable Daughters*, and to also write a postcolonial history of the homeland from which she has come. In-between two cultures and spaces, Tara seems to try and reclaim and recreate a lost space and thereby make an attempt to finally liberate herself from the past, echoing diasporic writer, M.G. Vassanji (63). In *The Tree Bride* Tara narrates the story of the Tree Bride and India's colonial encounter with the British, but whether she manages to dislodge these memories forever is debatable.

Describing a diasporic community, Robin Cohen points out that such conglomerations acknowledge that there is an indispensable ethnic connection with and a privileging of the cultural practices of the country that has been left behind by the immigrant (*Global Diasporas*). James Clifford also speaks about identifying features and loyalties which mark such immigrant dispersals (*Routes*). Tara identifies with such a collective identity, an Asian American who later ventures out on her own, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Being an Asian associates her with an

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outsider's entity in the US, while being an American reflects her socio-economic and cultural interactions with the mainstream.

An imaginary structure of longing, fantasy, allegiance and memories perpetuate in a diasporic consciousness, as is discernible in the following passage: "When we were kids in the high-ceiling house in Ballygunge Park, my mother was a mesmerizing storyteller . . . Of all her stories, the one that moved me most was about my namesake, Tara Lata, the Tree Bride of Mishtigunj . . ." (37-38).

What were stories once upon a time are now 'cultural carriers' for diasporic Tara. Tara explains:

> I had been writing a book about my sisters, Padma and Parvati, and our growing up in Kolkata, and then I'd started on something new and strange. This was about a distant relative we called the Tree Bride, my great-great-aunt, a point of light from the remotest, darkest galaxy of my life. (22)

Tara connects to a remote past, which is a source of light for her. What is important to note here is the choice that Tara has made in connecting to a particular relative, while being situated in a 'First World' metropolis. Myths, folklore, religion, and their metaphors abound in the narratives of Tara's migratory displacement and journeys. Telling and re-telling of the past seem to be the thread that binds *The Tree Bride* together. A consistent motif is that of 'roots' and 'rootlessness' in the discourse of diaspora. Tara in *The Tree Bride* starts out on a roots search. However, it is worth taking note that it is defined by an American tenor and tone, as Tara herself implies:

> The first time I went back to India on my own, it wasn't just to see relatives. I took Rabi with me on my own American-style roots search, into the East

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> Bengal – now Bangladesh – of my grandparents and a hundred generations of Gangoolys and Bhattacharjees. My friends and even my sisters thought I'd gone crazy, or very American. In particular, I wanted to see this place called Mishtigunj that everyone in the family had talked about, but no one had visited in sixty years. "Why go that side?" my mother had asked. It was much better to talk nostalgically and bitterly of that place, "that side," than actually to expose oneself to it. I've gone back two more times. (20)

Privileging her American identity over her Indian origin, the narrator reiterates as in *Desirable Daughters* the paramount importance that her Americanization receives.

The 'Insider-Outsider' Debate

While imaginatively recreating a home or a likeness of home at a distant new physical site, the diasporic has to interpret new cultural practices and hegemonic drifts. What may trouble a postcolonial immigrant in a 'First World' are the binaries of the centre and the margin. One may, however, unproblematically compromise with the dominant mainstream, and remain marginalized. Multiculturalism valorizes differences, after all. Tara is part of the "immigrant fog" that she uses to describe the inflow of 'Third World' immigrants in the US:

> During the twenty years I've been in California, an immigrant fog of south Asians has crept into America. Quiet, prosperous, hardworking, professional – in India they would have been blocked by social convention and family duties. There are Indians in every town, every hospital, every high school and college, in banks, motels, 7-Elevens and taxis, and a startling number have begun appearing in everyday American families. (19)

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One discerns a hint of 'othering' as Tara speaks of those 'like' her in the US. Perhaps, class-conscious Tara, brought up as an urban elite in Kolkata and married to a 'technology mogul' who revolutionized information mobility and flow, and a global Indian, Tara could objectify and hold at a distance the burgeoning of such a population of the Asians. Ironically, it is one of the members of the same demographic cross-section that jolts Tara out of her complacent identity as wife of Bish Chatterjee:

> I noticed the swell of Indian faces for the first time when I was still in Palo Alto. Rabi was three years old. I was cashing a check and one of the bank managers came walking behind the counter. She said to my blond teller, "Missy, you can take your break when Shobana gets back." Shobana? Where had *she* come from? I hadn't even noticed an Indian face behind the grille. I was still an Indian-graduate-student-wife. Wife-of-Bish-Chatterjee was my full identity. If I had plans for the future, they would be to follow my husband wherever he went, probably back to India. Shobana, wherever she was (and in my mind, she's been on that coffee break for the past dozen years), was constructing a different immigrant life. I suffered a twinge of envy for her. I wondered if "wife" was the only role permitted to me, if there was a way of being in this country with my own identity. (19)

Encouraged by someone like Shobana, Tara hits the road on a search for her individual identity:

> By twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties. I was married; I had a son, material comfort, an admired husband – what else is there? Eight years later, feeling myself a privileged prisoner inside the gated community, I

> listened to all the voices yammering around me and all the stories on television and in the magazines and did the right California thing and struck out on my own. (16)

From a collective traditional identity, Tara now assumes an individual Californian (read American/ Western) identity. What needs to be pointed out is that, like in *Desirable Daughters*, in *The Tree Bride* too, her individual identity post-divorce has been aligned to her sexuality: "According to the tabloids, I went on to have a life. There were men, yes" (16). William Safran, referring to the double-centred cultural "polycentrism" of the diasporic, points out at the spatial 'in-betweenness' where a new identity gets constructed, as argued in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis (76). Geographically and culturally, the diasporic identity is always in a state of being processed, where there is a negotiation between two realities, both simultaneously insistent and impinging. Economic dependence and a sense of belonging in quotidian existence, these are domains in which the immigrant has to correlate with the adopted land. It is important to explore the dynamics of this negotiation of the diasporic in her/his attempt to maintain a congenial balance between the outsider-insider in an alien land.

Tara is already privy to US multiculturalism. Being a postcolonial hybrid already, it is a further hybridization of cultures that happen in this new pluralistic platform. Already equipped with the English language, it being a colonial legacy of India, Tara is also familiar with some of the cultural practices of America. A convent-educated urban elite from India, Tara frequents the upper-class community in the US. Even after her divorce, Tara is financially supported by Bish to sustain the comforts of urban luxury and to look after her son. Post divorce, and after remarriage, Tara is still pegged on to money and class.

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Tara compares herself to her gynaecologist, Victoria Khanna, who also exemplifies hybridity like Tara, but unlike Tara, Dr. Khanna does not have a crisis to hide. Tara is an exotic in American eyes. With her 'bomb-shelled' life, she draws another attention to herself, a 'post'-celebrity.

However, Tara is acculturated to the new context of the US. Identity being non-static, Tara has already reached across cultural borders to align herself to mainstream culture. She is in continuity with an American quest in the process of following her lineage to the roots. But, one needs to keep in mind the question as to how far Tara goes in this quest. Why is there the choice to pause or stop at the Tree Bride? Though these questions will be dealt with elaborately a little later, what is important to remember is that it is the American mainstream insider's perspective with which Tara seeks her ancestors and looks at the beliefs that have constructed her past as well as the India/Bangladesh of today.

In the US, Tara takes pride in the achievements of her husband in the realm of global-technology:

> When America started looking for unthreatening, non-European success stories, there was always the "Atherton Communications Guru," "the Swami of Stanford," Bish Chatterjee. Unthreatening, because he was perceived as courtly and approachable. He always gave informative interviews. He had no rough edges. He hadn't started out in rags and gouged his way to the top. He hadn't stepped on anyone, hadn't tricked or absorbed competitors, and didn't keep their shrunken heads in a trophy case. There were no skeletons to haunt his dreams, no off-limit closets. He had no skeletons, no closets. Business writers called him "The Rajah" back then. (That used to give us a big laugh.

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> Rajahs are Kshatriyas and we are Brahmins; my parents would never have sanctioned marriage to a lower-caste maharajah.) Or he was the "Broadband Mogul," and we'd cringed again, since Mughals are Muslim, our historic enemies.They even morphed him once into "The Rajah Mogul, Bish Chatterjee." (15)

Tara seems to be aware of the fact that American mainstream still had exotic designs on the non-European and Asian Bish and herself. Though critical of America here, it is Bish's usefulness to America that Tara seems to take pride in, as though a native has been found to be a 'good' native. America's approbation of Bish delights Tara. The norm for Tara is America. The alien land's ignorance of the historical etymologies of the terms, 'guru,' 'swami,' 'mogul,' and so forth shows the West's blind appropriation of exotic terms, while the writer Mukherjee seems to play up to the American audience's taste for the Orient.

What is interesting is that when in India, Tara's sisters find a "Clint Eastwood" in Bish, calling him "Calcutta Cowboy", and thus there is already collusion with the West as the norm of reference (14). In the US, Tara may be sarcastic about the West's homogeneity of the Orient, but, it is often convenient to see the fault of another rather than of the self. Tara seems to be oblivious of this fact. One further quote explains this slip:

> Guru, Rajah, Mogul, Swami, and Yogi: They exhausted their exoticizing vocabulary on him. They couldn't call him wise or brilliant without the tag of guru, couldn't explain his success without rope tricks, or his wealth without the opulence of an Oriental potentate. For ten years, I was his "jewel in the crown," his "rani" on magazine covers. Smooth, sophisticated Bish Chatterjee

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> inside a walled mansion with tennis courts and a swimming pool. Just your normal, middle-class Calcutta boy with a temperature-controlled wine cellar and on-call wine steward, tending a few hundred vines of his own up in Napa with a private label, distributed to special friends. Château CHATTY Chardonnay. Bourgogne de Broadband. Calcutta and Chardonnay – they thought they had stumbled on a vast and inexplicable contradiction. (15-16)

The writer seems to suggest the West's inability to use mainstream qualifiers for the non-Western. The 'Third World' is compulsorily nativized, the writer suggests, even in the twenty-first century seamless world. But, Bish is also a part of America's capitalistic economy, consuming 'Third World' economies and colluding with the 'omnipresent' imperialistic ideology of pitching itself in local markets and usurping profitable spaces. Tara's praise-songs of Bish appear to be her intrinsic involvement with what postcolonial theory perceives as a quality of imperialism. Bish has marked his presence world-wide:

> At the time of the bombing, CHATTY had assembly plants in twenty countries, research facilities on three continents, and a worldwide workforce of well over a hundred and fifty thousand. CHATTY was in broadband and routers; it coordinated operating systems. The CHATTY time signal permitted integrated communication between the world's computers and universal access to the Web. It powered cell phones. Bish was convinced that its full power had never been touched. (17)

Here, we have a picture of an acculturated Indian, the 'globalizing-globalized' Bish, the new postcolonial sensibility that has emerged in recent times. Bish manages to remain loyal to his ethnic affiliations which bring about contradictions in his

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character. He has been an enigma to the Western press and public. They could only write on an oriental phenomenon, because that was what Bish had become before the bombing. But, in pointing out the subtle differences between Bish, pre-bombing and post-bombing, Tara hints at the fragile position that he occupies in the Western landscape:

> After the bombing, melted, particularly after Bish had been exposed as the target of hidden assassins. He withdrew from active participation. After the big bombs of 9/11, even the potential for broadband had narrowed. His old partner, Chet Yee, came back from semiretirement to run the day-to-day. (18)

The bombing of Tara's house cripples Bish, directly showing the immediate meltdown of "CHATTY's stock value" (18, emphasis in original). Bish's fragility is also shown in his personal life. Tara points out: "The man who practically invented wireless communication now requires my help to punch in a phone number" (22). The reality that Tara finds is that Bish is a vulnerable man:

> The only reality that counts now is that for the past three months I've been standing behind the Rajah Mughal and looking down on his head and shoulders and his once-dyed black hair, watching white hairs spread from his hair-part and the part itself begin to widen. (16)

Tara seems to set into relief Bish as a global Indian, but who fails, even with his faithful adherence to his Indianness, his 'dharma,' or duty. He had immersed himself in his work only to make Tara an invisible presence in his life. Tara was only a wife, to rear up their child. Tara did not have an individual identity, or rather, Bish would not acknowledge that there could be another identity for Tara besides the tag of a wife, like all Indian men, Mukherjee seems to suggest. Tara's venturing out on her

own quest of individuality is this expression against the homogenous patriarchy of Indian husbands, and a criticism that the Orient cannot understand the value of something beyond a collective identity. A fulfilment of the individual self, it seems, can be facilitated by America only, and however successful a global Indian can be, he fails on this account.

Ironically, Bish finds no fault with Tara. It was he, as seen in *Desirable Daughters*, who had faulted in his duties. It was he who had insisted that Tara should remarry him. Mukherjee's portrayal of Bish here seems to valorize the global male Indian. Bish cannot be the ideal husband until and unless he transcends the parochial traditions and patriarchal intentions. Therefore, what is foregrounded is Tara's appreciating the technology magnate Bish, but castigating the Indian husband:

> In Bish's order of priorities, building networks and endowing the world with handheld miracles was dharma, a duty. Creating wealth for millions entailed the further dharma of redistributing it productively. Marriage had not been a part of the same hierarchy of obligation. Marriage was something done once and for all time to satisfy everyone's expectations, then put aside. Marriage was self-sustaining, the way our grandparents' had been. But those are Indian assumptions, not American. (17-18)

Tara privileges American assumptions. But at the same time, Tara points out the transformations taking place in Bish. Even when considerably disabled, Bish is restless to find out the fundamental reality of life, that of convergences: "While I'm trying to write a book about my ancestor, he's working on something he calls *The Natural History of Coincidence*. Twenty-first century technology (speed) makes

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coincidence, or the appearance of coincidence, inevitable. Speed enhances contact, speed shrinks space and time" (13).

Here is an attempt Mukherjee makes to collapse science and religion, the West and the East, of a global Indian Bish and an Asian American Tara. The global connectivity of science, religion and culture enmeshes everything. This leads to a further hybridization of the postcolonial immigrant Tara. Tara now co-habits not with an American or the Hungarian Andy, as seen in *Desirable Daughters*, but with a man who was her husband. In the process of being American, one finds in Tara a mimicry of something American, considering the fact that it was a considerably significant aspect of Tara's post-divorce preoccupation. Now, Bish's need for her and her need for Bish, as Tara admits in the latter part of *Desirable Daughters* is this convergence that is galvanizing all global flows. But, in a world where the global economy is hounded by an imperial agenda, Mukherjee who is located in the US and has become a naturalized citizen, seems to overlook this exploitative mechanism in the garb of globalization or what Tara and Bish believe as convergences.

It is to prove this interconnectedness of a universal thread, that Tara is apparently motivated to locate a 'root' in the East from her location in the West. Immigrants are disposed to become both insiders and outsiders to their host land, and seemingly mobile in a transnational set-up to become transcultural. Srikanth comments on this complex dynamism:

> The complicated terrain of the insider-outsider antithesis has become increasingly nuanced over the years. The academic discipline that has given this topic the most attention is anthropology, and the colonial legacy of the discipline has, not surprisingly, made it a ready target of postcolonial critique.

> The rich debates that have arisen over anthropological fieldwork have demonstrated the limitations of the insider-outsider polarity and advanced instead the view of a continuum in which one's position as insider or outsider is fluid rather than fixed, contextual rather than absolute. (162)

While fluidity is that grey area of hybridity and ambivalence, the geopolitics of the global world has effects on 'Third World' cultures and economies. *The Tree Bride* is anthropologically oriented. Exploration and excavation, they are both predominant themes. Located in a Western metropolis, Tara narrates a postcolonial history of India. The linear history of Tara's quotidian existence in America is interrupted by 'several' narratives not only of British colonization of India but also a postcolonial India which lent itself to hybrid identities like Tara's. The evidence of this hybrid self, not at ease with her American identity nor with the persistent homeland memories, perhaps is another reason for Tara's roots search, which makes her adopt a postcolonial narrative. Entrapped Tara may find her 'release' by this process of narrativization. Tara's aspirations even with this narrativization seem to become cosmopolitan. Mukherjee seems to build a cosmopolitan identity of her character, by systematically portraying a diasporic identity and then showing the 'transruptions,' as explained in Section 1 of this chapter, that a postcolonial immigrant can create in a 'First World' location. "The cosmopolitan is the new postcolonial," says Nayar (*Postcolonialism*190).However, it is important to observe how or why such transruptions are made. Is it to exoticize oneself?

Like Salman Rushdie, Mukherjee perceives hybridization and cultural acculturation with the mainstream as positive gains. Multicultural practices in the US make the immigrant aware of this cultural hybridization in process. Diasporic identity being a double-sited one, it makes allowance for a transnational loyalty, as Arjun

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Appadurai argues in *Modernity at Large* : "Diasporic diversity actually puts loyalty to a non-territorial transnational first . . . The question is how can a post-national politics be built around this cultural fact?" (173). Mukherjee answers this by Tara's postcoloniality that has already absorbed the colonial culture in her hybrid self and further by positing the theory of convergences.

Convergences in the World of Diversity or Globalization?

> I'm enough of a mystic, like Bish, to believe there are no coincidences, only convergences. Yash Khanna had met and married an Anglo-Canadian, Victoria Treadwell-Percy, in India. They'd left India for Stanford and he'd taught my Indian husband. No Yash Khanna, no Bish and Chet Yee, no CHATTY. Victoria Khanna knew my blood, had typed me and could trace me, if she wished, to the dawn of time. Victoria Treadwell's grandfather must have known the Tree Bride. All stories of Mishtigunj touch, eventually, on Tara Lata Gangooly. She is like the Ganges, draining all tributaries. Hearing the word "Mishtigunj" from unexpected lips closed the circle. (27)

With Dr. Victoria Khanna asking Tara if she believes in destiny, the notion of convergence is set rolling. While Tara is writing the story of the Tree Bride, it is Victoria Khanna, granddaughter of Virgil/ Vertie Treadwell in the US, who was the DC of Mistigunj (now in Bangladesh) at the time of the death of the Tree Bride, who hands over a box of papers bridging the gaps in Tara's ancestor's story. The above quote summarizes the links which connect centuries, nation-states and individual lives and their respective domains of work or preoccupations. "The cone of coincidence" gets subsumed in 'convergence' in the former being a "mandated" (32, 273) part of destiny. The implication is that nothing happens by chance. Tara relates:

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> I keep telling myself (as Bish continually repeats) that what writers call "coincidence" is merely a function of mathematical probability, nothing else. If the man who bombed our house is the grandson of the man who sold me the Bangla *Mist-nama*, it is perfectly explicable in mathematical terms, without reference to fate and the magic of Mishtigunj. (146)

Information Design, says Bish, proves that there are no coincidences: "Yash Khanna invented Information Design. And there are no coincidences" (36). Narrowing down the role of coincidence and proving Yash Khanna's invention, Bish points to an old newspaper from Victoria's box which read: "*Mishtigunj Mourns Death of Tarama. Famed saint and recluse dies of heart attack in police custody. DC Virgil Treadwell denies police involvement"* (36). Tara finds in this "scrap of brittle, yellowed paper" "a cosmic mystery" (36). What bewilders Tara is how this piece of information has come to rest at her "dining table in San Francisco" (36). Tara connects this to her tracing the roots of her lineage: "Voices began to speak; ghosts took flesh. Bish always says, 'Nothing in the universe is ever lost,' and I hadn't fully believed him, or understood. It's physical and chemical and historical and finally psychological. Every discovery has a motivated seeker" (36). Tara's motivation is to set into relief the significance of the Tree Bride, her ancestor's life, while Bish's post-bombing project is to seal the fact that coincidence is no freak of destiny.

Woven with the story of the Tree Bride is the story of colonial British in India. Everything is connected, says Tara, as Bish and Yash work on "their all-embracing mathematics of communication" (232).

> Nothing in the world is ever lost and everything in the world is somehow connected. Plug it in, hit the key, and names like Mist and Gangooly and Hai

> and Octavius Rutledge and thousands of others lost to us now will pop up instantly. (232)

Interestingly, Tara's roots search converges with Bish's "prospect of sorting so much chaos" (35). According to Bish, the "proper question" was the key to every answer (39). Tara's problem is to draw the connections that make her consciousness, the cosmopolitan cultural identity that she has become in the US. Tara seeks order in the representation of 'her' history to an obviously American audience:

> That was a typical nighttime Calcutta –sorry, Kolkata – story told by a great-grandmother to a wide-eyed six-year-old. The story held for me the same vibrancy that comic books do for Americans. It still does. My daughter floats inside me, projecting dream-stories fashioned from lives lived and imagined. (4)

Story-telling is the craft of representation. The Calcutta/Kolkata stories or the 'unborn baby's' stories speak of the past and their relative connectedness to the present. Besides, Tara, the narrator is also skilfully connecting herself to her Western audience, drawing a parallel between the Hindu/Indian story and the form with which it is comprehensible to the Western audience/reader. One asks what attributes of culture these stores hold that Tara is unable to do away with them. Is Tara capitalizing on a ready American audience eager to consume her exotic self, or is it simply the 'homing desire' (as explained in chapter 3 of the thesis) integral to diaspora?

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Narratives that Construct Tara's Consciousness

The past intrudes into her present, a transruption which reflect Tara's consciousness:

> I have visited Mishtigunj three times in the past six years and have been writing about it, and the Tree Bride, ever since . . . In our family, she'd always been there, a living presence. Mishtigunj has always been there. Everything and everyone had always been there, without origin or ending. I'd been blocked from learning about the origins of Mishtigunj, and more about the living Tree Bride, until I made my second visit and an old hajji had taken me aside. That's how it goes; you put the word out, and magic things happen. (27-28)

The magic is of communication and convergence. In other words, it is also that of globalization. Mishtigunj, is a "utopian village" and home to the Tree Bride created by the Englishman, John Mist, a friend of the 'old hajji's' father (149). An interesting observation made by Stephen is that "Mukherjee takes the opportunity to celebrate lives without memory or history as she has already done it in *Leave It to Me*" (138). "Having been given nothing, they [the foundlings] were free to fashion anything they pleased. Such a man was John Mist" (*The Tree Bride* 56). Stephen calls Mist an instance of 'reverse assimilation,' who breaks away from colonial reigns and builds the place 'Mishtigunj,' an ideal of Hindu Muslim unity and with no British or colonial trace. Other examples of the Western assimilation with the East are Nighel Coughlin, the fifth generation British in Hindu land, and Dr. Victoria Khanna, Tara's "ob-gyn" at the medical centre at Stanford University (7). Coughlin who comes to Tara Lata to warn her of British interest in her role against colonial rule, impresses her with his

fascination for the Bengali culture and the Hindu religion. In him, Tara finds, to her complete surprise, an Englishman who believed in a casteless, classless India. Similarly, Dr. Khanna who is killed in the second bombing by Abbas Sattar Hai, the target of which was Tara, acknowledged before her death the Indian she had become. Her husband, Yash Khanna says, “I think a proper Hindu cremation would serve her better” (Stephen 139-140).

All these characters are interlocked in a logic that suddenly enlightens Tara. The person who bombed Tara’s San Francisco house was none other than a member of the Hai family that has occupied her ancestor, Tara Lata Gangooly’s house in Mishtigunj. Tara’s visits to Mishtigunj led to the suspicion that American-rich Tara has come to claim her ancestral property. Elimination of Tara is erasure of this threat to the occupants of the Tree Bride’s house. Thus, Tara finally understands how it is she and not Padma or Bish who has been the target of the bomb blast (in *Desirable Daughters*) or the assassination attempt which killed Victoria. The murder of the real Chris Dey and the appearance of the young man posing as Chris Dey (in *Desirable Daughters*) are directly linked to Tara’s connection with Mishtigunj:

> There have to be millions of Hais in Bangladesh, just as there are millions of Gangoolys and Chatterjees in West Bengal. Even if the names are coincidental, I knew that the best transcriber in all Bengal, Rafeek Hai, sitting that day in a Calcutta courtroom, would make his way to Mishtigunj and die on the same day as John Mist, after taking down the Persian dictation of his *nama*. (117)

Rafeek Hai was hanged along with John Mist. While John Mist was charged with a crime committed fifty years ago, Rafeek Hai was the one who helped Mist in

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escaping to the now Mishtigunj. It was Rafeek Hai's son who married the Tree Bride's childhood friend, Sameena, the daughter of the former cook at the Gangooly's household:

> Sameena's father, the cook Abdulhaq, after having been fired by the newly orthodox Hindu Jai Krishna for being too unclean to cook or serve his food, was installed as gatekeeper, or chowkidar, a reassignment that might be considered compassionate, or cruelly demeaning. (276)

Tara conjectures that this demotion and the "family's indignity" must have been at the root of the conspiracy to take over Mist Mahal one day (276). And, Tara understands, "The magic of Mishtigunj is black indeed" (278).

Tara does come to the roots, the material reasons for her current condition in the US. The bombing of her house is traced to Mishtigunj, a place she has always associated with the Tree Bride's subversion of tradition and her strength and commitment to the Indian Independence movement:

> Every manner of protester and activist came to visit: Mahatma Gandhi the pacifist and Netaji Subhas Bose the militant, American friends of India, Sikh separatists from California, vegetarians and theosophists, Sufis and freethinkers, authors and photographers. One of those visitors could have been Vertie Treadwell. (33)

It was this Tara Lata Gangooly that Tara has always valorized. 'Silent' like a tree, being the wife of a tree, she became "a sombre young lady" with only one dream, that of an "independent India" (251- 252). Mishtigunj has, therefore, been to Tara a mystical 'real' place with which she openly acknowledges her belongingness:

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> I felt for the first time how recent my family's Calcutta identity was, just two generations, how shallow those urban roots were, not much deeper than Rabi's in California. I saw my life on a broad spectrum, with Calcutta not at the centre, but just another station on the dial. (20)

Tara's first visit to Mishtigunj fills her with an overwhelming sense of being 'at home.' She understands that just as Rabi's connections to California are not deep enough, so has her connection to Calcutta been a superficial one. It is Mishtigunj which forms the deep core of her personality. The irony is that there is an international terror network operating from the same source. There is however, a bigger irony: such information networking and mobile connectivity that Tara's husband has revolutionized provides the groundwork which made the bombing possible.

But, how does Tara reconcile to her Mishtigunj roots after she discovers the bomb trail? Already, the stories, the rituals, the memories, the books, the childhood, all have become constituents of a postcolonial cosmopolitan identity. As in *Desirable Daughters*, the narrator talks about the presence of the present in the past: "I believe it was Faulkner who said the past isn't past. The past isn't even dead" (29). It is the past which takes centre-stage in the novel and carves out its patterns by connecting it to the present. But, the past may store disturbing elements with the devastating capacity of toppling the stability of the present. As Tara also acknowledges, the Tree Bride's story has not always been happy: ". . . from my grandmother I learned the *happier* parts of the Tree Bride's story" (35, emphasis added). Tara's American identity induced fear in the Hai's. Here, Mukherjee seems to indicate the 'imperial gaze,' and the thoughts that the image of America induces in people. Tara's adopted homeland, therefore, becomes a source of danger for her. Again, most ironically, it is

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to Tara in America that the ghost of Tara Lata Gangooly pleads for help in the release of the soul of the deceased.

It is such moments, as described in the above passage, that give the novel a transnational character. Located in the US, India and Bangladesh, and with the threat of the borderless terror labyrinth, and focusing on the Bish's global investments, Mukherjee foregrounds a narrative beyond national boundaries. However, it falls short of being a completely transnational work, because it is the diasporic dimension which underscores its themes.

A Cultural Citizen

Beyond national boundaries, the Tree Bride's ghost evokes in Tara the response which makes her come to India for the final rites. Tara's surrendering to the ghost's urgent demand and Bish's serious acknowledgement of it, in the modern-day scientific world is a conundrum of sorts. It may be argued that in Tara's veering towards a cultural citizenship, she sustains a serious engagement with metaphysical beliefs of the homeland. Being in the US, she attempts a postcolonial critique of India. She wrests agency in condemning the British for the colonial exploitation of her family's and other such families' "expulsion from that eastern paradise – modern-day Bangladesh" (44). It is a "postcolonial reclamation," and rewriting of history which is mainly centred on the "Brahmo-Arya split" that occurred in 1833:[8]

> It all began in 1833: the seeds of the Brahmo-Arya split, the active encouragement of English, and the creation of a native, English-speaking intellectual aristocracy. It's the year that created my hybrid family of orthodox Hindu, Bengali-speaking, cricket-loving, Shakespeare-acting, Gilbert and Sullivan-singing, adaptable-anywhere Brahmins. That was the year the

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> brilliant young parliamentary orator, Thomas Babington Macaulay, only thirty-three at the time, delivered his famous “Minute on Education.” I say “famous” but of course it is known only to scholars of India, even if it is part of the cultural baggage of every “Westernized” Indian with an English-language education. Bengalis are its target, and potential beneficiaries. Macaulay set out to define a range of British attitudes toward India that began with liberal, enlightened self-interest, and ended in sheer contempt. (45-46)

Tara holds up for ridicule the legacy of the English language that has become an integral part of India, and at the same time, the boost it received from the “Brahmo-Arya” conflict. Tara also does not spare her convent school education which conspired to promote Macaulay’s agenda of conquest without an end.[9] Tara also condemns the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British. Tara also points out another negative aspect of Macaulay:

> Better, Macaulay thought, to turn natives into surrogate Englishmen, easily controlled, making the English language and Western values desirable to them, than to rely on British adventurers whose embrace of Hindu and Muslim practices made their basic loyalty suspect. (46-47)

Intermingled with Macualay’s scorn for natives and their literature, is the converse side of the assimilation of some Englishmen with the culture and religion of India. One such is Nigel Coughlin who warns the Tree Bride of imminent British charges against her, as mentioned earlier, which of course, ultimately leads to her death. Deeply intrigued by Coughlin’s passion for all that is native to India, and his Bengali attire, Tara Lata Gangooly is drawn to this English gentleman who exuded chaste

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'Bengali-ness.' An implication that the native is attracted towards the 'white' would not be far-fetched.

Tara perceives that it was only John Mist and the Tree Bride who escape Macaulay's entrapment:

> Sooner or later, the mood of 1833 will figure in Tara Lata's story, just as it figures in mine. Perhaps a well-trained colonial administrator like Vertie Treadwell had vague knowledge of Thomas Babington Macaulay, but certainly no one else involved in this story had reason to be. Yet the bookends of Macaulay's argument – uplift the natives to make them better subjects, uplift India to make it more profitable, ridicule Indian for its superstitious ways – will apply to nearly all of them. Except, of course, John Mist and the Tree Bride. (47)

This is how Tara connects the British foray into India with the personal history of her ancestor, the Tree Bride. Vertie Treadwell represents that seamy side of the waning of the Empire, those hybrid Englishmen who did not find any relief from their simultaneous attraction to the wealth of India and the disgust for the natives of India, and had to retire disgruntled, and abandoned by the dying 'Raj.' Vandana Singh points out that "Bharati Mukherjee quarries into the conflicts faced by the ICS officers of British origin who left home with good intentions to subjugate the colonized serviles" (218). Ambitions thwarted, some of these unacknowledged British officers, like Vertie lived utterly miserable lives. It was the effort of Vertie and his likes, of studying, categorising, mapping and archiving, that actually had led to the expansion of the 'empire.'[10]

Further, Tara denounces the British colonial expedition as a failure. "To my mind, the history of the British in India is a story of adventure gone bad, where the thrill of new encounters, the lure of transformation, and the frontier of second chances slowly, inevitably, started drying up" (47). The British left only to leave the colonizing mission alive in the evangelical project of the missionaries. Convent schools produced hybridized natives like Tara and "English models" as ideals (48-49). Though Tara awakens to this Orientalism foisted upon the Indians, yet, in exploring her knotted ties to her homeland, she creates a narrative for the Western audience:

> The Tree Bride had been little more than my grandmother's and mother's bedtime fable. When I realized that Tara Lata had been an actual little girl who grew up surrounded by other little girl servants and had taught herself to read Bengali, English, and Persian, it seemed to me a miracle on the order of Helen Keller. The fact that she then taught the languages to the girls and boys of the village made her an Annie Sullivan, and that she had fought against the colonial authorities on the side of the Indian nationalists, a Joan of Arc. It became my dharma, my duty, to set her story down. (37)

All comparisons are made with Western models. One finds a "defection", to use Tara's own words, from the colonial ramifications of the past to a continuing colonialism of the present (48-49). Tara has appropriated her privileged position of accessibility to a Western audience and thus speaks from a location of compromise making her narrative of postcolonialism suspect of colonial collusion. If as a postcolonial Tara wrests agency, it is at the cost of becoming an exotic.

No doubt, Bish's techonological innovation has established his presence not simply as an exotic in a 'First World' imperialistic domain that has become revolutionized by Bish and his partners. After his injuries, Bish plunges into uncovering the mysteries of information, "the glue of the universe" and its correlation with time and space and arranging order out of chaos (235). Bish's project shows a cosmopolitan sensibility at work, perceiving the whole world as one even with differences. His 'information connectivity' project undermines all differences, be they geographical, cultural or technological. He is that multiple hybrid who, as Anna Kurian puts it, "travels in multiple cultures and worlds with equanimity, engages with new cultural practices and is already transculturated" (257-258). While Bish exudes this self-assuredness, Tara finally comes to terms with the global world, Bish's role in it, and, indirectly, her place in the world. Technology seems to have facilitated cultural connections. This is the reality of the global technological world and culture. Nothing is exempt from the influence of technology. This also connects Tara to Tara Lata and the bombing of her house, and the later bombing which takes Dr. Victoria Khanna's life. This has enabled Bish, and, therefore, Tara, Victoria and Yash Khanna to become 'transnational postcolonial parasites' (this term has already been discussed in section I of this chapter), where the immigrant guest is a parasite on the host, and the former survives off the latter. Nayar further appendages another qualifier to the parasite, "cultural," and refers to the intervention that the parasite makes initiating a new "order" (*Postcolonialism* 183-184). Returning to the already discussed insider-outsider paradigm, the 'Third World' parasite, thus, becomes an insider to mainstream America. Therefore, one cannot shear off Bish or Tara's American identity. One can point out to the Bay Area that Tara describes in both

Desirable Daughters and *The Tree Bride* as a non-European/Western/American parasitic instance of the 'Third World.'

But the moot point is how has Tara's narrative become a part of her cosmopolitan parasitic self? This question arises because Tara condemns in 'her' postcolonial history the corrosive role of Western imperialism. So, how does Tara exempt herself from conniving with the imperialistic condition in the midst of which she is situated? Therefore, one would like to explore her allegiances or affiliations in constructing her identity. After all, her narrative of the Tree Bride and that of her 'spiritual' invincibility in the face of British colonial onslaughts is what Tara chooses to connect with, and to show her membership with a cultural community of homeland beliefs and cultural practices. Tara openly declares that their family, "beginning with Jai Krishna Gangooly, father of the Tree Bride" had "never joined forces with the truly Westernized, progressive traditions of nineteenth-century Bengal," the Brahmo-Samaj, and had retained their Arya-Samaj "anti-secular" "piety" (43). "For this," Tara says, "I am unapologetic" (43).

But, one finds Tara completely supporting Bish's technological successes in the "*global consumer culture*" which conspires with "domination, power and subjugation" the rule of the 'First World' over the 'Third World' (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 192-193, italics in original). Globalized capital is not simply to do with the geopolitical economy but is a party to making 'native' culture hybridized "where the European component dominates" (195). This leads to 'glocalization' and the extension of "colonialism's practice of 'unifying' the world under a European umbrella by ignoring difference, local cultures and native traditions" (194). Tara and Bish's belief in the theory of convergences without addressing these issues make Tara's narrative of quest for her roots a biased one. While focusing on her cultural connections, Tara is oblivious

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to hegemonic practices of the space she is located in. Tara's perspective, therefore, is coloured with racist ideology and hegemony. What, therefore, has come to the fore is the fact that, as Hardt and Negri point out in *Empire*, contemporary 'Empire' gobbles up binaries and differences in its 'universal' agenda of one-directional capitalistic profit . The tentacles of globalization are hidden and far too many.

Re-Orientalism

Tara's narrative suits this global narrative. Hers is an 'ethnofiction' like that of "*postcolonial writers*" who "*demonstrate their affiliation (or disjunction) with any nation-space through a process of cultural belonging where markers of authenticity, rootedness, realist accounts of their cultural practices . . . underscore their location, even when they are not physically rooted in 'their' home/land"* (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 141, italics in original). Tara thereby shapes herself as a postcolonial Indian. But, Tara becomes, in being the Tree Bride's progeny, an exotic like the Tree Bride. Oriental representations in oriental images describe the Tree Bride. This is what Lisa Lau has termed as the project of 're-orientalism' by contemporary postcolonials.

Tara's 'parergonal space,' one that configures her identity is the American spatio-temporal location.[11] Tara is preoccupied with trying to bridge the chasm that is between her adopted land and her homeland. Mukherjee seems to hint at this possibility with the fluidity of information, technology, and communication in the context of globalization and transculturation. Everything seems to be answered by global convergences. Tara's gliding in and out of marriage is shown to be a very convenient and smooth process with only a glib rationalization. Trying to understand her Indian beliefs and trying to understand Bish seem to her the one and the same.

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Unlocking her ‘area code,’ or the gaps in the information and understanding between Bish and herself, the individual identity (American) that she sought from her divorce and the collective identity (Indian) with which she re-connects in Bish and her cultural narrative of the Tree Bride, are all attributed to Tara’s belief in connections over spaces, borders and beliefs. In accepting the fact that the Tree Bride’s soul has been “dangling between worlds, waiting to be released to the Abode of Ancestors” (Stephen 136), one detects Tara’s own in-between position which has sought to find a stable place and identification. Tara seems to finally find peace in letting Rabi perform the funeral rites (as per the instructions/urgings of the ghost of the Tree Bride) to enable the soul of her great-great aunt attain liberation. “We have no corpse of the Tree Bride. Instead we have a raffia figure the head funeral priest’s assistants have made as a proxy. A proxy-soul for a proxy-bride” (292).

Challenging binaries, Mukherjee etches a diasporic cosmopolitan narrative. The author has attempted a graphic picture of the Indian Bengali encounter with colonial Britain. In doing so, Mukherjee becomes a part of the diasporic literary sub-genre of re-orientalism. Lau says, “[W]e have the curious case in which the positionality of the powerful is simultaneously that of the insider and outsider, where the representing power can be simultaneously self and other” (572). Both Mukherjee and her protagonist, Tara, in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are located as insiders and outsiders, described in the “relationship of the powerful speaking for and representing the other, who is all but consigned to subalternism” (572). What re-orientalism perpetuates are the images of the Oriental and more importantly, the possibility of representing “a select minority as representative of the diverse majority” (573). As a result, such diasporic narratives are sometimes deliberately under duress of demonstrating the South Asian features, or an “anxiety of Indianness” as

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contended by Meenakshi Mukherjee (171-172). The resultant effect is the prevalence of stereotypes ignoring the complexities of an individual human being, "Like all stereotypes, this depiction contains partial truths but omits significant conditions, subtleties and differences" (Lau 583). Lau also points out to an important feature of such novels, that of "blurring the boundaries between fiction and autobiography," "enabling a very skewed representation to be mainstreamed by virtue of possessing a 'truth claim'" (585). Bharati Mukherjee has time and again spoken of her immigrant condition which has contributed to the understanding of the immigrant predicament in the new culture. However, in portraying an upper caste and upper class Bengali immigrant's depiction of a colonial encounter way back in the nineteenth century within the narration of the contemporary imperialism of the West/ America, Mukherjee has chosen a few episodes out of the vastly diversified Indian socio-cultural-geographic spaces. One can discern an unmasking of certain colonial attitudes towards the world in Mukherjee. One also notices, as Stanley Stephen remarks, "Mukherjee does not fail to exoticize the beauty of Sunder Bans which sounds like a page from a tourists' brochure" (142).

IV

Conclusion

Tara is part of a globalizing-globalized process, where binaries do not always hold. The influence of global technology on the political and the transcultural deconstructs the difference between the national and that which is 'not national,' producing rather the cultural citizen. In *Desirable Daughters*, in Parvati's letter to Tara, Tara talks of this cultural membership in the sense of mongrelisation: "A few

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weeks in Bombay and believe me, you lose all sense of who you are and where you came from. We're getting to be mongrelised as you Americans . . ." (108).

Be it in India or in the U.S., Mukherjee seems to suggest the emergence of a cosmopolitanism and a cultural membership which acknowledges an awareness of a broader world, where 'purity' does not get privileged. A cosmopolitan is not defined or constrained by borders. Cosmopolitanism evokes what Amartya Sen argues against Samuel Huntington's thesis of the 'clash of civilizations' when he says,

> civilisational categories are far from clear-cut, and the simulated history that goes with the thesis of clashing civilisations construct[s] a make-belief [*sic*] world of thoroughly hardened contrasts (partly by ignoring the heterogeneities within each culture) and also ignor[ing] historical interactions between them. (qtd. in Srikanth 17)

Privileging cosmopolitanism over humanism, Srikanth points out, Appiah makes a "crucial distinction" between the two "in an age of globalization: 'The humanist requires us to put our differences aside; the cosmopolitan insists that it is the differences we bring to the table that make it rewarding to interact at all'" (21). Tara's character shows the complexity of historical convergences that 'diasporic cosmopolitanism' advocates. Srikanth further quotes Appiah, "The cosmopolitan celebrates the fact that there are *different* local human ways of being" (22, emphasis in original). Cosmopolitanism, referred to as 'reticulate consciousness' by Vinay Dharwadker, "begins perhaps in the appreciation of traumas other than one's own" (Srikanth 28).[12] Tara and Andy in *Desirable Daughters* share such a relationship. What comes to the fore is the empathy that could be shared between peoples or communities that can bring about the cosmopolitan attitude.

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In the reunion with Tara, when Bish talks about his failure in his marriage, for to him, "Marriage is man's manifest dharma, his test, his duty, the outer sign of his inner strength and harmony," it is the 'mature' Tara who perceives such notions to be fixed in "the ancestral long-ago" (*Desirable Daughters* 266). Today, she understands such fixities to be an "illusion" (266). Tara understands that Bish is caught in the replay of "born-again traditionalists like Jai Krishna Gangooly versus Westernized progressives like Keshub Mitter" (267). Tara as a cosmopolitan, is in a position to help Bish understand himself. Tara deduces,

> if only I could bend it [Bish's "rectitude"] or dent it just a little bit, he might have been the only man for me. I think we recognized that. All we had to do was reach across an ever-narrowing gulch. He would know to include me in his world; I would know not to expect from him things he couldn't deliver. (268)

This is the potential expansion of Tara and Bish's world, embracing each other's differences, expectations and flaws to carve a broad cosmopolitan worldview.

Together it problematizes the insider-outsider dimension of Tara's identity in *Desirable Daughters*. As Mukherjee puts it, "Tara, the thirty-six-year-old narrator, is living in a world where East is East, West is West is no longer possible because of globalization, art, culture, trade" (Krasny 123). Tara is a postnational. Her relationship with Andy is a case in point: "We were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on. . . . Something in me (and it's not hard to figure out where) responded to those incongruities. The Buddhism, the placidity, the meditative streak, and the brute force. . ." (77). Circumstances, choices and priorities take a postnational cosmopolitan framework, not 'national.' For Tara in the US it may be a

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celebration of ethnic differences in multicultural America. It is also the convergences of history, not simply a linear narration of a particular nation: "As she learns more about her heritage, Tara experiences historical convergences as past events begin to impact her personal life" (Edwards, *Conversations* xviii). Responding to a question if her characterization borders on melodrama, Mukherjee replies that for immigrants life is mainly characterized by "messy intensity, messy agony. And that it's an unfortunate superior way of dismissing what more and more Californians and New Yorkers, for example, are experiencing every day. Ethnic lives are full of great heights and great lows" (Krasny129).

In *Desirable* Daughters, at some places, certain things do not fit. Tara's reference to her convent school education is a constant refrain in the novel. But, she totally discounts her postgraduate degree that she had pursued in India and, thereby, its influences. Another instance is the reference to Parvati's long handwritten letter to Tara. On one side, the author is talking of twenty-first century technology, on the other, there is Parvati who does not use 'e-mails,' and rather prefers the expensive transnational phone calls and the 'snail mail.' Had there been such access, the discovery of Chris Dey, the impostor and not the real one, would not have taken so much time. Much tragedy, the murder of the real Chris Dey, the death of Ron Dey, the bomb blast of Tara's house, might have been avoided. Here the writing seems to be a bit contrived.

While reviewing Mukherjee's novel, Luan Gaines sharply criticizes Mukherjee:

> The author has ended up writing a book with typically American feminist ideas about housewives, sexuality and worth . . . the author ends up with a nearly familiar tale of female victimhood and females on the verge of personal

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> enlightenment and freedom from oppressive well-meaning husbands. (qtd. in Vandana Singh, 214).

While this is a relevant observation and American feminism is privileged in the novel, Gaines' perception is perhaps too narrow a view of the problem. Female identity is a preoccupation in *Desirable Daughters*, but the different interwoven strands of the insider-outsider complexity, globalization, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism transcend the feminism of the protagonist. One understands Tara and Padma as part of that transnationalism which feeds on differences of distance, time and context that makes space for their own culture and identity. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel contends it is important to note that states emphasize the "more informal or subjective processes by which minority communities interact with dominant views of belonging" ("Between Mosaic and Melting Pot" 2). "This," she asserts, "gives particular salience to the idea of cultural citizenship; as a concept that gestures to the private domain of citizenship, it brings into focus the people's emotional ties or psychological experiences of belonging, or non-belonging, to the nation" (2).

Desirable Daughters deals particularly with the psychological upheavals that the three daughters/ sisters undergo to understand their traditional/national upbringing in a framework of the world which has become globalized and is still globalizing, creating interventions in linear narratives of culture and history. Gabriel, in further deliberating on cultural citizenship, refers to "scholars like Katharyne Mithcell who asserts that 'although immigrants may become legal citizens through a prescribed, state-regulated path, immigrants become *cultural* citizens only through a reflexive set of formative and locally constructed processes'" (2, emphasis in original). Gabriel continues, "This approach to citizenship also echoes Paul Gilroy's distinction in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* between 'merely formal citizenship of the

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national community provided by its laws and the more substantive membership which derives from the historic ties of language, custom and race'" (2).

Tara in *The Tree Bride* achieves cultural citizenship in 'stories.' Mukherjee weaves all the stories in a larger story, that of the epigraph of the novel:

All kings must see hell at least once.

Hence you have for a little while

been subjected to this great sorrow.

This quotation from the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*, Chapter XCVII, translated by Chakravarthi V. Narasimhan (epigraph), refers to the eldest Pandava brother, Yuddhisthira having had to see hell, even being the adorer of righteousness. Stephen comments that it is 'intertextuality' which Julia Kristeva advocated that surfaces in such weaving of narratives (140). Further, as Stephen rightly points out, "The entire text is subsumed in the aura of Hindu Philosophy and Mythology" (140). Tara's separation from Bish, her escape from two fatal bomb blasts of which the target was Tara herself, and her crisis in identity seem to be collectively Tara's 'hell,' as Bish's is his severe injuries in trying to save Tara in the second bomb blast. At the end of Tara's narrative, Tara seems to fulfil her duty with the cremation of her ancestor, Tara Lata Gangooly. One wonders what other symbolic cremation has Tara initiated. Is it her crisis in her identity, which straddled many worlds, geographically, politically, socially, culturally, religiously, and metaphysically? Does it mean that Tara is finally at peace with who she is: Bish's wife again; this time a wife who is not coerced to be subservient to or a subaltern to her Indian husband? Mukherjee seems to suggest that an immigrant's acculturation with the adopted land

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is an imperative, to arrive at a better interpretation of the new identity that gets constructed. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel argues that “a nuanced reading of her [Mukherjee’s] texts and an unpacking of her terminology will reveal that Mukherjee has not been wholly uncritical of dominant ideologies in her literary and cultural imagining of the American nation” (“Between Mosaic and Melting Pot” 1). Mukherjee has openly declaimed her defiance of multicultural practices which sustain ethnic differences, or differences between the mainstream white/Euro-America and other US immigrants. But, as is seen in both *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*, contemporary totalizing practices that privilege American multinational socio-economic-political ventures, couched in terms of globalization, transnationalism and transculturation, are inextricably in league with Tara’s narrative in both the novels. To end where it all had its beginning, it is an American roots search that Tara indulges in from a location of a cosmopolitan comfort zone.

Notes

[1] Kymlicka and Miller provide some of the newer perspectives on citizenship that comprise the discourse of citizenship today.

[2] The complex connections between identity formation and nationality are elaborately discussed in Pecora’s *Nations and Identities: Classic Readings*.

[3] The term “receiving society” is used by Sahoo and Maharaj 1:13.

[4] Bharati Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2003). All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

[5] Nayar expands on the issue of the queer/homosexual and diaspora in *Postcolonialism* 127-133.

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[6] Manuel Castell's trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* deals exhaustively on the negative aspects of globalization and transnationalism.

[7] Bharati Mukherjee, *Desirable Daughters* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2003). All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

[8] The term, "postcolonial reclamation" is used here following Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 139.

[9] G. Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* deals extensively with Macaulay and his strategies of education in India.

[10] "Military-political conquest and domination were accompanied, in all cases, by a close *study* of native cultures: anthropological-ethnographic studies, codification of native laws and detailed documentation of native histories and arts, to produce a colonial archive of knowledge about the natives. Finally, having acquired in-depth knowledge of native cultures, the colonial power proceeded to modify and control the social and cultural practices and beliefs of the natives in the guise of 'reform' and 'welfare.'" (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 2, italics in original)

Vertie Treadwell did the same.

[11] 'Parergonal' is defined as "the frames of a work" (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 169).

[12] Srikanth describes reticulate consciousness as "an awareness of oneself as part of an extensive network of the globe's inhabitants" (10).

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

This chapter collates the issues discussed in the thesis in an attempt to highlight the findings and to show the direction for further research. Section 1 of the chapter presents a brief summary of each chapter which is followed by significant aspects that have shaped the thesis, sometimes dwelling on a particular novel much more than the others, as necessitated in this concluding chapter. Section 2 briefly critiques Bharati Mukherjee as a writer and reviews the questions that have directed the explorations of this thesis.

The study has endeavoured to explore the narratives of the immigrant protagonists in Bharati Mukherjee's fiction exemplifying different stages of acculturation in the trajectory of the cultural reconstruction of the immigrant identity. It has set into relief the 'in-between' conditions that surface from the diasporic situation. This 'middle passage' is seen as 'liminality' in chapter 3. The negotiations that take place at this stage between the homeland moorings and the imperious demands of interacting with the mainstream are explored in chapter 4. In chapter 5, the interface between the adopted land and the homeland is set against the background of contemporary geo-politics. From a diasporic sensibility the immigrant's identity takes on the contours of a cosmopolitan consciousness in the thoroughly globalized situation of the 'First World.' A neo-colonialism in the garb of globalization and a continuing imperialism in the form of Western/American capitalistic economy have pervaded 'Third World' economies. Postcolonial theory addresses these issues and focuses on the collusions that take place to sustain a racially nuanced politics of power. Once termed as 'colonialism,' this power in

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today's world is seen as celebrating multicultural differences that construe another universalizing 'Empire.' This new imperialism has emerged out of the incessant global flows of culture and capital facilitated by rapid technological advancements. The context of centre and periphery has perhaps changed but the dynamics of power and subjugation have remained the same.

I

A Summary of the Chapters

The objective of this thesis is to try to show the dynamics of identity and to highlight the matrix of culture and politics against the backdrop of neo-colonialism and show the complexities of representation and choices in a cosmopolitan liminality. The thesis took as its hypothesis the imperative of cultural reconstruction by immigrants in the new country of relocation. It essayed to highlight the fluidity of culture. It showed how the 'Third World' postcolonial immigrant interacts with the 'First World' in the new circumstances of the information technology revolution and its consequent borderlessness. Its other objective was to show how the immigrants look back upon the homeland, and consciously and unconsciously re-interpret its culture, after having encountered a different set of beliefs and circumstances in the new community and context. To fulfil this objective, the study has taken the selected novels of Bharati Mukherjee. These particular works of Mukherjee see culture's hybridity as an opportunity for meeting new frontiers, and in doing so, valorize the 'First World' as a space for individual fulfilment. A brief summary of the chapters follow to attest to the explorations of the thesis.

While the first chapter is an introduction to the thesis as such, Chapter 2, "Theoretical Framework and Issues" is an elucidation of the theoretical framework

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that structures the argument of the thesis. It points out the understanding that the colonial ideology still finds its extant place in the contemporary world. The centre and periphery binary is manifested in a global imperialism of control, inequality and distorted representation. Orientalism is prevalent in the garb of re-orientalism. The discourse of the native and the Other still continues in pernicious ways. The rapid hybridization of identity does not exclude the fact that there is still a coercion to assimilate into the dominant culture. The multicultural practices of the United States may have allowed resistance to the 'melting-pot,' but the same multiculturalism sustains the differences between the dominant and the marginal. Bharati Mukherjee has tried to dislodge this binary of 'us' and 'them' by staking her claim to an unhyphenated identity as an 'American.' Being an immigrant herself and a writer who focuses primarily on the immigrant nation that America is, Mukherjee has embraced transformations as necessary requisite for surviving the 'unhousement' in the process of immigration and settling down in a new land. Mukherjee's concept of immigrant acculturation has undergone changes over the years. The writer now believes that assimilation is not necessary in a transnational globalized world. No doubt, the Indian Americans have established themselves in various fields to have attained the accolade of 'model minority,' yet, the required class and the consequent cosmopolitanism are available only for a very few. Mukherjee's works primarily serve as a platform for these few. As culture is reconstructed to fit the circumstances of mundane life, even at the cost of violence, Mukherjee highlights the expansion of the identity in these cultural transactions, and plays down the need to retain the ethnic and collective identity. In this, postcolonial critics have found Mukherjee yielding to the hegemony of the West, while Mukherjee has severely criticized the assumptions of postcolonial theorists and their failure to signify the importance of individuality.

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Chapter 3, "Arriving at the Liminal" discusses two novels and investigates the 'in-between' space of liminality that surfaces in the juxtaposition of two cultures as the immigrant arrives in the new land. Both the protagonists, Tara and Dimple in *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* respectively, incline towards assimilation with mainstream America, situating India adversely in the reconstruction of their new identity. While Tara finds a dilapidated Calcutta in the erosion of upper class dominance and the rise of communism on her much-awaited return home, Dimple finds the regressive cultural practices of India being carried over to America, binding her to the role of the Indian wife. Tara desperately seeks to return 'home' to America, to her American husband, and Dimple murders her husband in an act of striking at the root of all fetters of her desires. In both the novels, the liminal identities of the protagonists finally 'arrive' at an understanding that their futures lay with America.

Mukherjee clearly perceives America to be a land promising better conditions for claiming one's individuality and freedom. In this, Mukherjee's perspective merges with that of the Western agenda of neo-imperialism. There are sweeping generalizations, ignoring nuanced complexities, that paint a picture of India as a postcolonial society that restricts individual agency and self-fulfilment. While this may not be completely untrue, it may yet be seen that what Mukherjee reads as freedom in America, can be also be read as colluding with the Western grand narrative of modernity and enlightenment. Thus, Mukherjee seems to project only one discourse, marginalizing all other narratives that the East has in its history and ethos, contaminated or not by colonization.

Chapter 4, "Negotiating the Interstitial" explores the interstitial negotiations that occur in the process of re-interpreting a new culture of the receiver society in which the immigrant finds herself. Paradoxically, the eponymous protagonist, Jasmine,

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employs homeland beliefs, myths, and fate to dislodge the baggage of the past and 'travel light' into the future. Gender and violence work as agency in this process of creating opportunities for the present. The 'idea of America' prods Jasmine to direct her course to realize her desire for an individual self, while subverting patriarchy and rigid traditions. As names for her change, there is a simultaneous re-invention of identity in her gradual identification with the American mainstream.

In this representative novel, used in the curriculum for 'multicultural studies' in the US, Mukherjee positions India and America as two opposite sites, the former reduced to one of regressive traditions and suffocation of individuality. This is tantamount to a colonial representation of India as backward and oppressive, desperately lacking the technological modernity of the West, and freedom for its women that Western feminists advocate. Mukherjee chooses to select certain myths and cultural practices of India which equip an 'exotic' Jasmine to make her way through new meanings of quotidian existence. Jasmine appropriates to her convenience her past beliefs to reorient herself to an exciting future that only, as Mukherjee seems to uphold, the US is able to facilitate. The American frontier myth is Jasmine's justification for leaving behind responsibilities to claim a future of individual fulfilment.

Chapter 5, "Becoming a Cultural Citizen" traces diasporic sensibility, as elucidated in chapters 3 and 4, that inclines towards the formation of a 'cultural citizen' within the matrices of globalization, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. The trajectory of the cultural reconstruction of the immigrant identity that Mukherjee's narratives develop, as explored in this thesis, finally seems to converge on the appropriation of 'Third World' homeland beliefs in the 'First World' space to carve an identity that is exotic as well as cosmopolitan. Positing a theory of 'convergences'

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(which seems suspiciously like 'coincidence') the writer negates the necessity of total assimilation of the protagonists with the mainstream as seen in this chapter. It follows that Mukherjee takes cognizance of contemporary geopolitics and the formidable function of technology in the dissemination of information. This is in marked contrast to the 'assimilation' theory vouched by Mukherjee as seen in chapters 3 and 4. But, while Mukherjee appears to advocate 'cultural citizenship,' which constitutes 'cultural' membership of the immigrant with homeland community and 'legal' citizenship of the new country, Tara the protagonist in *Desirable Daughters* and also in *The Tree Bride*, seems to collude with the imperialist agenda by 're-orientalizing' the non-Western native space to become a cultural citizen. The thesis, therefore, 'unmasks the colonial' (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 19) that stretches from Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* published way back in 1971 to the one published in 2004, *The Tree Bride*.

The following sections take a brief look at the major issues that this study attempts to formulate:

"Unmasking the Colonial"

Notions of returning to an original/ pure/ fixed culture are abandoned for fluidity, liminality, interstitiality and the possibility of cultural citizenship. Bhabha's 'Third Space of enunciation' allows such an acknowledgement of cultural identity as a hybrid, temporal flow. Using the praxis of Cultural Studies and Postcolonial theory, this thesis has examined colonial tendencies in the politics of identity and its reconstruction. What has emerged is the privileging of the ideology of the West in the hegemony of cultural imperialism. The invisible locus of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the West and its tentacles have spread over

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the entire world (Nayar, *Postcolonialism* 3), especially making the Third World economies a soft target and a ready market. Networking transculturally has dissolved national borders while the occurrence of 9/11 has policed new binaries in the United States of America. The postcolonial emphasis on ambivalence and hybridity might have received a blow but what cannot be denied is the porosity of culture that this thesis has taken as an indispensable prop in delineating the transformations of the identity of the Indian immigrant in the United States.

The full-length critical reading of the texts in chapters 3, 4 and 5 have engaged in a contrapuntal exercise, a "catachrestic: reading between the lines" which reveals the diasporic postcolonial's 're-orientalism'(Bhabha, *Location* 269). The novels, therefore, no doubt, celebrate Mukherjee's "exuberance of immigration," but at the same time they appropriate the Other in a consuming neo-imperial agenda to celebrate cosmopolitan cultural citizenship. Class becomes a primary facilitator for the protagonists who do not need to exact a living as migrant labourers. Technology equips the protagonists to narrow down geographical distance as also to spread their allegiance to non-national territorial space. The postcolonial cosmopolitan can, therefore, seek meanings in the ethics of postnationalism, as discussed in chapter 5, section 1.

Agency

Mukherjee's agency is that of individual identity. No doubt, it makes her female protagonist realize their individual selves and resist conflation with the collective. *Jasmine* is a conspicuous instance of this. Even *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* aspire towards breaking the confinements of the collective to support a quest for the individual self. But, Mukherjee seems to find this agency possible only on a 'First

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World' platform. In this, it reflects the colonial representation of the non-European as weak and yielding to compromises. Liminality does allow wresting control from flux to invent new identities, and negotiations in cultural encounters permit choices of reconstruction of culture. Both situations have been dealt with in chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The protagonists in the novels explored in these chapters do not finally remain passive individuals, but they achieve this only by a process of assimilation or moving towards assimilation with the mainstream. That is the only way Mukherjee seems to endorse agency.

Loss and Gain of the Immigrant Identity

As has been demonstrated, Bharati Mukherjee privileges an American ethos over 'Third World' postcolonial culture. What now becomes apparent is that in the immigrant nation of the US, those that are not seemingly marginalized are the cosmopolitans. And cosmopolitanism has invariably to do with class. An upper class postcolonial migrant only, like Mukherjee, or Tara or Bish in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* can be at par with the mainstream or have some impact on it. Mukherjee's narratives do not seem to take into account this vital factor in the reconstruction of the immigrant identity. A convenient forgetting of the ethnic identity by Mukherjee's characters at appropriate moments to further the development of the self thus seems to be compromised ethically. An irreplaceable loss occurs. This is the erasure of one's self.

Mukherjee's description of Dimple or of Jasmine is the author's inability to find another way out except by forgetting or breaking off from one's roots to participate in the host land's socio-economic-political dynamics. Ironically, and this shows a rather surprising trajectory in Mukherjee's oeuvre, in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree*

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Bride the theme of 'return to roots' predominates. Mukherjee's philosophy or worldview changes with the geopolitical transformations. True, that one can have the leisure of multiculturalism. While Mukherjee may not vouch for multicultural policies of sustaining difference, the US practises multiculturalism in its civil society agenda. In such a case, one cannot but work within the dynamics of reality.

Further, Mukherjee believes in reinventing oneself, which is a 'gain' for her. If there is a gain, then it is in becoming partially American, as is shown by the protagonists in asserting their individuality and becoming American. Jasmine becomes an individual by adopting Americanization. Does this mean that individuality can be retained only with erasure of the ethnic Indian self? Mukherjee seems to see hybridity as a gain, but there is a difference in how she perceives it and how the postcolonial critics perceive it; they find empowerment and agency in hybridity. For Mukherjee it results in assimilation. For the postcolonialists, it helps resistance to colonial binaries, and helps recovery and reinscription.

The Pursuit of the 'American Dream'

Mukherjee seems to suggest that Americanization implies a break from the past which is imbued with homeland beliefs. All Mukherjee's protagonists as discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5 are in pursuit of the 'American dream.' This involves the common motif of 'travelling light' by disbanding the weight of traditions, customs and collectiveness. A quest for America is equated with a quest for individual identity. While America is equated with advanced technology, glamour and the adventure of the frontier, a glance at the past and that to India shows 'Third World' backwardness. If there is at all an importance given to the homeland, then it is as a region representing the exotic: a true sign of Mukherjee's re-orientalism.

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Representation of Space and Place

Looking through the lens of postcolonial theory, the protagonists in Mukherjee's works represent the homeland space much in contrast to the adopted country. They look at India almost in distaste, focussing on the unflattering and unbecoming features of the country, technologically backward and culturally steeped in traditions. Besides, to speak of *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*, Mukherjee does not bring up the question of the restoration of the Mist mansions, but abandons the ruins showing no serious and responsible fallout of Tara's search for roots. One wonders what would have been Tara's reaction had the Mist mansions been aristocratically maintained heritage museums. Tara is happy to be only connected with the 'glorious' narrative of the Tree Bride. Mist Mahal becomes an object and finally a political play for conquest.

Gender and Sexuality

The analysis of Mukherjee's texts present the female protagonists as the carriers of culture, who as immigrants, are at the crossroads of adopting a new culture, or adapting to another. There is a relentless spurning as well as appropriating of traditions by the protagonists and an equally persistent quest for individual identity and fulfilment of individual desires. The 'American dream' prods them to seek in America what India could not and cannot give. Mukherjee casts an essentialized orthodox identity for those who are not Americanized. Tara's sisters in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are entrapped by their Indianness, and subdued by patriarchy (in case of Parvati) and tradition (in case of Padma). Only Tara shows a liberating self, because she has identified with American feminist beliefs. All the women in India are shown to be in the grip of patriarchy, as is Tara's mother in *The*

Tiger's Daughter, in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*. In *Wife*, Dimple feels worn out by this supplication to her husband. In *Jasmine*, Jasmine's grandmother maintains control over the family, and Jasmine's mother is physically abused by the father. However, it must be granted that there is a subtle but considerably weak show of agency by these women from their positions of subservience and subalterns. But if they are compared to Mother Ripplemeyer or Lillian Gordon in *Jasmine*, both American, the Indian women are definitely very short on individual agency to rise above suppression and male dominance. Through such representations Mukherjee, no doubt, gives a picture of the stereotypical Indian woman, thereby setting "up the inevitable dichotomy of oppressive East and liberating West" (Srikanth 131). As Srikanth insightfully puts it, "East and West need not be seen only as oppositions of culture, as though each space represented an unchanging set of circumstances. Rather, it is possible to look for other forces impinging on" the decisions of characters and their lives (132). Such alternatives are missing in Mukherjee.

The analyses of the female protagonists as portrayed in the novels taken up for study in chapters 3, 4 and 5 reflect Mukherjee celebrating modernity, individuality and freedom as necessarily significant markers of female identity, while eschewing religion, spirituality, tradition and community/collective allegiance as secondary to the former set of signifiers. This shows an inclination towards white/Western feminist valorizations, and the subservience of 'Third World' postcolonial cultural beliefs.

The Queer in Postcolonial Theory

Mukherjee brings 'queer' studies into the ambit of her narratives. Setting Rabi's homosexuality against his father's normative Indian heterosexuality, Mukherjee has

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problematized a very important issue of 'Third World' postcolonial queer movement in the arena of the 'First World.' However, Mukherjee seems to imply that Rabi's upbringing in the United States/ the West erases the problems that his queerness could pose. Besides, his belonging to the upper stratum of society enables his admission into a school that facilitates the smooth acceptance of his situation. On the other hand, it is only when Tara (in *Desirable Daughters*) is in India with Rabi that his homosexuality poses a problem. Rabi's Westernized rearing again comes to the fore when he is shown to sport a broad outlook in appreciating some Indian monks as 'gay.' In this, as in much else, Mukherjee valorizes the West as against the East.

Nation and Nationalism

Mukherjee's oeuvre associates itself both with the Indian nation by virtue of it being diasporic, and with the American nation by advocating the 'idea of America.' Story-telling takes an important role in Mukherjee's works, especially in the form of recalling the past, investing in religion, myths, and traditional beliefs, thus charting out an Indian nation distinct from that of America. Cultural memory takes centre stage in the immigrant encounter with the adopted land, and for the postcolonial immigrant, Mukherjee traces the colonial legacies in the use of the English language and other cultural practices. The English language is employed by Mukherjee to bring a native culture to the West, and thus assert agency in the dominant ideology of a grand narrative of the West. Also, there is, as must be acknowledged, an attempt to reclaim a past before colonization, as is seen in the depiction of Sunderbans (Chapter 5 of the thesis). Besides, there is an attempt to subvert 'colonial' history by inquiring into the role of the British underlings, and the conspirers of the Empire and of the Indian national movement, as depicted in *The Tree Bride*. But, in Mukherjee's works as studied in this thesis, binaries as 'us' and 'them'

survive, the glamour of the British ‘adventure’ is retained, and ‘colonial’ instruments/frames of perception for discovery, conquest or enlightenment are conveniently used. Most intriguingly, Mukherjee lets her protagonist Tara, in chapter 5 of the thesis, to reclaim a national and personal history which has its conception from around the time of Western colonization. This begs the question that there is no alternate history for Tara or for India, besides that of the history of the Empire. Self-determination is shaped by the Other, and here it is the colonial ‘other.’

But, at the very juncture of representing the ‘Indian’ to the ‘American,’ Mukherjee conflates the personal with the collective and thus makes an individual immigrant narrative representative of the community, ignoring the imperial hegemony of the West. As Srikanth comments while discussing “reductive representations” in fiction, “one of the strongest criticisms among South Asian readers of Bharati Mukherjee’s works is that her characters reproduce dominant-culture stereotypes . . . The exercise of imaginative power [of writers] is the issue at hand” (153-154).

The ‘novel’ is integral to the narration of the nation, as elucidated so famously in Timothy Brennan’s essay, “The National Longing for Form”:

> It was the *novel* that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the “one, yet many” of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles. Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility. But it did much more than that. Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation. (qtd. in Dirlik, “Literature/Identity” 215, italics in original)

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Mukherjee succeeds in representing diversity within the Indian Bengali context by representing the responses of different protagonists to the immigrant predicament located in different socio-cultural-historical contexts. But, the oversight seems to be in making it representative of India as a whole.

Violence, a Leitmotif

In all the novels explored in this thesis there is the invariable use of violence. In the immigrant sensibility, violence has been shown to be a conduit for change and newness. If in *The Tiger's Daughter* violence is palpable in the physical space of the streets of New York and Calcutta, in *Wife* violence becomes pathological, to the extent that it consumes the entire self of the protagonist. In *Jasmine* violence structures the entire narrative. It is against violence that Jasmine's individuality and strength of character is measured. It sets into motion Jasmine's journey to the US, it complicates the journey itself and it is with violence that she begins her Americanization. Finally, it is violence that makes Bud a cripple, and urges Jasmine to abandon 'old world' duties and hasten towards a new frontier in quest of her individual desires. Transnational terror is the form given to violence in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride*. However, in the latter, the Indian colonial encounter is also included. Mukherjee, thus, draws attention to the violence that comes with transformation. Violence drives Mukherjee's plots forward and facilitates the immigrant acculturation to the host land.

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II

A Critique of Bharati Mukherjee, the Writer

Mukherjee constructs reality out of the common daily experiences of the immigrant where she endorses a necessary acculturation with the new culture. At the same time, Mukherjee situates the central role of power and agency in the location of the adopted land. This condition is problematized by the fact that the US has been at the helm of a 'new colonialism' and Mukherjee's immigrant is already a postcolonial. Therefore, what is seen is that the postcolonial suffers a double loss: in trying to marginalize her/his own ethnicity to become assimilated with the multicultural mainstream; and in trying to become a cultural citizen in collusion with US's imperialistic dynamics.

What is Mukherjee's logic? Why do her characters make the choices they do? What other way could they have behaved? In what philosophy or worldview is Mukherjee's fiction embedded? Being an immigrant herself, and becoming a naturalized citizen, how has Mukherjee's personal life influenced her fiction? Immigration to Mukherjee personally is a celebration of the reinvention of the self. What proof does she take up to show that? What meanings occur in her representation of the immigrant situation? Through the novel, Mukherjee chooses to voice the answers to these questions, which this thesis has tried to explore. But there are other questions too: How well does Mukherjee put literature to use "as a mode of learning to engage with and force change in the world" (Srikanth 13)? Does Mukherjee succeed in being able to pay, as Srikanth says, "keen attention to the complexity and nuances of the South Asian American experience" (16)? Is, one may eventually ask, Mukherjee's idealism in the 'idea of America' misplaced? How much

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of the “questions of global capitalism [that] are now routinely discussed by literary critics such as Rey Chow, Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins, and R. Radhakrishnan” figure in Mukherjee’s works (Srikanth 89)? For as Srikanth points out, “The discursive realm is continuously informed by the economic and the material. Given this reality, a literature as global in its reach as South Asian American writing can only be enriched by an understanding of the economic and political practices that link South Asia with the United States” (89).

Is Mukherjee reflecting the specificities of the present? “Following September 11, the discourse comparing the supposedly opposed civilizations of East and West seems to be confined to the domains of the cultural and the religious: modernity versus tradition, Islam versus Judeo-Christianity” (Srikanth 90). The repercussions of 9/11 do not find place in Mukherjee’s narratives except in the form of transnational terrror that has its origins in a personal history. This is a serious political oversight with even more serious ramifications. Not considering the impact of 9/11 is not considering the contemporary geopolitics that has jeopardized the potential pluralistic beliefs of an immigrant nation.

It is important, though, to mention that there are precedents to Mukherjee’s enthusiastic optimism of America as the land of fulfilment of dreams as in “ the first U.S. Congressman of Asian American descent” Dalip Singh Saund’s *Congressman from India* (1960) and Ved Mehta’s *Sound-Shadows of the New World* (1986); these two accounts speak of the facilities the US provides to the fulfilment of one’s desires and dreams, which Srikanth accounts as “uncritical acceptance of dominant-culture assumptions about the construction of selfhood” (7).

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Being a part of the South Asian American writing, Mukherjee's works definitely reiterate what Srikanth contends, that, "these texts at their best move the reader to consider why understanding the interconnectedness among nations and peoples matters, and how such understanding can be transported from the realm of literature into the material realm of politics and civic behavior" (3). But, as explained above one cannot ignore the grave oversights.

Yet, Mukherjee succeeds in her art of creative writing to expose the impossibility of rigid separateness between peoples or races or territories and boundaries, and therefore showcasing cultural porosity in constructing what is known as cultural citizenship. Even with the resurgence of the binaries of 'us' and 'them' after the 9/11 'phenomenon,' one cannot take recourse to the "antipodal frameworks: national and transnational, individual and collective, insider and outsider" (Srikanth 5), but explore the eventual reclamations of the interconnected currents of culture and humanity.

K.A.Appiah ends the introduction to his seminal book, *Cosmopolitanism* thus: "Depending on the circumstances, conversations across boundaries can be delightful, or just vexing: what they mainly are, though, is inevitable" (xxi). Bharati Mukherjee has indeed engaged many a critique in an ever-broadening 'world' of conversation.

This thesis has been an attempt to discuss identity reconstruction of immigrants through the perspective of postcolonial theory which is of direct relevance to contemporary literary studies. It reiterates the vast scope of postcolonial theory as a rich reservoir of potential thought and energy that directs human civilization to a richer experience of life for all, sans injustice, inequality and violence. As an extension of the study of cultural meanings and identity, this thesis shows the

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direction to a further exploration of the cosmopolitan identity in the ‘post’ postnational paradigm.

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