OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 10

Special Issue: 1

Month: August

Year: 2022

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 04.07.2022

Accepted: 20.08.2022

Published: 30.08.2022

Citation:
Josephin Rani, A., and P. Jeyappriya. "Diasporic Sensibility in the Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts Science and Humanities*, vol. 10, no. S1, 2022, pp. 1–11.

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v10iS1.5249

Diasporic Sensibility in the Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

A. Josephin Rani
M.Phil. Scholar in English (PT), Reg. Number: 197208EP053
Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal

Dr. P. Jeyappriya
Associate Professor & Head, Department of English and Foreign Languages
Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal

Bharati Mukherjee who is universally acknowledged as one of the prolific writers in English does significantly occupy a remarkable place in the field of English literature. Her outlook is rather cosmic and universal. She has the credit of being a humanist because she is a writer who has achieved in giving great importance to the value of humanism and brought out her feelings rather sincerely through her feelings rather sincerely through her novels and stories.

In 1963, she married Clark Blaise, a Canadian American whom she had met at the Iowa writer's workshop.

On July 27, 1940, Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta. She lived in Europe with her family for two and a half years when she was eight years old, first in London and later in Switzerland. She attended the Loreto convent in Calcutta upon her return to India. She graduated from Calcutta University with a B.A. (Hons) in English Literature in 1959. She graduated from Baroda University with an M.A. in English and Ancient Indian Civilization in 1961.

Bharati Mukherjee worked as an English lecturer at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, from 1966 to 1978, where she resided with Clark Blaise. Bharati Mukherjee received a doctorate (Ph.D.) from the University of Iowa in 1969 for her study on "The use of Indian mythology in E.M. Forster's "**A Passage to India**" and Hermann Hesse's **Siddhartha**."

Mukherjee acquired Canadian citizenship in 1972. After receiving the Canada Arts Council Award in 1973-1974, she only stayed in Calcutta for a brief period of time. She oversaw the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute in New Delhi in 1976–1977 after receiving the Shastri Indo–Canadian Award.

Mukherjee and Clark Blaise relocated to Toronto in 1978 from Montreal. They left Toronto for the United States in 1980 because Mukherjee could no longer stand the racial prejudice that pervaded Canada. Mukherjee taught at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs.

She subsequently moved through a number of teaching positions at Queen's College, Columbia University, and the City University of New York in the USA. She acquired American citizenship in 1988.

She has been a resident of San Francisco since 1988 and a professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Bharati Mukherjee's writings include six novels, two anthologies of short stories, and two nonfiction books co-published with Clark Blaise. **Days and Nights in Calcutta,** published in 1977, describes their year-long travels around the city; **On the Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India** Tragedy, published in 1987, includes portraits of the 329 people who perished in the Sikh terrorist-caused crash of the Air India plane in Ireland in June 1985, in addition to numerous journalistic articles and interviews.

While in Canada, Bharati Mukherjee published two novels, **The Tiger's Daughter** in 1971 and Wife in 1975. She also co-authored a book of memoirs with her husband, entitled **Days and Nights in Calcutta** (1977), on their year-long stay in India in 1973-74, after a fire in their Montreal home.

Other writings in Canada included articles on civil rights, such as "**An Invisible Woman"** and a few short stories, which were later, published in the collection Darkness (1985). Another collaborative effort with her husband was published in the U.S.A. **The sorrow and the Terror** (1987), **The 1985 Crash of the Air Plane Kanishka**, travelling from Toronto to Bombay. Mukherjee's collection of short stories, **The Middleman and Other Stories** (1988) have won critical recognition and awards subsequently there has been one more novel **Jasmine**.

Mukherjee's fiction can be divided into three phases, the early phase before she settled down in the U.S., during which she published the first two novels, **The Tiger's Daughter** (1971) and **Wife** (1975); then the middle phase in which she published two collections of short stories and a novel-Darkness-Stories (1985). The Middleman & Other Stories (1988), and the novel **Jasmine** (1989); and finally her two most recent novels; the holder of the World (1993) and **Leave It to Me** (1997). In her attempt to 'appropriate' the American language and extend the American mainstream, she redefines the nature of Americanness and what constitutes 'Americans'.

There is a common theme of difference—difference on the basis of culture, religion, race, sexual orientation, and economic class—that connects Mukherjee's eight fiction works. In the modern world where her stories are situated, a variety of changes—damaging effects of colonialism, migration, incidents of violence and prejudice, and experiences with cultural otherness—can result in what Stuart Hall refers to as the "interior expropriation of cultural identity."

Bharati Mukherjee writes mainly about Asian immigrants to North America. These characters, have different gods. And they come from different nations than earlier immigrants from Europe, Instead of trying to fit in, they alter the country's appearance and psychological makeup. More precisely they disrupt the milieu they have chosen to inhabit, and in the process they make the American come in contact with uncomfortable, drive them away or even provoke them to violence. The uniqueness of many of Mukherjee's short stories and of her novel **Jasmine** lies in their reversal, even denial of the standard narrative about the assimilation of immigrants to America.

As a writer, Bharati Mukherjee considers herself the repository and exponent of experiences made possible by immigration. Fiction and theories are simultaneously articulated. Through a review of her own several transitions, Bharati Mukherjee has evolved a credo for the new immigrant voices, which she calls 'maximalism'. This she claims is the key to introducing diversity to America's fairly stagnant 'Minimalist fiction' of 'main-steam', 'collective dread', and common cause.

According to Mukherjee, Ernest Hemmingway and William Faulkner gained some kind of international readership. The later writers promoted by market-place type were those who pretended to speak for America but used only limited categories of subjects like Vietnam-'dead-end jobs and midlife crises. Their tepid fiction and timid refusal to take position against other currents within America caused a dullness to set into the literature of the 70s.

'Minimalism', according to Mukherjee, was a deft shorthand for experience which was supposedly 'typical' but, in actuality, ignored the major change America was passing through.

Bharati Mukherjee is her own theorist and exemplar since her novels illustrate the credo of immigrant writing as a 'Maximalist' act, strenuously announcing and emphasizing her American citizenship. She tends to downgrade her Indian heritage and affiliations, several times during her 1989 tour of India. She refused to answer questions about her 'Indianness'. Yet the audience saw her sarri-clad, dark-eyed, dark-haired, retaining an obvious Bengali-Brahmin name, and heard her use Indian material in the extracts she read from her fiction. Mukherjee has deliberately problematized her identity, perhaps over-reacting to the likelihood of being enclosed in a coterie culture, geographically and ideologically separate from her chosen home and citizenship.

The examination of the opposite side of difference is marked by multiple instances of inversion of the insider/outsider conflict in Mukherjee's debut book, **The Tiger's Daughter** (1971). To support the adoption of the outside-looking perspective, the literary device of letters is used. **The Tiger's Daughter's** textual otherness is shown through allusions to English poets, including Tennyson, Keats, Rupert Brooke, and even a purposeful imitation of W.H. Davies' "Leisure." It pinpoints the features of alterity that are worrisome without homogenizing all of alterity. Thus, it appears to pave the way for a richer exchange of cultural ideas.

Mukherjee's second book, Wife, takes a dystopian turn in its examination of Difference. A string of nightmare pictures that symbolize the protagonist Dimple Dasgupta-Basu's growing estrangement from her sense of self cause the tale's seemingly clear narrative structure to fall apart.

In 1989, Bharati Mukherjee released the book **Jasmine**. The titular first-person narrator's existence is one of perpetual transition from one circumstance to another, taking on changing personas in each circumstance. Numerous name changes that are related to these identity alterations can be interpreted as experiences of Difference inside the self.

The exploration of Difference takes a dystopic turn in Mukherjee's second novel Wife (1975). The apparently straightforward narrative structure turns out to be splintered by a series of nightmarish images that mark the protagonist's Dimple Dasgupta-Basu's, growing alienation from her sense of self.

Bharati Mukherjee published a novel entitled Jasmine in 1989. The eponymous first – person narrator has a life of constant migration from one situation to another, embodying different selves in each situation. These mutations of identity are accompanied by a series of name changes that can be seen as experiences of Difference within the self.

In the collection of stories entitled as **Darkness** published in 1985, four were written in Canada, in Montreal and Toronto. They are **"The World According to HSU", "Isolated Incidents", "Hindus", and "Courtly vision"**. Mukherjee comments on these stories in her introduction: "The Purely 'Canadian' stories in this collection were difficult to write and even more painful to live through. They are uneasy stories about expatriation" (iv). Most of the remaining stories were written in the spring of 1984 in Atlanta, Georgia, when Mukherjee was writer-in-residence at Emory University. This collection, which contains stories written both in Canada and the U.S.A. illustrates the transition from expatriation to immigration.

The twentieth century had witnessed migratory movements of various people across national and continental boundaries. The reasons for migration vary; the destinations differ. Yet all immigrant experiences share certain fundamental characteristics. The history of immigration, after all, is essentially a story of alienation and its often troubling consequences. The migratory experience invariably entails pain, for it involves an unhealable rift from home and tradition. Even when migration offers new forms of personal and political freedom and an enhanced material well-being, the pleasures are subverted by a sense of loss, discontinuity, and broken identity.

The numerous creative texts that reveal the diverse immigrant experiences around the world, therefore, can indeed be legitimately placed in a single category and viewed as a unique genre of imaginative writing with its own assumptions, forms and features. In other words, works as diverse as Maxine Hong Kingston's **The Woman Warrior,** Albert Went's **Sons for the return home,** and AzouzBegag's**Le Gone du** Chaabadespite their obvious differences, are closely related texts.

The Chinese, Samoan and Arab protagonists of these novels – different though they are – share a common experience: the experience of growing up in an immigrant family in an alien, often hostile, country. Their lives, and the text that contain them, therefore, have certain shared themes and patterns.

Some of the powerful voices in this international literature of migration belong to Indian writers of the diaspora. These voices emerge from a variety of places: from Fiji and Singapore, from Durban and Trinidad, from London and New York. These voices give shape and form to a wide spectrum of Indian immigrant experiences near and far from the subcontinent.

A beautiful novel, poetic, exotic, perfectly controlled says the San Francisco Chronicle of Bharati Mukherjee's book **Jasmine**. Such a review exemplifies the warm reception the text that met in the U.S., especially within liberal circles of readership, a popularity. **Jasmine's**narrative of immigration – clearly a project of "assimilation" – eclipses, any possible political differences and vision while foregrounding depoliticized cultural once to produce what can be read as a touristic text.

The effacement of certain differences and the over-representation of others within a narrative of immigration and identities relies on the management and control of the concept and politics of difference in the attempt to achieve "multiculturalism", multiculturalism and the study of 'difference' currently characterizing many areas of scholarship.

Bharati Mukherjee is an elite non-white author, not explicitly claiming any nationalistic allegiance to India or any explicit commitment to anti – colonialist struggles and anti – racist politics in the U.S. The selective, superficial, and stereotypic representations of difference in **Jasmine** are productive and geopolitical categories such as "First world" and "Third world" and "East" and "West" as not only "different" but also as rigidly oppositional. Mukherjee isexplict in asserting her metaphoric intent.

The women novelists seem to subtly and artistically suggest that the prevailing values of the system in India should come in for a radical revision, and the social institutions and other props of civilization should be thoroughly reformed so that life would become more agreeable for women.

The Tiger's Daughter (1971) and **Wife** (1975), two of Bharati Mukherjee's early books, explore what it's like to be an immigrant to America and an Indian living abroad. BharatiMukherjee appears to have developed a deft grasp of juggling between time and geographical contexts in her most recent writing, as well as a characteristically postmodern self-conscious and self-ironic posture in the production of her fictions.

In Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife**, the action is viewed mainly through its heroine Dimple's consciousness. Her apparent frivolous life in Calcutta is jolted into action and ambition with her marriage to Amit. The migration of the couple to the USA proves disastrous to her hyper – sensitive nature. Amit's insensitivity only aggravates the self – destructive instincts already unusually activated in her mind. Her necessity to die becomes greatly pronounced at the end. A common displacement does the job for her. She kills Amit in a trans – like state of mind.

Dimple's moral and cultural suicide is symbolized and effectuated by an act of abortion, the destruction of an actual or political human life merely because it has begun, like Dimple herself, in India. This act is pregnant with the destruction of the marriage bond in adultery, and the climatic murder of the husband. As noted above, this comes dangerously close to a critique of feminist ideology by an author who is, by her own admission, fundamentally a moralist:

Mukherjee places the idea of a "Hindu imagination" as the mark of her "identity" as a non – western writer. But this notion of "identity" is little more than a standardized and "Orientalized" figure of a colonial, cultural self – definition". The critical implications of her authorial positions are, to a great measure, reflected in Jasmine, whose "magical" narrative reflects some of the elements of this orientalist discourse, particularly the "non – casual, non – western narrative from that is employed to fictionalize Jasmine'sentry and her wanderings as in illegal immigrant in the New World.

The idea of the "mongrelization" in immigrant culture which she expresses fourteen years after the publication of **Days and Nights**, reflects the ethos of such cosmopolitan aesthetics. Claiming that her interest lies in delineating the "dense lives" of the new immigrants seeking to find their place in the New World, she hopes to capture the dangers and uncertainties of their existence.What makes Mukherjee's assertions ironic is that the epic theme she adopts to dramatize these dangers, does not allow her to consciously represent them in any other form than the one mandated by her own managerial, post colonial imagination.

This kind of aesthetic also fosters, in Jasmine, a peculiar relationship of identification and misidentification-between the immigrant writer as the holder of an urban cosmopolitan ethos and the immigrant protagonist as a Third world subject pursuing the dream of cosmopolitan romanticism. Although Mukherjee's protagonist, **Jasmine**, is made to embody the urban spirit and feistiness of the new immigrant, the author refuses to acknowledge the fact that her heroine does not share the same social and economic sphere as herself.

Mukherjee's education and socialization in India's post-partition insular, upper-middle class environment and her achievement of artistic reputation in the West place her own creativity on a privileged ground that **Jasmine** does not share. From this, Mukherjee can reject the insularity of her own upbringing with a cavalier sense of dismissal and euphorically celebrate her religion of cosmopolitan freedom made possible by her own immigrant experience.

The expatriate writers face a multi-cultural situation which may be combined with a personal anguish due to discrimination or a sense of rootlessness, if rejected by their host countries. As coloured expatriates, both Bharati Mukherjee and Yasmine Gooneratne are likely to have faced their full share of racial discrimination. Inspite of being married to a Canadian, Mukherjee's experiences in Canada were far from pleasant. In fact, she took the risk of quitting her job and shifting to the U.S.

Today, cultural alienation is a global phenomena. The stark contrast between the two ways of life causes despair and resentment in people. One can refer to this as culture shock. His old values and the new ones he encounters clash when a person leaves his own culture and enters another. We immigrants, according to Bharati Mukherjee, have great stories to share. Her mission is to introduce Americans to the vibrant voices of recent immigrants. According to her, immigration is a "two-way process" and the American experience is one of "fusion," in which both white people and immigrants develop through interaction and experience.

In her novels Jasmine and **The Tiger's Daughter**, Bharati Mukherjee has shown a dual cultural shock. Jasmine and Tara leave their respective countries in search of their dreams. This migration or "cultural transplant" leads to a crisis of identity and a final reconciliation to the choice. Bharati Mukherjee has deliberately avoided the immigrant writer's temptation to fall in the trap of glorifying his native country and to belittle and degrade the adopted country. She has presented a fascinating study of the problem of a displaced person in America as well as India.

Bharati Mukherjee's **The Tiger's Daughter** (1973) and **Wife** (1976) deal with two different problems of expatriates. While the first is a truly immigrant novel, the second thematically resembles Joshi's **The foreigner**, Bharati Mukherjee in a recent interview has clearly stated her aim in her novels:

We immigrant stories are wonderful to share. Many of us have lived in newly independent or

developing nations where there are ongoing civil and religious conflicts. When we leave those nations and move here, either voluntarily or out of necessity, we are suddenly required to learn about 200 years of American history and become accustomed to American culture. In my books and short stories, I try to illustrate this.

My goal is to introduce Americans to the vibrant voices of recent immigrants. (TD, IV)

Mukherjee's novels have nothing in common with other immigrant novelists. She doesn't deal with problems of alcohol abuse of the expatriates.Her American attitude to life is readily sensed by relatives. They find her "Stubborn": the relatives attributed Tara's improprieties to her seven years in America", Tara's rootless self makes the scenery, outside "merely alien and hostile". In Matthew Arnold's words, she finds herself wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to the born, with nowhere to rest head. Her American life evokes such dreariness, vacuity, and despair.

New York had been a unique place. The tunnels below were being patrolled by police officers and their canines. because she witnessed girls like her getting stabbed in elevators in their own apartment complexes. Caste pollution was the only type of pollution she had received a warning about in Calcutta. New York was undoubtedly extraordinary, and it had left her feeling hopeless. (TD 28)

The Tiger's Daughter (1973) and **Wife** (1976) too deal with the immigrant experience. **The Tiger's Daughter** is about Tara Banerjee Cartwright, a western – educated well – to – do Bengali woman married to an American. After a seven-year stay in the U.S.A., Tara visits home and tries to pick up the threads of her old life. She is, however, unable to see her people and her country. Through her earlier childhood memories, she is unable to converse with her friends, as they are more interested in her American husband. At the end, she is caught up in a violent demonstration, and the book ends with this young immigrant surrounded by different ideas and cultures.

In **Wife**, Dimple Basu is married to Amit, an engineer who has already applied for immigration to Canada and the U.S. In America, she becomes increasingly addicted to the media, and begins to lose her sense of balance and her sense of reality. She is extremely lonely and feels cut off from everything around her. Tara and Dimple are both essentially lonely women.

The south Asian immigrant experience is described by Bharati Mukherjee in her introduction to **Darkness:**

"if you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait – surrendering little bits of reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever – retreating past – you'll never belong, anywhere […] I have joined imaginative force with an anonymous, driven, underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return. I see my 'immigrant' story replicated in a dozen American cities, and instead of seeking my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration, I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated" (V)

A novel of migrancy and belonging, **Jasmine** is the culmination of a literary trajectory initiated by **The Tiger's Daughter**, a semi-autobiographical novel reflecting a postcolonial expatriate consciousness. By the time Mukherjee writes Jasmine, she is ready to celebrate: "I'm one of you now". Jasmine is an ebullient novel offering a special-up version of the classic recipe of assimilation into the dominant culture. However, the central problem of the novel is that it is silent about the conditions that such assimilation possible.

The narrating consciousness proceeds to dissociate itself not only from India but from Jyoti as well. She has transformed herself into Jane – a fighter and survivor. Being a survivor, Jyoti is less like the Indian woman, "who falls into wells", and "got run over by trains": she is more like Jane. When she is herself, Jyoti (light) is powerless against the feudal darkness in India. Likewise, Jasmine (Fragrance) is weak before the land's stench.

In the end, Jasmine represents the challenges faced by immigrant women. The heroines of Mukherjee's novels are from affluent postcolonial India, not rural Punjab. By having her protagonist be both educated and uneducated, Mukherjee tries to hide the incongruity. Jasmine struggles to overcome her postcolonial consciousness, which is most obviously displayed in literary allusions to English works **like Pygmalion, Great Expectations, and Jane Eyre.**

Bharati Mukherjee has gained notoriety for her unique perspective on expatriatehood as a metaphysical experience of exile and as a catalyst for attitudinal change, both in the minority and majority cultures. She is the clear-eyed but affectionate immigrant in American society. Her concern goes beyond the typical challenges of culture shock and acclimatization to include existential distress and zeitgeist.

Bharati Mukherjee dedicated her collection of short stories **Darkness** to Bernard Malamud, who happened to be her husband's teacher at Harvard. She looks upon her work as being very much in the tradition of this great novelist and short-story writer Bernard Malamud who brought the Jewish immigrant experience to light with such pathos and bitter reality.

However, neither **Jasmine** nor any other short stories bring across truly the pain of exile. Mukherjee has picked up the nuances of the American idiom, but her characters are manifestos by performing a part. Inspite of every new guise, all that changes of Jasmine is merely the exterior, there is no corresponding growth in depth and maturity. Bharati Mukherjee touches only the fringe of the ice berg-the emotional upheaval and trauma of the migrant.

Summing Up

Expatriate writing that occupies a significant position in the contemporary post-modern era generates new theories and perceptions.As it tries to define positions, it seeks to construct a new identity.A person involved in 'diaspora' carries an ambiguous status: he / she is an ambassador and a refugee. The ambassador relatively could be termed 'the immigrant' and the refugee 'the exile'. The diasporic experience becomes heterogeneous, widely varied, complex and evokes multiple meanings at once.

The Indian diaspora in the universal scenario or the post-modern world and its relation with the expatriate writers reveals itself in different, complex, temporal and spatial metaphors. The expatriate writer, Bharati Mukherjee, chosen for this study share a common diasporic vision that has been voiced by her. One's biological identification may not be their only identity in this diaspora-filled era. Emigration is accompanied by accretions and erosions. The main characters of these two stories explore the effects of migration using metaphors that are unique, varied, and complicated. In the minds of the refugees, the frantic quest for a suitable new identity in an unfamiliar environment turns into a compulsion, essential for survival. In this post-modern setting, it is essential to examine the conflicts between many cultures that existed before to the creation of the new identity, as well as its effects and how the diasporic vision is perceived. South Asian American writers, a moniker that is comfortable for Indian expatriate authors, must contend with this forced identity in order to be heard in a multiethnic Asian America.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the diasporic writers who openly confesses her desire to become an American, not an Asian-American. In plain terms, the question is whether this is possible at all. One can not step out of one's skin. She asks the question not only in the context of the contemporary situation but also in terms of the past. In **The Holder of the World**, she constructs a science fiction mode of time-travel and goes into the Mughal past of India when trading marauding wanderers entered India. One of them – or rather an appendage of one of them – comes into the country and puts herself in a position to get entangled emotionally also with a Hindu King of India, and even carries his child in her womb. And she finds an exact emotional counterpart in an Indian woman. But the old culture, embodied in an old woman and an old King, does not accept this new mixture (though the old King is himself the

scion of a marauding race that entered this more ancient land at an earlier time). The rejection of such fusion by the commonalty is the reality confronted by this visionary of human oneness.

Mukherjee's complex politics reflect her multiple (dis)locations, and her artwork demonstrates the influence of a muddled perspective. There are a lot of immigrant women writers of color who passionately affirm the immigrant condition while also resolutely rejecting the emotional paralysis of exile, much like Mukherjee does. They also share her amazing ability to create a coherent vision from the chaos of her several relocations and her capacity to express that vision in a voice that is both gently demanding and gracefully provocative. There has always been complication.

Bharati Mukherjee's **The Holder of the World** is a novel that tries to visualize the problem of cross – cultural relationships two centuries ago. In such exchanges, the majority in the early times tends to be adventurers who seek money and excitement and who have no sensitive and complex interests. The protagonist of the novel is a woman who comes from the west and creates for herself a new world of experiences and emotions. The differences between the cultures – she confronts two Indian cultures – are formidable enough but they are further complicated by individual personalities. But the protagonist and her Indian maid transcend these differences and find relationships in the other culture which gives them a deep emotional fulfillment. They reach beyond differences to arrive at a human unity.

The hypocritical life that the English men and women live is a startling revelation for Hannah. The result is clear:

> *The company code they lived under placed inhuman limits on even routine freedom. At the same time, their personal code was Excess in All Things. And so they recast themselves as capital's little Pilgrims, forgotten victims of England's indifference to their sacrifice.Self – Pity, unaccountability and hypocrisy were recast as virtues and renamed forgiveness, solidarity and tolerance. (**HW**:128)*

The social life of many Englishmen is fettered with morals and regulation while they crave for excess and sensuous gratification in their personal lives. Hannah sees and meets the west in terms of this contradiction and sham. Moralistic and ethical codes acquire entirely different meanings and the Englishmen on the Coromandel live sham lives, projecting what they are not in reality. To a woman born and brought up in a puritan society, this is an experience of 'translation'. This is a typical instance of an east-west confrontation at two different levels of living with a new people. Hannah wants – or is made for –a different kind of relationship irrespective of whether the other party is western or eastern. For the other whites, it is a relationship based on exploitation, insensitivity and ignorance.

Hannah is the author in the most commonly used sense of the term-she records experiences and memories in journals and translates them into embroideries that tell her tale. These pieces of embroidery (the pun on is embroidering as needlework and as embellishment of tales is obvious) create unusal landscapes in which Massachusetts flora and fauna coexist with tropical Indian ones.

Hannah's tales told by needlework also achieve a suspension of time in that these panels. The unusual landscape that Hannah embroiders symbolizes the unusual relationship that Hannah finds it possible to forge on this new land. She is able to love an Indian and to taketake risks for him, even to the extent of emotionally alienating herself from her compatriots. Hannah's realization grows through an understanding of the inadequacies of the western system of colonization. The western system of colonization is based on materialism and the idea of expansion. The whites dominate a foreign nation and impose their hegemony even on its culture and remain unresponsive to the value of the Indian culture. Hannah, unlike her counterparts, identifies herself with the roots of the Indian culture and gets fully assimilated. The western counterparts instead of opting for a life of translation opt for the life of aggressive domination and hence their failure in the East West cultural encounter.

The worlds of Puritan, New England and Mughal India will present themselves as foreign territory to readers familiar with Mukherjee's previous works of fiction which encompass modern-day America and India. But the basic premise is the same – adaptation and survival in a potentially menacing world which is not one's own.

Reborn to herself in three continents and discovering her dynamic consciousness and individuality as she travels, Hannah is a precursor to Mukherjee's 20th century immigrant protagonists. Her multiple names – she is Hannah Easton Fitch in Massachusetts, Hannah Legge in England, Precious – Pearl in India, white Pearl back in Salem, and the "Salem-Bibi" into history – and her changing identities attest to her resilience to survive on often malevolent foreign territory. The paths which Hannah's life pursues, like those of Mukherjee's earlier heroines, continue to raise themes about transformations, about the discarding of old identities and the assumption of new ones.

New immigrants came from a society where they had been parts of a whole – the whole being the community: Everything was knotted into a firm relationship with every other thing. And all things had meanings in terms of their relatedness to the whole community. In the community they had done everything together – grief, celebrations, festivals. The persons had never partaken of any of these alone. Relationships with relatives and neighbours and friends had regulated every aspect of their lives. Once these people left their original homeland, they were really alone.

Even while standing in a crowd of a hundred thousand people such a person feels isolated, alienated and totally alone. So the first step that the immigrant takes in the New Land-the Promised Land, the land of golden opportunity where getting rich is easy-is the outcome of his deliberate independent choice to emigrate from his mother country. From now on, he will be an individual in stark contrast to his role in his previous existence. The new immigrant must interact with people who are fundamentally unlike him. He must study and comprehend foreign languages and ways. He must contend with unfamiliar issues; in other words, he must survive in a setting that is wholly strange.

The **Holder of the world** forcibly inserts immigrant culture and history into the American novel, Mukherjee is also claiming a place within the canon of American literature for immigrant writers like herself. It is in this sense that she sees herself as an American writer; by calling herself American, she is not naively adopting an alien identity but is refusing a hyphenated existence as an Indo-American writer. An inherent contradiction, this, for it was just such a mind-set that the book seeks to break.Mukherjee is reaching a new balance with her own two worlds-Indian and American.

The elaborate game playing with geographic and ideological space, with literary canons and tropes, makes The Holder of the world a fascinating intellectual experience. However Mukherjee's use of virtual reality as a narrative method causes problems. It allows her to suspend time and to consider only location. It allows her to make characters become each other and partially experience another's life. It allows her to theorize that race and gender are over determined categories in the discussion of subjectivity and agency. Further, the increasing preoccupation with game playing in this novel renders the immigrant woman's experience as almost entirely textual. As one reviewer cautions, the novel tends to be more interesting to think about than to read.

Mukherjee begins the novel **Desirable Daughters** by telling the story of "The Tree-Bride", which has a pervasive influence on the rest of the book. Jai Krishna Gangooly was a pleader at Dacca High Court. As a Bengali Brahmin, he was a staunch believer in Hindu culture. When Tara was five years old, he arranged her marriage. Just before the wedding the bride-groom's father increased his demands for the dowry. Refusing to be cowed into submission, Jai Krishna took his daughter into a deep forest and married her to a tree, and thus Tara became known as Tree-Bride. But that was decades ago. Several generations down the line, Tara, the narrator, marries the best available man and goes to America, where her new husband, Bishwapriya

Chatterjee, makes millions in the Silicon Valley. In due course, she gets a divorce and walks away with millions following the settlement. She lives independently with her son, Rabindra, and freely sleeps with Andy, her carpenter, as well as with friends of her ex-husband. In short, unlike her ancestress, she enjoys complete social, financial and sexual freedom. But the strange behaviour of her son and the emergence of Chris Dey claiming to be the son of her sister Padma begin to disrupt her safe heaven. Naturally, she turns to her family and wants to be reconciled with her ex-husband, but an explosion destroys her house and wounds Bishwapriya very badly. In the end, Tara returns to Mishtigunj, where the Tree-Bride lived "not for rest but to follow the Ganges to its source". The narrator and the Tree-Bride reach the same dead end, although through different routes.

Mukherjee describes the hyphenation that is thrust on most South Asian immigrants. European immigrants are never referred to as Polish or German – Americans, so why should she be termed an Indo-American, she questions. European immigrants because of the colour of their skin, easily blend in. Despite feeling totally adjusted to being an American immigrant, Tara is frequently asked "who are you really?" She feels "tried of explaining India to Americans, I'm sick of feeling an alien."

There are frequent references to issues of identity, alienation and belonging. In fact the author's quest for a catharsis and her attempts at working out the past, are often done at the reader's expense. The result is a thin story line, which is padded by generous doses of insights into the Hindu religion, heritage, history and philosophy. This is done to give the text a fullness and complexity that will appeal to Mukherjee's numerous western readers.

The novel's denouement comes, when Tara discovers that the man claiming to be Chris Dey, is not Chris at all, but a member of a Bombay underworld gang. This revelation comes courtesy of her sister Parvati in Bombay and Inspector Sandhu of San Francisco, whom Tara has taken into confidence. Parvati has met up with Ronnie Dey in Bombay and learnt a few details about Chris, and none of these seem to tally with the man who had encountered Tara. The novel then dramatically presents an undercurrent of danger and the Bombay underworld. There is a murder, a near fatal bomb explosion.

Further complexities are introduced when Tara discovers that her son is gay, and she decides to re-start her relationship with Bish. With Tara, Mukherjee succeeds in creating a shrewd protagonist, one who has a sense of humour and a great insight.

Tara is therefore the alienated self, wallowing in the misery and boredom of the diasporic experience while still trying to find her place in the world. She is the "nowhere woman," flitting between the passionate and risk-taking allures of the present and the nostalgic fascinations of a traditional past. Tara occupies the precarious terrain where East and West meet, where the sound of clashing cultures has the potential to shatter glass, like the other diasporic figures in Bharati Mukherjee's work.

Obviously, **Desirable Daughters** deals with America and its liberties, individualism, and money power and with India and its gods, ghosts, and curious social practices. American readers may find the Indian stories amusing and appalling, but Indian readers will find the American stories more appalling than amusing. This is because Mukherjee presents totally insipid characters.

References

Primary Source

1. Mukherjee, Bharati. **The Holder of the World.**New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
2. **Desirable Daughters.**New York: Hyperion, 2002.

Secondary Source

1. Agarwalla, Shyam S. "An Indian Woman in the U.S.A: A Study of **The Holder of the World", The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium**. Ed. by R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996: 196-201.
2. Agarwal, Ramlal. Rev. of **Desirable Daughters. World Literature Today,** Vol. 77, No. 3-4, Oct-Dec 2003: 86-87.

3. Bharvani, Shakuntala. "Bharati Mukherjee's **The Holder of the World", Indian Women Novelists:** Set III: Vol.3. Dhawan R.K. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1995.
4. Bromley, Roger. **Narratives for a New Belonging: Diasporic Cultural Fictions.** Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.
5. Chandra, Subhash. **The Holder of the World:** An Anti-war Novel' **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium** Ed. by.R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.
6. Chowdhury, Enakshi. "Images of Woman in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels". **Lterary Voice.** No.2, Oct. 1995: 81-87.
7. Chowdhury, Neel. "Not for the Mature Reader". Rev.of **The Holder of the World.** The Book Review. Vol.18, No. 2 & 3, Feb-Mar 1994:67,69.
8. Dhawan, R.K. Ed. **The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Critical Symposium**. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996.
9. Gabriel, Sharmani Patricia. "Tedium Aspiring to Literature". Rev. of **The Holder of the World. CRNLE Reviews Journal,** No. 1 & 2, 1995:225-228.
10. Gaur, Rashmi."Gender Relations and Cross-cultural Transactions in Bharati Mukherjee's **Desirable Daughters**", **Indian Journal of English Studied.**Vol. XLI, 2003-2004.
11. Ghanshyam, G.A. and VasumatiNadig. "BharatiMukherjee's **The Holder of the World:** A Bridge Between the Past and the Present", **Indian English Literature.** Ed. BasavarajNaikar, New Delhi : Atlantic, 1984: 149-155.