

# Transformation of Self in the Works of Bharati Mukherjee

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**Abstract:** - Bharati Mukherjee has established herself as a powerful member of the American Literary Scene. Her works frequently redefine the process of immigration as a translation and as a new opportunity for the individuals. In this paper such a view has been articulated in her novels as *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife and Jasmine*. Mukherjee's novels tell of boundary crossings and international networks reveal a number of the effects of transnational are on people and their fates. While America remains the location for the construction of identity in Mukherjee's writing it becomes a re-imagined global space, not the unified nation state which it has pretended to be.

**Keywords:** Heroines of Bharati Mukherjee, Transformation of self, Search for identity in alien land.

The starting point is the implicit inferiority of women, and the first question de Beauvoir asks is what a woman is? Woman she realizes is always perceived of as other, "she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not him with reference to her". A myth invented by men to confine women to their oppressed state. For women it is not a question of asserting themselves as women, but of becoming full-scale human beings. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"<sup>1</sup> or as Toril Moi puts it "a woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in the world, or in other words, through the way in which she makes something of what the world makes of her"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, woman must regain subject, to escape her defined role as other. "To be a woman", says Kierkegaard in "Stages on the Road of life"<sup>3</sup>, is something so strange, so confused, so complicated, that no one predicate comes near expressing it and that the multiple predicates that one would like to use are so contradictory that only a woman could put up it. This comes from not regarding woman positively such as she seems to herself to be, but negatively, such as she appears to man.

This paper deals with various aspect of self as perceived in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee. The study deals out with different layers of self of the characters in the novels. As in the accomplishment of their assertion of self how they come in conflict with the so called, so code and norms which largely serve the purpose of patriarchy set up of the society. As a writer of Asian diaspora, Bharati Mukherjee, an American writer of Indian origin, known as the grand dame of Indian Diaspora, as she captures an address and demonstrates all the issues associated with expatriate experience in the United States. By selecting her protagonists

from all parts of the world having divergent ethnic, religious and cultural preoccupations, her work based on the theme, which is centered in their struggles to outgrow inherited values. The authenticity beauty of much of her fiction lies in being, well versed by the personal experiences.

The author lives her life with distinctly different experiences she has been throughout life. Because of this reason, she has been describing as a writer who has lived through several phases of life. As first, she lives as a colonial, then national subject in India. After that, she led a life of exile as post colonial Indian in Canada. Finally she shifted into a celebratory mode as an immigrant and then as a citizen in the United States. She considers her work a celebration of her emotions that she brings out of her heart. Bharati Mukherjee cherishes the Orchestrated American culture. The recurring theme in her output is the condition of Asian immigrants in North America. She pays particular attention to the changing face of South Asian women in a new world. While the characters in her works are aware of the brutalities and violence that surround them and are often victimized by various forms of oppression she generally draws them as survivors.

Bharati Mukherjee's own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as an immigrant in the United States has lead to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants<sup>4</sup>. In *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) the protagonist Tara, attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage. Tara finds it different to relate herself to her family, city, culture in general since her marriage to an American, her western education are enough signs to brand her as an alienated westernized woman. The implicit logic is that since she is exposed to the west and has absorbed its values she must be necessarily alienated. Tara travels back to India to rediscover her self - identity<sup>5</sup>.

Tara expected that her return to India would remove her displeasure of staying abroad. "For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta"<sup>6</sup>. However, so far the return had brought only wounds. First, the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggars in the Railway Station, and now the inexorable rain ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reverse. She

was an embittered woman she now thought, old, cynical at twenty-two, and quick to take offence Tara who belongs to an upper class Brahmin family of Calcutta goes to America for higher studies; there she marries an American Dravid Cartwright, who is a stranger to her Indian background. She too could not adjust herself in the foreign milieu. She comes to India after seven years and finds herself a complete stranger, she feels neither Indian nor truly American. She is completely confused and lost. She feels identified with problems and finds herself as an exiled Indian and westernized American. The first novel addresses Bharati Mukherjee's personal difficulties of life form caught between worlds, home and cultures and is an examination she is in and where she belongs.

Bharati Mukherjee was born in India in a Bengali Brahmin family at Calcutta on 27 July, 1940. In 1947, her father was given a job in England and he brought his family to live there until, 1951, which gave Bharati Mukherjee an opportunity to develop and expertise her English language. Having planned to be a writer since childhood, Bharati Mukherjee went to the University of Iowa in 1961, to attend the prestigious writer workshop. During a lunch break on September 19, 1963 she married Clark Blaise, a Canadian writer in a lawyer's office, after only two weeks of courtship. In 1968, Bharati Mukherjee immigrated to Canada with her husband. After living in Canada from 1966 to 1980, she becomes a naturalized citizen in 1972. In an interview with Erin Soderberg from the University of Minnesota, Mukherjee states that her "fourteen years in Canada were some of the hardest of her life, as she found herself discriminated against and treated... as a member of the visible minority". This experience influence Bharati Mukherjee's depiction of Canada in "The Management of Griek". Finally fed up with Canada, Mukherjee and her family moved to the United State in 1980, where she was permanent U.S resident. She also taught at Queens College, New York for a brief period before finally joining as a Professor of English at University of California, Berkely.

Mukherjee has established herself as a powerful member of the American Literary scene. Her most of the memorable works reflects not only her pride in Indian heritage, but also her celebration of embracing America as said in an Interview in *The Massachusetts Review*, "the immigrants in my stories go through extreme transform America and at the same time they alter the country's appearance and psychological makeup"<sup>7</sup>.

In *Wife* (1975), Bharati Mukherjee foregrounds the experience of a woman forced to confront her marginalization within her own Indian culture, while attempting to forge an identity within an alien American Culture, both of which, however, are entrenched in patriarchal ideology. In delineating Dimple Dasgupta's attempt at negotiating the cultural and ideological divides, Bharati Mukherjee provides for the contradictory interactions of culture, ideology and identity. The opening lines of the novel "Dimple Dasgupta

had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in matrimonial ads". Dimple initially believes that marriage "would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpet lawns, and fund - raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love"<sup>8</sup>.

Dimple migrated to Canada and U.S. with her desire to find freedom, fortune and perfect happiness in American. Marriage is a blessing in disguise, which would bring her love. Amit Basu is not her imagined husband and does not bear the image of ideal husband. She faces the cultural difference between Indian and American attitude and finally becomes a psyche wife and kills her husband. She neither finds India nor America as her native land nor becomes a woman living in dilemmas and rootlessness. The novel based on the novelist's shaping idea what do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one. Finally, as a wife, she feels as a woman of nowhere land. Assertive identity starts when there comes a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of self becomes insecure, typically due to change in her/his expected aims or a fear of his /her beliefs being shattered, unrealized. In the case of Dimple, once she gets to U.S.A with her husband, she is quite shocked at the violence, frankness and permissive environment there. Later she tries to come to terms with it, struggles to fulfill the demands of tradition and her own will. She is ensnaring within this conflict. When she does not get an outlet for her pent up feelings, desires and whims, when she cannot come out of the web of her fears and inhibitions, she gets depressed, insomniac, almost on the verge of madness, and eventually turns into a murderer of her husband whom she feels responsible for her condition<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, it is through the act of hers that she has managed to assert herself, her individual identity, husband being the archetypal oppressor. Dimple is entangling in the web of her own making. She loses herself when she tries to be a perfect Hindu wife, but her egoistic, attitude, her concept of freedom, and her quest for self- identity, all are ingratiate into multiple knots, coaxing her to cross the border of gender and she experiments with American doctrines.

Bharati Mukherjee's novels focus on exploring the migration and the feeling of alienation that is experienced by these immigrants. Her works have explored such themes as isolation, sexism, discrimination, the mistreatment of Indian women, and exploring identities. *Jasmine* (1989) is based on this notion. Through her female protagonists, Bharati Mukherjee reveals the truth of re-birth and re-invention that a woman undergoes to adapt to the new world. Her novels explore the theme of love and marriage, questions related to gender and identity. Bharati Mukherjee deals with the theme of identity in *Exile* in her famous novel *Jasmine*. It is about a new woman, who is able to fight discrimination at multiple levels of commenting, that she changed because she wanted to, *Jasmine* shuttled between identities from *Jyoti* to *Jasmine* and from *Jase* to *Jane*<sup>10</sup>.

Mukherjee's protagonists respond to their self-alienation in different ways and in so doing, contribute to an understanding of Americanness that complicates its presumed association and then to small town banker and Iowan landowner Bud Ripplemeyer, Jasmine seems to thrive on the fact that the immigrant experience is unanchored. She shuttles between identities and names from Sati-goddess to Jasmine the reliable caregiver and Jase the prowling adventurer. "I thrilled to the tug of opposing forces, unless, presumably, these forces are so violent that they bring about disintegration and death"<sup>11</sup>. Jasmine's affirmation of shuttling seems to deny. Although Bharati Mukherjee proclaims a liking for her female character Jasmine's mould, the enterprising people, characterizes her, the irons butterfly. Jasmine's self-empowerment occurs at the expense of others.

Her refutation of the astrologer foretelling her widowhood and exile seems to be the most powerful sentence reflecting her determination not to accept what others impose on her. She confronts him squarely, "I do not believe you"<sup>11</sup>. Although she never willingly accepts what she is not convinced of, the rules laid by the male in her family try to dictate her all the time. In traditional Indian family system, man holds the supreme power in the family and women are marginalized; they are supposed to act according to the head of the family. For example in marriage, women are not allowed to question and wherever their marriage is fixed, they are bound to go through in that connection. Bharati Mukherjee's Jyoti like most of the Indian woman controlled and dominated by her father and brothers, she says, Village girls are like cattle, whichever way you lead them that is the way they will go. Her spirit to defend her self-identity does not hold much ground because of that, though luckily she gets married to the man of her choice, Prakash, a modern thinking man, encourages Jyoti to study English, and symbolically gives Jyoti a new name Jasmine, and a new life. She has to identify herself with him and is made to think according to his plans, as is exemplified in his rejection of her wish to have a child. However, her happiness was short-lived. However, after her husband's death, the basic instinct of rebellion and defiance in her nature comes to the fore to assist her and pave the way for her to declare her decision to go to the States despite bitter opposition from her family. Jasmine sets off on an agonizing trip as an illegal immigrant to Florida, and thus begins her symbolic trip of transformations, displacement and a search of identity.

Jasmine sways between the two worlds, the past one of nativity and the present as an immigrant. Coming from an oppressive and a rural family in India, Jyoti comes to America in search of a more beautiful or fruitful life and to realize the dreams of her husband Prakash. Thus, she begins her West journey and her quest for a new self and identity. She undergoes her first transformation from a dutiful Hindu wife when she meets the intellectual Taylor who calls her Jase, and then moves on to become Bud's Jane. She comments, "I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside

nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet proof vest was to be a crowd"<sup>11</sup>.

In Jasmine, Bharati Mukherjee shows the possibilities of remarking oneself in the new world.<sup>12</sup> In this novel, written after she immigrated to the west, she explores the possibilities for liberation through transformation especially for oppressed, middle-class women in the new world. Bharati Mukherjee's maps the immigrant experience of a protagonist who finds the West exciting and full of possibilities, Jasmine transforms herself by finding an authentic American identity. We see epistemological violence in Jasmine when Jasmine reinvents herself. Jasmine, an illegal immigrant, a young widow, transforms herself from Jyoti, to Jasmine, to Jassy, to Jase and to Jane in the United States, moving rapidly from one locale to another. Starting from rural India Hasnapur, proceeding to a city in Punjab, arriving in Florida, moving to Queens, then to Manhattan and ultimately setting for sometime in Iowa, Jasmine does not transform herself gradually; she reinvents herself by killing her old selves. "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to make one. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams"<sup>11</sup>. Jasmine's desire to come to the United States stems from the desire to commit Sati on the campus where her own deceased husband, a victim of Sikh terrorism, was supposed to attend engineering school in Florida. She buys a fake visa to the U.S; when she arrives in Florida after a nightmarish journey, she is attacked by a whiteman who rapes her. After she stabs her rapist in the guise of Kali, she sets her clothes and her husband's clothes, which she was supposed to burn along with herself at the campus on fire in a dumpster. At this point, she is symbolically free to find a new identity for herself in the new world. When Jasmine burns her clothes in the trash bin, she symbolically trashes the old traditions. Hence, her traditional identity, as the act of rape frees her from the old notions of purity and impurity; she becomes liberated and therefore, can construct a new American identity for herself.

*The Holder of the World* (1993) is a story about Hannah Easton, a woman born in Massachusetts who travels to India. She becomes involved with a few Indian lovers and eventually a king who gives her a diamond known as the Emperor's Tear. This story is told through the detective searching for the diamond and Hannah's viewpoint. Bharati Mukherjee's focus continues to on immigrant woman and their freedom from relationships to become individual. She also uses the female characters to explore the spatiotemporal connection between different cultures. The novel deals with the cultural encounter of two cultures with a tale of dislocation and transformation interacting with each other. It is not a journey from East to West but from West to East in quest for art and culture. Hannah Easton, the female protagonist lives in society too puritan to all her young fancies. It is only when she goes for an unpremeditated marriage with Gabriel Legge, a mysterious person, and comes to India with him, that her true nature gets a chance to be

display. In India, her real identity as an exotic, passionate, highly romantic idealist is revealed to the full.

The protagonist Hannah Easton, is a woman who is an “inquisitive, vital, awake to her own sense of self and purpose” as any other heroine of Bharati Mukherjee. Although she is born and brought up in a Puritan American society, her spirit yearns for freedom, to exercise her own free will; most probably this is the reason behind her marrying a mysteriously adventurous person like Gabriel Legge and accompanying him to India. Beigh Masters depicts her happiness: “she was alert to novel, but her voyage was mental, interior. Getting there was important but ... watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure” (HW 104).<sup>13</sup> Her love for living life to its full in all its varied colours, slated to realize when she saved by Raja Javed Singh from a bridge collapse and taken to his palace: she has already left Gabriel for infidelity. She embraces the wilderness of that palace and realizes that “Hannah Easton Fitch Legge was dying” (HW 222).<sup>13</sup> She takes upon new identities, improvising the rules of behavior set for her in Salem or in London. As a bibi of the Raja, she lives a life full of intense passion, to the extent of frenzy. She even Indianizes herself in every way. However, in her quest for her identity, there comes a movement when she feels “the contradiction of a passionate nature” too. On the one hand, she craves for the gratification of her sensual desires; she wants on the other hand to nurse the “wounded and dying” (HW 237).<sup>13</sup>

Just when we are on the verge of accusing her of lechery, she amazes us by her act of saving the life of the Raja and further proving herself “a spiritual aristocrat” (Kumar 68).<sup>14</sup> She takes the daring task of negotiating peace with the Emperor. She maintains her dignity by not accepting the Raja’s offer of a place in the Zenana, and thus saving herself from being besmirched and disgraced. Having fully realized herself in this way, she feels confident and audacious enough as “a pregnant white woman” as to try to end the war. She recognizes her inner strength. Even after being a hostage of him, “only a person who thought she was God Almighty” (HW 259)<sup>13</sup> could have spoken before the Great Mughal as a selfless peacemaker (HW 267) trying to safeguard the innocents from further suffering. Her quest for freedom in life inspires her to escape from there to Salem back live life on “the fringes of society” (Kumar 140)<sup>14</sup> with her mother and her children. They are discarded by society but still render social service uninhibitively asserting them, as “we are Americans to freedom born” (HW 285).<sup>13</sup> Bharati Mukherjee sees herself as a unique human being and gives message to her fellow female. In *The Holder of the World* (1993), she suggests two advantages of women’s liberation. Hannah, defies estrangement in the society she lives and get the answer in rejecting cultural stereotypes she develop the life of her own outside the home.

In *Leave It to Me* (1997), Bharati Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman Sociopath named Debby Di Martino, who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story

reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents describes as a murderer and a flower child. The novel also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main character in her quest for revenge. Candia Mc William of *The London Review of Books* describes Bharati Mukherjee appropriately as “A writer both tough and voluptuous” in her work.

*Leave It to Me* (1997), Debbie Devi, was adopted by a New York family of Italian origin. Born in India with a hippie follower mother of a sex – age guru and her father, the founder of Ashram, a serial killer of Romeo Hawk, and was adopted by DiMaritino family of America. She has grown up in an American town knowing very little about her biological parents. She explains her situation as follows:

An orphan does not know how to ask, afraid of answers, and hopes instead for revelation. Ignorance is not bliss, but it keeps risky knowledge at bay. I never badgered Mama to tell me all she knew about my toddler days. She kept my origins simple: hippie backpacker from Fresno and Eurasian lover boy, both into smoking, dealing and stealing. She left my biodata minimal; some sort of police trouble my hippie birth mother had got herself into meant that the Gray nuns in Devigoan village had to take me in; one of the nuns had renamed me Faustino after a Typhoon, but Mama’s changed it officially to Debby after Debby Reynolds, her all time favorite (LiM 41).<sup>15</sup>

Debby has only a faint memory of the birthplace, “the whiteness of its sun, the harshness of its hills, the raspy moan of its desert winds, and the desperate suddenness of its twilight...” (LiM 9)<sup>15</sup> While shoveling snow off the stoop in Schenectady, she says, “I have smelled heady hibiscus-scented breezes; I have felt tropical heat and humidity” (LiM 10).<sup>15</sup> As it always happens in such circumstances, she feels compelled to address herself to the origins of her birth. First by Wyatt, a young correctional officer placed in charge of her after she was caught shoplifting, and next by Mr. Bullock, her English composition teacher. She has, however, nothing but fate and her imagination to guide her teacher. The urge to know the exact details becomes irrepressible after she is abandoned by her Asian employer and lover Francis Albert Fong, the owner of multinational company manufacturing fitness equipment, following a summer of passionate love making. After persistent nagging and goading, she finds out from her mother that she discarded by her Fresno biological mother. She also learns that her father is serving a life sentence in an Indian prison. Setting Frankie’s New York apartment on fire in revenge and unwillingly killing a rival ready to take her place. Debby leaves for California in search of her biological mother who had first abandoned her as a child.

As, when we talk of her female characters defining their identities, it is not in the context of their need to assert

their identity in terms of a national and cultural group, though it may still be a part of their identity. The identity imposed upon them by their respective families or communities or nationalities often help them in navigating their path to discover their true self. Their quest is more on an individual plane. So, it is analyzed here whether they are able to identify their own true being, express it, and then, maintain it too. The protagonist Debby narrator's exploration of her own, personal Otherness (LiM 15) since she had been adopted from India by American parents at the age of two (LiM 87).<sup>15</sup> The fragmented nature of the narrator's memories before her adoption is a stimulus for her to find out more about her progenitors and the circumstances of her birth and early childhood (LiM 49).<sup>15</sup> However, these steps often leave to dead ends or irretrievable blanks (LiM 61).<sup>15</sup> Having discarded her identity as adopted child Debby of the American DiMartino family (LiM 10), this abandoned daughter of unidentified parents births herself into a new identity as Devi Dee. In addition, choosing to claim as her mother, the daughter and the cosmic spirit, "Earth Mother and warrior Goddess", endowed with the contradictory power to save and to kill (LiM 5).<sup>15</sup>

Here the character Debby seems to merge with the image of the goddess Devi. When Ham Cohan introduces Devi to her Bio-mom for the first time before the mother – daughter relationship is clarified between them. The scene takes place in a designer clothes store near Sacramento where Devi has been trying different ways of draping a layered seven veils dress on her. Jess Du Pree suddenly emerges from behind a rack of caftans and lays a possessive claim on Ham that Ham honours with a long and hard kiss. Devi reasserts her presence by announcing whom she is without stopping to check for tongue positions (Swapan 1997).<sup>16</sup> The tongue positions could apply to the middle- aged lovers or also to Devi herself, who enters the fray, tongue first, in a typical style of the Goddess Devi (LiM 113).<sup>15</sup> This voluntary steeping into Otherness by the narrator is a means of coming to terms with an erased self.

In the later flashback, Devi recollects a small- town courthouse scene where the Gray nuns in India had brought the infant Devi to her mother, but the woman had denied any blood connection whatsoever with the child, before the Judge and the court of Law (LiM 125).<sup>15</sup> The poignancy of this rejection is underlying by the image of parish puppies suckling on the saggy tits of a scarred, bony bitch in the courthouse yard (LiM 223).<sup>15</sup> Destiny's bizarre loops (LiM 233) are further depicted through "the pattern of veins on the inside of my eyelids" (LiM 9), which reappears as "familiar veins like snakes squirm across my eyelids" (LiM 172).<sup>15</sup> The unpredictability of human trajectories is supplementary referred to by an Indian burger – muncher at McDonalds'. For him, "The concept of Karma is that fate is very dynamic ... when on a dead – end street, jump into alternate paths" (LiM 80).<sup>15</sup> Han Cohan uses earthquakes and fault creep theory to help Devi come to terms with the complexity of identity. Ham explained about "creeping, gliding, and sliding movements

along fault lines, pressure... and then wham bang, whoa! The big one breaks the body in two" (LiM 223).<sup>15</sup> All these images are capable of seen as developments of the basic theme of otherness or identity quest within the self in *Leave It to Me* (1997). Since the battle has to be waged non- stop until the ultimate moment of annihilation.

In *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Bharati Mukherjee talks about a mythic family story, where a pre-arranged marriage that goes wrong; when an intended groom dies of the snakebite, on his way to the marriage ceremony. Tara Lata's father marries her to a tree in order to save his daughter's life and to uphold his Hindu faith. The author tells us that in Hinduism a woman reaches nirvana through worshipping her husband as God. In addition, a woman without a husband is not only a social outcast but doomed to be reincarnate. She is excluded from society, even not allowed to associate with any religious or marriage ceremony. On the other, hand Tara a self- possessed and curious woman exhibits a fervent quest for identity and space of her own. In fact, central to the theme of the novel is the quest of her, as her traditional Brahmin roots and present American life frequently struggle for supremacy. She has done what is quite unimaginable; she has divorced her brilliant, extremely rich and famous husband. However, the couple stays in touch. Tara lives in San Francisco with her fully acculturated teenaged son and the two live in a funky house in the heart of the city. She has a white American lover, Andy who is typical former hippie- type who always spouts pseudo-enlightened Buddhist maxims. As an individual, she enforces her identity as a self-propelled woman by exerting her own will on decisions about her life, "I am free to make a mess of my life, (DD 48) she says to Bish."<sup>17</sup>

When we go back to past Tara relationship with her two sisters is complicated, the flow of affection blocked by a certain formality and adherence to present roles. Her eldest sister Padma, as she says Didi, the eldest and most glamorous, married a Mehta, an illustrious family which includes the conductor Zubin and moved to New Jersey to pursue a career in television. Again, all is not as it seems. Her lifestyle is a thin veneer laid over the dense pressed down bedrock of tradition. Her sister Parvati, the middle one married a rich man and stayed in India, but by some miracle was able to choose her mate. "Parvati, the pliable middle daughter had done the unthinkable: she'd made a love match... He was certainly not what brains-and- beauty. Parvati Bhattacharjee could have commanded on the Calcutta market" (DD 51).<sup>17</sup> Tara had married the bridegroom of her father's choice, she recounts the utter lack of romance in her marriage, in which her father told her, "There is a boy and we have found him suitable. Here is his picture. The marriage will be in three weeks" (DD 23).<sup>17</sup> Tara, not knowing any other way, submitted: "I married a man I had never met, who we picture and biography and bloodiness I approved of, because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market" (DD 26).<sup>17</sup> Soon she divorced from Bishwapriya, and she raised a teenage son of her own and the two live in a funky house.

She is living comfortable life until one day a boy appears in her home, Chris Dey who is looking for Tara's elder sister, Padma. He presents himself to Tara as didi's illegitimate son, conceived through an affair with a prominent businessperson named Ronald Dey. Nevertheless, after the revelation of her sister's pre-marital affair with Ronald Dey, and her having a child by him, she realizes that she cannot escape her past. Moreover, when she thinks of herself in the light of the past, she wonders... does she know her family all these years ... or does she even know herself. She wonders what she really is: a well-protected and safe Bhattacharjee/Chatterjee or an ordinary person vulnerable to any threat. These are the question that goad her to probe into her past and act on her own to find out answers.

She considers her assumptions about her family and begins her quest for reality. It is through this quest only she finds her identity. Her sister denied the fact of having an illegitimate child. She realizes the pernicious intentions of somebody behind Chris Dey's arrival at her new home, but finds nobody to support her in her search to know the truth. Her lover deserts her for her going to police, her son gets irritated; but despite all this, she takes it upon herself to find out the truth. The Indian police officer assigned to her informs Tara that there is a rash of gangs in the States from India, who prey on Indians with money. She is a very wealthy woman, her son has a huge trust fund, and her husband is the richest Indian in the States. The officers feel her family is a target, perhaps for a kidnapping. Having once been informed of the danger of the Dawood gang looming large, Tara is worried about her ex husband and son ,decides again to be united with her husband , and look after him when he is seriously wounded in the attack of some powerful explosives oh her house. However, she tells him of her vision "a vision of discipline and self- knowledge and of misfortune turned to new energy" and thus "the scale of her achievements made it difficult for a wife to set her own sights" (DD 280).<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it clears the fact that she never liked to be shadowed, and now articulates this quite clearly to her male counterparts, without any hesitation. In addition, after that though she does not intend to return to India permanently, the first thing to come to her mind naturally is her "need to see Mummy and Daddy" (DD 277).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the entire novel comes over as an attempt by Tara to explore her own individuality and acknowledge her difference from her two sisters, her family and her community. By the repetition in varying versions of a nursery rhyme: "We are sisters three / as alike as three blossoms on one flowering tree" (DD 23).<sup>17</sup> The greatly differing choices and outlooks of the three sisters illustrate that a sameness of desh or place of origin and of family genes does not in any tactic guarantee similar experiences through life. In Tara's case, it is after many vicissitudes, including a divorce, a roots search and a fire that nearly caused her death that she arrives at a realization of what her true vocation is.

*The Tree Bride* (2004), is a sequel to *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Tara Chatterjee is the main protagonist again in this novel, is happy with her husband and is expecting a baby. She talks about her families past and narrates the tale of her great –great aunt and namesake Tara Lata, who was born in 1874 and at five married to a tree because her fiancée died. Tara Lata conspired to win Bengal's independence from England. The narrator discovers how Tara Lata died in prison; she even reveals the evidence of British rules. The contemporary Tara accesses *The Tree Bride's* story, through family papers provided by Tara's gynecologist Victoria Khanna, whose grandfather path crossed that of Tara's ancestor *The Tree Bride*. In this novel, Bharati Mukherjee focuses on the global identity that the Indian woman is fast acquiring.

Tara is doing research for a novel; she is fascinated with the history of her own ancestor *The Tree Bride*. Tara Lata Gangooly, the *Tree Bride* went on to become a fearless figure in India's freedom struggle housing many freedom fighters in her house in Mishtigunj in West Bengal. Her gynecologist Victoria Khanna, a European married to an Indian Professor at Stanford, who once taught her husband. Their meeting leads to more convergences and opens several doors in Tara's search into the history of her ancestral village and her great-great aunt, Tara Lata Gangooly, *The Tree Bride*. Victoria's grandfather was Vertic Treadwell; a district commissioner in the Indian Civil Service who has kept her grandfather's personal papers, offer them to Tara. Until then, Tara had been collecting information about *The Tree Bride* and her ancestral village Mishtigunj, mostly from family sources and old books and ledgers, but Treadwell's papers prove to be a gold mine. They form the backbone of this story, which reveals the effects of colonialism and its aftermath.

As a narrator Tara discovers why her namesake died in prison, she uncovers much evidence of the British ruler's contempt for the Indians they claimed they were civilizing, their cruelty, bigotry and duplicity cut into the narrative like a bloody knife. Back in Colonial India, her great-great aunt, Tara Lata Gangooly, spent her life as a resistance fighter against the British Raj. Tara also finds a woman Victoria Khanna, whose British grandfather had a direct connection to *The Tree Bride*. Bharati Mukherjee's novel moves back and forth across time and continents as Tara tries to find the connections and coincidences of her past and present. The problem with *The Tree bride* could stem from one sentence, "I am enough of a mystic, like Bish" says Tara (TTD 27) "To believe there are no coincidence only convergences". *The Tree Bride* has received mostly positive reviews with Chicago Sun – Times saying, "To understand Tara's rich experience of revelations, *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tee Bride* are meant to be read in succession. Together they prove that Bharati Mukherjee is a master at creating magical, Mysterious stories that resound with spiritual healing for both the dead and the living".<sup>18</sup>

During an Interview question, I wonder aloud how one goes about planning a trilogy, when writing simple one book seems difficult enough. Bharati Mukherjee herself explains, “When I started *Desirable Daughters*, I had no idea it would lead to a three book project. Things really started to form in my mind as I was writing the last scene. Here we had Tara, a naturalized citizen, previously a good wife living in a gated community, successful husband, personal happiness, and then asking herself: ‘what do I want out of life?’ She is an impulsive risk-taker. For Tara to really understand who she is, she would have to know her background”. In the book, Tara comments, “By twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties. I was married; I had a son, material comfort, and 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 magazines and did the right California thing and struck out my own” (TTD 16).<sup>18</sup> “For people like me, the question of identity isn’t just about who I am but all the cultural, political and social influences that have shaped an Indian born American writer;” says Mukherjee herself in an Interview in Magazine (Hancock 59).<sup>19</sup>

All Bharati Mukherjee’s heroines go through a transformation in their personality; they are not what we know them to be in the beginning of the novel, we are simply amazed what they have turned themselves into when the novel ends. People can internally transform at only when they are not quite satisfied with their identity, in some corner of their heart they yearn for change. This dissatisfaction leads to a quest for identity in ambitions and curiously adventurous people for their actual self and eventually, to an affirmation of their newly found identity. It is through this process of their metamorphoses that their quest is finalized. Realization of one’s self-identity is a sense of being powerful. Bharati Mukherjee herself has said in one of her interviews, “Empowerment meant escaping the identity assigned by ... tradition bound community”<sup>20</sup>. Her protagonists show that kind of empowerment in themselves ones they realized themselves fully.

According to Stuart Hall, identity should be thought and not as an already accomplished fact, but as a process always constituted within, not outside representation. She explores the shifting identities of diasporic women both in the

past and present day United States and India, thereby establishing universality of her works. In an interview with Barbara Lane she says that her protagonists are composed of “a series of fluid identities”. Therefore, it is clear that for them, self- identity is not a presence but is the redemption from a rigid, already established identity; it is what they create, changing the one that is imposed.

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