

# Shadows of Immigration: The Crisis of Indian Female Identity in Selected Works of Bharati Mukherjee

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## Abstract:

The growing phenomena of immigration during the last two centuries has affected the demography of the host countries as well as dramatically shocked the immigrants themselves for discovering new horizons through which they would have never flown before. The paper examines the dynamic evolvement of the female identities of an Indian immigrant, Bharati Mukharjee, through a series of her literary works including: *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, *Wife, Darkness*, "Nostalgia," "A Wife's Story," "The Tenant," "The Management of Grief," *Jasmine*, and "Two Ways to Belong in America." The analysis in this paper is anchored on the postcolonial theory with regard to issues such as gender, power, race, centre/margin and assimilation. It aims to explore the identity formation of the characters through psychoanalysis to reveal how the Western ideology and philosophy, mainly reflected through *Jasmine* and other female characters, have gradually altered them to what can be described as "different" from both their original roots and their new cloaks. The transformation can be compared to fine Chinese ceramics made in England. They have lost the uniqueness of their homeland. Though the stories are presented as examples of successful transformation, the findings of the study suggest that the inferiority complex of the Indian identity is dominantly reinforced through the emotional and intellectual denial of a whole civilization and its legacy, looking down upon their own heritage beside the celebration of the new

colonizing approach. The controversial area to be investigated in other articles is whether the descendants of immigrants struggle to find who they are or they will have been fully integrated to their host countries.

**Keywords:** Bharati Mukherjee, Post-colonialism, Feminism, Immigrants, Immigration, Diaspora, Indo-American, Identity, English Literature.

**Introduction:**

Like many ethnic literatures in North America, writings by immigrants from the Indian subcontinent are concerned with the personal and collective identity, presenting their homelands, and the exploration of their new worlds. Indian-American writings voluntarily choose to use English language as their medium because of its influence and spread among their audiences. It is an option that has become available since the colonial epoch. Undoubtedly, those authors do not write from an American or Canadian perspective, they "must now create their own traditions" (Nelson, 36).

Bharati Mukherjee and other explicitly Indo-American writers belong to "the Fifth World: that of the economically and politically displaced immigrants of the twentieth century, who are transposed into alien contexts where they redefine and newly construct alternative identities and communities" (Nelson, 36). The "Fifth World" was opened since the fifteenth century when the British Empire searched for a passage to India to sow the seeds of the Commonwealth there. The passage is responsible to reverse the direction and immigrate to the new world for fortune, or fame, and for "swifter pursuit of happiness" (Nelson, 51). Mukherjee has continually questioned in her works how such a world contains binding nature of cultural heritages. She has moved beyond traditional ties of her original country towards a global Americanized life. Her fluctuation between the old and new

worlds has led her to lose the required balance between modernity and authenticity.

The crisis of the identity of Indian female protagonists in Mukherjee's works has reflected her own crisis. A great deal of it can be referred to the different cultural positions she has taken before she finally declares that she is "no longer Indian in mind or spirit" ("On Being an American Writer," 51). These cultural positions necessitate having a clear recognition of what culture means. The old battle over defining the meaning of culture can be summarized into two sides. On the one hand, "there is the unifying concept of *one* culture of mankind" (Ostendorf, 2006). It indicates the project of enlightenment to free people from discrimination and to accept individual's human qualities. On the other hand, "there is a differentiating concept of *cultures*" that points to the natural ethnic diversity (2006). The notion of having dissimilar cultures is a gate for bias if a certain one is politically, socially or religiously protected. So, a compromise between the two ideas can be achieved if people accept being different but equal as well. Mukherjee could not reach such conciliation, and ends up obliterating her Indian background. By Indian, the researcher means the subcontinent of India, including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri- Lanka.

### **Literature Review:**

Fakrul Alam's *Bharati Mukherjee* is a beautifully elaborated book that examines her personal and literary life in a comprehensive way. It includes a remarkable analysis of her works and themes supporting his thoughts by her articles and interviews. It divides her life into three main phases: her life as an exiled person, then as an Indian expatriate and immigrant and finally as a full Americanized person.

*Bharati Mukherjee's Fiction: a Perspective* is a book by Sushma Tandon in 2007. The author sets forth the conditions that justify the reasons behind being accepted by American people and

rejected by Canadians, and lays out the disturbance of immigrants between the Canadian mosaic and the American melting pot. The author examines Mukherjee's works suggesting that she favors America to Canada and favors both countries to her old world in India. Also, she interestingly studies her works analytically and thematically.

F. Timothy Ruppel contributes to Kostas Myrsiades's and Jerry Mcguire's *Order and Partialities: Theory, Pedagogy, and the Postcolonial* with his article "Re-inventing Ourselves a Million Times: Narrative, Desire, Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*", State University of New York Press, 1995. He describes the deep conflict of the heroine and comments on the word choices by Mukherjee when she names immigrants as "boat people" and "strange pilgrims" relating his article to what Edward Said suggests, "When the postcolonial subjects speak, they are considered by many Western intellectuals to be merely wailers and whiners, denouncing the evils of colonialism" ("Intellectuals", 54). Kristin Carter-Sanborn, an assistant professor at California State University, Los Angeles, wrote his article "We Murder Who We Were: *Jasmine* and the Violence of Identity" (2006) in which he describes America as "a new Third World" because the new immigrants might act the same way as they were doing back home. He also comments on the way the heroine, Jyoti, rejects English Classics like *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* and then embraces them. "A Hindu woman flees her family's poverty and the Sikh's terrorism" that is how he suggests that India was the place where the heroine puts an end to her emotions and America is where she regains them (Carter-Sanborn, 28). Mukherjee confesses that her Indianness is fragile though she looks unmistakably Indian.

### **Methodology:**

The paper will follow a descriptive method exploring the depths of Bharati Mukherjee's personal and professional experiences and how they are reflected in her works and seen by

other critics. The selected works are chronologically ordered according to their publication dates and chosen to study her mentality and clarify her positions from issues of originality and westernization, power dominance, identity formation and self-assertion. The selected works includes some of her novels and short stories. They are *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, *Wife, Darkness*, "Nostalgia," "A Wife's Story," "The Tenant," "The Management of Grief," *Jasmine*, and "Two Ways to Belong in America."

The paper is going to examine the following points:

- A detailed biographical sketch of Mukherjee's life and literary themes.
- Examining Mukherjee moving from wearing the Sari to wearing jeans

### **A biographical sketch of Bharati Mukherjee**

Of Bengali origin, Mukherjee was born in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. She later travelled with her parents to Europe after Independence, only returning to Calcutta in the early 1950s. She received her B.A. from the University of Calcutta in 1959 as a student of Loreto College, and subsequently earned her M.A. from the University of Baroda in 1961. She next travelled to the United States to study at the University of Iowa. She received her M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1963 and her Ph.D. in 1969 from the department of Comparative Literature. After more than a decade living in Montreal and Toronto in Canada, Mukherjee and her husband, Clark Blaise, returned to the United States. She died on January 28, 2017, at the age of 76 in New York, U.S.

Remembering that Bharati Mukherjee is one of the representatives of the literature of immigrants, the phenomenon of immigration should be highlighted to construct a fair background about her. Most studies of immigration, that asks why and how people emigrate, examine economic rationale and the connection network among emigrants. The article "Go West Young Man: The

Culture of Migration among Muslims in Hyderabad, India" (2007) by Dr. Syed Ali uses data gathered from field research in Hyderabad to affirm that the culture of migration is expanding.

Anup Shah's article "Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All" (2008) says that immigration seems to be making more headlines in recent years. As the world globalizes in terms of nations' economies, trade and investment, borders are opened up more easily for freer flow of goods and products. People are supposedly freer to move around the world, too. They emigrate from one country to another for a variety of complex reasons. Some are forced to move, due to conflict or to escape persecution and prejudices, while others may voluntarily emigrate. Although such a move may be necessary, it can be quite traumatic, and on the top of many challenges experienced so far. Shah resumes explaining that immigration can have positive and negative impacts on both the host or recipient country, and the original country. The recipient country is usually an industrialized one in Western Europe, or the United States. The field of study is concerned with Mukharjee as a postcolonial feminist writer; therefore, lights should be shed on those terms. The field of post-colonial literature is vast enough to contain the literature of immigrants from the colonized countries who narrate their stories of exile and diaspora.

Taken literally, the term "postcolonial literature" would seem to label literature written by people living in countries formerly colonized by other nations. This is undoubtedly what the term originally means, but there are many problems with this definition as discussed by Paul Brians in his article "Post-colonial Literature: Problems with the Term" (2006). He states six important points to argue these problems:

First, literal colonization is not the exclusive object of postcolonial study. Second, among the works commonly studied under this label are novels like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

which was written while the nation in question; i.e., Nigeria, was still colonies. Third, some critics argue that the term misleadingly implies that colonialism is over. Fourth, it can be argued that this way of defining a whole era is Eurocentric, that it singles out the colonial experience as the most important fact about the countries involved. Writers from; say, India, who has a long history of pre-colonial literature, wish to be viewed differently. Fifth, many postcolonial authors do not share the general orientation of postcolonial scholars toward engaging in an ongoing critique of colonialism. Sixth, post-colonialism as a term lends itself to very broad use (Brians, 1).

Postcolonial is also a troublesome term because it draws some very arbitrary lines. A host of fine Indian writers is neglected simply because they do not write in English on the sensible grounds for India has a long tradition of writing which should not be illogically linked to the British imperial episode. Of those who write in English, Bharati Mukherjee specifically rejects the label Indian-American, though she is an immigrant from India, and Salman Rushdie prefers to be thought of as a sort of multinational hybrid, though he has occasionally used the label postcolonial in his own writing. It is notable that whenever writers from the postcolonial world receive wide recognition, they are denounced as unrepresentative, inferior to others and illegitimate spokespeople. Therefore, what determines when you are counted as postcolonial: the place of birth, the length you have lived abroad, or your subject matter? These and similar questions are the object of continuous debate.

### **Mukherjee Between Sari and Jeans:**

Over the last decades some exiled post-colonial writers have refigured their identity by rejecting the status of exile to that of immigrant. Bharati Mukherjee has adopted the term of immigrant to describe her literary productions and personal experience. The paradigmatic shift from exile to immigrant literature has important

implications because it forces us to re-examine the relationship between the experience of exile and the process of representing it. Exiled writers are often seen as giving objective views of the two worlds they are straddling by virtue of their alienation. They are ascribed as neutral. Their assumed privileged status as in-between mediators between two cultures becomes the cue that grounds interpretation and constructs a binary logic between alienation in the west and romanticized homeland.

Bharati Mukherjee's life can be divided into three main phases as Alam indicates in his book *Bharati Mukherjee* (1996). Firstly, her own struggle with identity is described as an exile from India, then as an Indian expatriate in Canada and finally as an immigrant in the United States (Alam, 10). Her works correspond with the biographer Fakrul Alam's categorization into three phases. Her earlier works, such as *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, are attempts to find identity in her Indian heritage. They are almost biographies of what she and her American husband had experienced when they went there for a vacation. Mukherjee's style of writing *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Days and Nights in Calcutta* touches of little sympathy and malice. She was in a position of re-defining if not severing her ties with her homeland.

The second phase of her writing encompasses works such as *Wife*, the short stories in *Darkness*, an essay entitled "An Invisible Woman," and *The Sorrow and the Terror*. These works originate in Mukherjee's own experience of racism in Canada, where despite being a tenured professor, she feels humiliated and on the edge of being a "housebound, fearful, obsessive, and unforgiving queen of bitterness" (Alam, 10). That temper is reflected in her works. Examining *Wife* and "Nostalgia" in the short story collection *Darkness* reveals that Dimple and Padma, the heroines, are "reincarnated and murdered in order to be reborn" because "the new births are accompanied by great pain" (Tandon, 56). On the

contrary, she announces that "rebirth was a privilege of the dead" (*Darkness*, 105). In that way, she assumes if her female characters feel as being reborn, that implicitly means that they were dead at earlier stages of their lives. In another different meaning, she might suggest the impossibility of their ability of being spiritually reborn. Neither of these implications is acceptable since they have offensive allusions to characters she has already described as survivors.

*Wife* was written in the dark phase of Mukherjee's life. So, it is shaded by her gloomy, bleak, desolate mood of writing. She is not as objective as she should be. She writes the plot to have not only a tragic ending to the story, but also an explainable failure of the heroine. Her expatriate experience fails. Besides, she shows literary barrenness because she cannot find a satisfying denouement other than going mad and murdering the hero. Although the setting is in Calcutta and New York City, the setting of the heroine's mind is that of Toronto, Canada, with its dimness and depression. It is obvious that the authoress takes hostile position against Canada since her early stages.

In her third phase, Mukherjee is described as having accepted being "an immigrant, living in a continent of immigrants" (Alam, 9). She describes herself as American and not the hyphenated Indian-American title:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I'm ashamed of my past, not because I'm betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here ... I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a U.S. citizen for me is that can define myself in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My

affiliation with readers should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race (2005 Interview, 32). Her third phase includes the rest of her works and most outstandingly her novel *Jasmine* and the collection of *The Middleman and Other Stories*. She explains that "there are people born to be American" in spite of her awareness of "the brutalities and violence" there (Tandon, 139). She suggests that "America is certainly no Eden," and describes her new characters as "survivors" (139-146).

On the other hand, Mukherjee's bigotry against India extends to admit that "it will exist in the immigrant writers works as a ghost, a friendly one" (Tandon, 141). Such concealment is deliberately meant to cut off any possible bonds between her and India to present herself to the western and westernized audience as a dissident from it. She also declared that:

Instead of seeing [her] Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration, [she] sees it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated ... Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world. Though the characters in these stories are, or were, "Indian," [she] sees most of these as stories of broken identities and discarded languages, and the will to bond oneself to a new community, against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal. The book [she] dreams of updating is no longer *A Passage to India* (Darkness, 3).

It is the fluidity of identities that leads Mukherjee to actually embrace none, and be loyal to none. She would "forever shuttle between the old world and the new" (*Darkness*, 105). She holds a disfigured concept of identity-- the matter that hinders her from being a trustful bridge between the east and the west as she sees herself. She has prejudices against her own country of birth whereas she is infatuated by the host one. So, how would she be a fair representative of the former on the lands of the latter?

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) contains her most optimistic depiction of the south Asian experience in North America. The novel's heroine grows out of one of the *Middleman* stories, also entitled "Jasmine", who would not die from the imagination of the authoress. She believes that the heroine deserves to be reincarnated in the longer genre of novel.

Bharati Mukherjee's rejection of the hyphenization of being Asian-American leads her to be in a constant struggle to prove her belonging and affiliation. It is precisely the vague double identity which forms a great deal of her literary works. She states that "[her] transformation has been genetic" not hyphenated (*Jasmine*, 222). "Re-inventing Ourselves a Million Times: Narrative, Desire and Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" (1995) by Timothy F. Ruppel explains her encouragement of the "re-invention" of the true identity. She also calls for an identity that is "multiple," "discursive," "shifting" and "flexible" (Ruppel, 8). If she has really succeeded to make such a leap from the east to the west, then why she still carries the interests and concerns of many immigrants who could or sometimes could not make the same leap. In a few words, her east was soulless, and victimized, and her immigration experience to the west was deliberately romanticized and adventurous.

*Jasmine* is the best elaborated work which embodies Mukherjee's recent notions of identity. Mukherjee uses lots of fictional techniques with great skill. She uses the flashback technique. Starting from the end is her way to assure the readers that the whole story is a long bitter-sweet memory that would not be repeated anymore. Readers are able to know why she reaches that point of power, self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment. Moreover, Mukherjee uses the first-person narrator which indicates the heroine's independence and strength and creates a sense of immediacy. Readers are capable to understand the heroine's

motives, plans and emotions without the need of any other character to explain or direct the audience's attention.

Jasmine represents Mukherjee in all aspects. She writes her own story telling her own experience as an immigrant, and elucidating reasons for her immigration and difficulties to fit in the new world. Jasmine is the speaker of Mukherjee who is able to open up and speak about the dilemma of finding another place to call home. In shaping the character of Jasmine as an immigrant bildungsroman, Mukherjee takes care of all of the details to embed her story among other stories of immigrants, and to differentiate between immigrants who are capable of surviving in America and those who could not make it and ended in frustration.

The dictum of the novel is clear: "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to make oneself. We murder who we were, so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams" (*Jasmine*, 29). She suggests that the process of making oneself is a hard one. In an article on *Jasmine*, "We Murder Who We Were: Jasmine and the Violence of Identity," (1994) Kristin Carter-Sanborn reads *Jasmine* in a different way from what Mukherjee wants as self-empowering. Carter-Sanborn suggests that Jasmine is dependent on the current events as well as on other males to change her position, which implies that it is not a self-made desire to change. She sees that her identities are divided like objects according to others' agendas and desires. Jasmine forwards a linkage between an immigrant's personal progress and assimilation into the technical America and an Americanized technological identity, one that is subjected to the terms of adjustment including egocentricity, contradictory relationships and dissolution of many social concepts.

Mukherjee contributes to the enhancement of the stereotypical image of Asia for the western audience as being unhygienic, stubborn, exploitative and socially inflexible and isolated. The importance of traditions, religious beliefs and family

relationships is not as dominant in the west as it is in the east. Although it makes the eastern immigrants different, it also makes them distinguishable if not enchanting. The Indian people are known by their natural intelligence, critical educational minds, perseverance and being faithful, dependable and very spiritual. Unfortunately, Mukherjee does not reveal that bright part of the Indian culture that is attractive to many western people like Bud Ripplemeyer and Taylor of *Jasmine*. On the contrary, she pictures such aspects as a heavy burden that should be thrown away to fully interact in the new culture. She celebrates their abandonment and their replacement by irresponsibility, religious and social disintegration and spiritual vacuum. She rejoices being secular and socially unreliable and having illegitimate relationships with men. She considers these features and other similar ones as parts of the American dream package that should not be avoided. She does not picture any character that used to be seen as a tyrant or at least ill-mannered in India and developed or changed into a civilized one. She is possibly not lying, but she is not telling the whole truth of the situations of Indian women and society.

Jasmine embodies the major themes adopted by Mukherjee and is considered her literary magnum opus. It includes the themes of assimilation of immigrants, self-assertion, the themes of rebirth and multiplicity and the strategy of hybridization and the social themes of early marriage, women's submission, men's superiority, biased traditions and domestic violence. Each theme is placed somewhere within the multiple characters of the same body and flesh of Jasmine. Jasmine makes quite a change from the pleasant simple girl, Jyoti, to Jasmine, the loyal wife and widow, to Jazzy, the illegal immigrant, to Jase, a nanny in the household of an American couple, to Jane, a would-be wife of a crippled American banker. Each of these characters has carried heavy load of transformations in behaviour and personality. The successive "rebirths" seems analogous to Hindu transmigration of the soul.

*Jasmine* receives wide controversial reception among common readers and critics in North America and in India. It has been accused of simplifying the lives of immigrant women. John K. Hoppe adds in his article "The Technological Hybrid as Post-American: Cross-Cultural Genetics in *Jasmine*" that by definition of a postcolonial writer, Mukherjee is no multiculturalist. Mukherjee is definite about her desire to be considered as American writer, not and Indian or an Indian-American one. That attitude extracts her from the category of multiculturalists though places her among post-colonial writers whose field is that of the Orientalizing west.

Sami Ludwig's article "Cultural Identity as Spouse: Limitations and Possibilities of a Metaphor in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*" (1996) treats "the issue of cultural attachment as a relationship with the male Other" and explains how certain attitudes define the new identity (Stummer, 103). He also indicates that Mukherjee has suggested that the Indian female identity is determined by the new Other spouse. The spouses are selectively chosen and the process of changing them guarantees other possible identities which are not yet revealed and exposed. Furthermore, her protagonists are differently seen according to the variable contexts they live in. While one of them is considered "humours, intelligent, refined and affectionate" in one context, the same woman is known as "widowed," "fearful, illegal, raped," "murderer" and "destitute" in another (*Jasmine*, 171). Additionally, the penetration of cultural norms has extended to admire one and neglecting the other. She explains that for the Americans "experience leads to knowledge, or else it is wasted," but for her representative protagonist "experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill" (*Jasmine*, 33). She has intentionally obliterated one's cultural elements for others. She has repeatedly insisted on the inferiority of her original culture. In her article "On Being an American Writer," she realizes that "[she] was

no longer Indian in mind or spirit" ("On Being an American Writer," 51).

Moreover, Mukherjee's feminist view of eastern women is that they are persecuted, ill-treated and unable to control their lives and take important decisions for their future. Such generalization is an unfair description of the real status. Besides, her view of being liberated is very westernized. She portrays most of her female characters as liberated when they become very irresponsible and have illicit relationships with men. Dimple of *Wife*, Padma of "Nostalgia," Panna of "A Wife's Story," Maya of "The Tenant," and Jyoti of *Jasmine* are depicted in that way in spite of the fact that some of them are married and some belong to good families. Their behaviours are, to some extent, inexcusable. Although they face some social and emotional troubles, their manners reflect huge spiritual vacuum even before going to America. She loses the balance between traditions and modernity. Gender is the major trouble of Indian females in their homeland, but both gender and race collaborate to be two major obstacles for them in the west. Those members of racially marginalized communities and conflicting gender expectations shift their gender performances across mainstream and sub-cultural settings. Considerably, Mukherjee agrees to use the norms of the regular western females neglecting those of her origins. She implies the superiority of the western standards without giving justifiable excuses for paying no attention to the others. However, she regularly points to men's influences on forming their identities. So, it is a kind of omitting or at least devaluing the Indian men's roles, and overestimating the roles of the western men, whom she has appreciated for their constant stimulation of their women to be intellectually and emotionally autonomous.

Therefore, America's assumed contributions to the advancement of their characters are just pure theorizing of the reality. Immigrants have to adapt with the new conditions because,

according to Homi Bhabha, the host country has no room for "the fixity of the past" (Bhabha, 219). In terms of post-colonial theory, this adaption is "an interesting move in different direction for the notion of identity formation of the Other of western discourse" (Dascalu, 72). Reading Mukherjee in the best intentions would place her call of "assimilation, mimicry and collaboration as the components of ethics of exile" (Dascalu, 73). It is noticeable that though the colonists themselves can be considered exiled from their homeland, the ethics of exile do not function in their discourse. They do not have to adapt, assimilate or change their patterns of thinking. A clear ambivalence is detected.

What Mukherjee and some other writers fail to apprehend are the facts that there should be differentiation between modernity and westernization, and that the balance between authenticity and novelty must be maintained. The difficulty becomes how to preserve women's innocence and purity without sacrificing modern social progress. She has preferred her thoughts of that progress to the protection of innocence through propagating the limitless freedom that might bring about moral, social and ideological disintegration. She also adopted the western perspective of femininity through situating the South Asian women in the shoes of the white American ones though they belong to two different contexts approving the colonial visions of women, tradition and culture. It becomes necessary to say that her introduction of herself as post-colonial writer is brought into question. She is intellectually colonized by the westernization and more particularly the Americanization of the world. The issues of women continue to be an East-West cultural battlefield where Mukherjee is one of the soldiers whose loyalty is bitterly specified and definitely clear. Homi Bhabha has another interesting notion to describe the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. For Bhabha, mimicry is a process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as "almost the same, but not quite ... so that mimicry is at once

resemblance and menace" (Bhabha, 86). Mukherjee's selected works unravel some of her thoughts that might be read as trials of mimicry rather than attempts of assimilation because the sense of being exiled and different is somehow scary. "My foreignness frightens [Bud] ... It frightens me, too" (*Jasmine*, 26). It is a safer technique to approach the mainstream than to face it.

### Conclusion

A text quoted from the book of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, entitled *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), describes the erosion of the exiled post-colonial subject through the process of dislocation and cultural denigration:

A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or voluntary removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and the unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model (Ashcroft, 9).

Although the effects of dislocation are fully explored, and the cultural denigration of the Indian culture in the west is woven into the ironic perspective of Mukherjee's texts, the denigration of a symbolic Indian female through the process of her own transformation and movement away from the homogenized image constructed by the requirements of western liberal discourse remains plainly controversial.

The clash of cultures creates an ever-lasting desperate battle between and within cultural differences. If one has the desire to avoid such an inevitable conflict, he/she should sacrifice part of his individuality to be able to connect to the surrounding communities. Mukherjee has partially supported Samuel P. Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations, especially the part that speaks about the west versus the east. The western dominance has extended in

fields of politics, military, economy, sciences and businesses, and now it has reached the areas of intellects and literature.

To Mukherjee and many other immigrant writers the journey of identifying one's true original self is an endless path that has phases and would never find a satisfying destination or an arrival point. She has sought it in Canada and the United States. She has assumed that Canada individually and communally has pulled the wool over its eyes to the increasing discrimination against non-Western people. Such misrepresentation is more fully recognized by the margins than it is by its practitioners. In the meanwhile, she considers America as being on the other pan of the scale. Painfully, India is no longer a place that connotes home for Mukherjee, "but rather a way of perceiving reality and adapting to the empirical world" (Nelson, 44).

Besides, immigrants would have been required to abolish their over-romantic bonds to their homelands. Instead, their immigration experiences are intentionally over-romanticized by Mukherjee and many other writers who have given them high potentialities of achieving their dreams whether or not those chances are true. It is important to mention that they are willingly giving such sacrifices and as Jasmine says: "I changed because I wanted to" (*Jasmine*, 185). They show no resistance and welcome the alteration.

Mukherjee's works have aroused several skeptical notes around the issues of fusion or clash of cultures, identity, self-fulfillment and domination of the powerful and degradation of the powerless. She has verified that cultural fusion depends on dislocation, damage of communal memories and individual alienation and loss of original identity, and necessitates battles of domination. The successful balance between the two sides has turned to be a mere phantom that would never be reached and there are rare ways to reduce inevitable damages.

Furthermore, Mukherjee is usually presented as a possible bridge between East and West. It is demonstrated in this paper that she is drifted away from her origins, and attracted to western modernization. Instead of linking the two worlds and driving them into a common ground, she has renounced her rich inheritance in favour of a culture that is not hers. Thus, her views have widened the gap between them by embracing the new culture and promoting immigrating to it whereas rejecting the other and demeaning it. Eventually, the paper comes to a final conclusion that Mukherjee's immigration has brought her original culture into shadow putting the identity of the Indian female immigrants in a crisis through enfeebling their abundant legacy.

Bharati Mukherjee saw herself as a person who always lived in exile. She recalled her memories of family, friends and homeland with great passion. She kept in touch with her origins through magazines and newspapers which nourished the sensations of homesickness. Meanwhile, she graduated, published, practiced her hobbies and careers, got married and fulfilled what she wanted to do with her life in Canada and the United States. When she visited the subcontinent of India, its dreamy and magical picture had been hugely ruined by the reality. It had changed by economic decline, poverty, political corruption, violent protests, social decay, class conflicts, over-population, and deterioration in education and health care. The conditions she had seen and lived for a year were unsatisfactory. It was massively painful for her to realize that her sweet home was no longer her best place to live in. Her dreams of settling down among family and relatives had shattered into million pieces. Therefore, she had chosen to live in her voluntary exile. She left behind a wistful soul for her dear inhabitants, but she held no remorse over the vanishing mirage and the fading rose.

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