

A Thematic Analysis of a Few Select Novels of Bharati Mukherjee

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Abstract

This paper is a thematic analysis of a few select novels of Bharati Mukherjee. Diasporic literature, especially Indian Diasporic literature is the result of colonization and decolonization, the period in Indian history in which a large number of Indian people migrated to other countries either through colonization or by their need for work. Diaspora dream figures are found prominently in all the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee covering many moods of expatriation - nostalgia, frustration, uncertainty and despondency. In her novels, she explores the theme of expatriation, immigration and transformation. The protagonist of the novel *The Tiger's Daughter*, Tara Banerjee Cartright is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee. There is a strange fusion of the American and Indian in the psyche of Tara. She can take refuge neither in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. By analyzing the novel, one can understand how the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. *Jasmine* has achieved a proper identity and balance between tradition and modernity in the concluding part of the novel. *Leave It to Me (1997)* reveals the protagonist's ungrateful interaction with the kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. It also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main character in her quest for revenge. The expatriate and the immigrant are important figures in Mukherjee's writing because she uses them to integrate spatial location and dislocation.

Keywords: Diasporic literature, the Expatriate, the Immigrant, mother-daughter relationship, Colonization

Identity – Important Issue in Diasporic Literature

Identity is an important issue in diasporic literature. Diasporic literature, especially Indian Diasporic literature is the result of colonization and decolonization, the period in Indian history in which a large number of Indian people migrated to other countries either through colonization or by their need for work. The migrated people began to face different problems as they were indifferent to the culture of other countries, which lead them to search for their own identity.

This feeling of lack of identity gets classical expression in the diasporic literature of the period. Many writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arvind Adiga and others have expressed the feelings of rootlessness in the countries to which they migrated, where they were treated as ‘others’. They have discussed the issues of globalization, consumerism, transnationalism, cultural hybridity, alienation, and identity crisis faced by the individuals. Their works focus on the dislocated self, which desires to search for home and identity in transnational and trans-cultural situations. Diasporic dream figures are found prominently in all the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee covering many moods of expatriation - nostalgia, frustration, uncertainty and despondency. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated writers of the Asian immigrants’ experience in America. Her writings are largely honed by the multiple dislocations of her own personal life. Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian born American novelist, short story writer, non-fiction writer and journalist. Bharati Mukherjee, one of the famous women writers of the Indian diaspora, in most of her works brings out the experiences she has encountered in her life as an immigrant.

Theme of Expatriation, Immigration and Transformation

In her novels, Bharati Mukherjee explores the theme of expatriation, immigration and transformation. Her creative works comprise six novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *The Tree Bride* (2004). Her latest novel is *Miss New India* (2011). Her two collections of short stories are *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). She has also written two fictional works along with her husband Clark Blaise, *Days and Night in Calcutta* (1977) and *The Sorrow and the Terror: The Haunting Legacy of the Air India Tragedy* (1987) as well as several journalistic articles and interviews. The significant ones are “*Political*

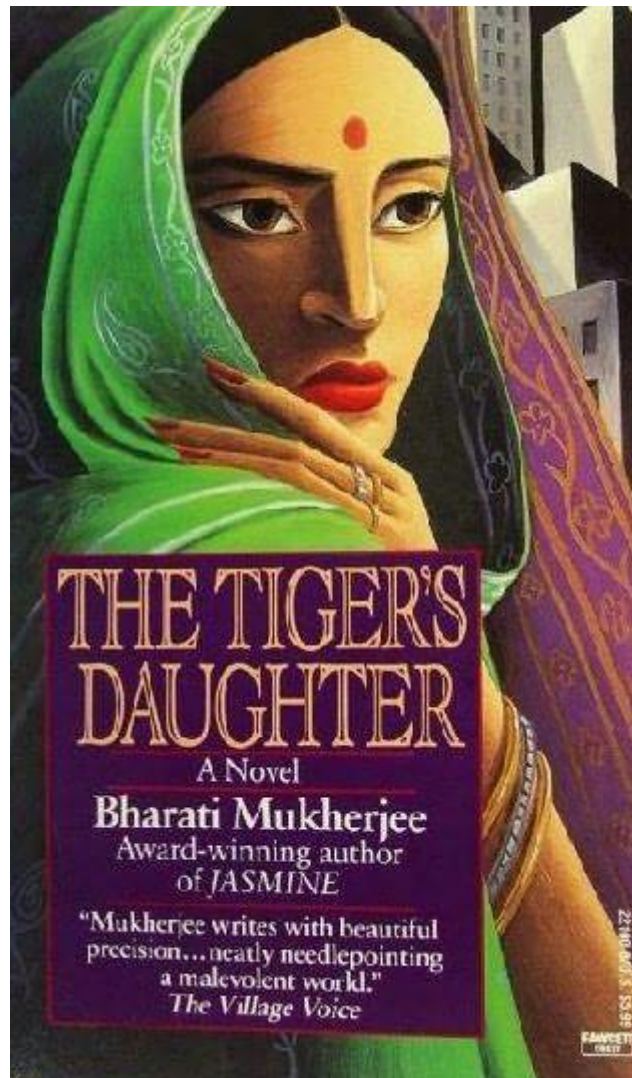
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Culture and Leadership in India (1991), “*Regionalism in Indian Perspective (1992),*” “*Immigrant Writing: Give us Your Maximalists,*” and “*Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties.*”

The Tiger's Daughter



Mukherjee's first novel *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) is a fine presentation of cultural conflict. It was conceived in a very difficult phase of her life when she was struggling to determine her own identity in the Indian heritage. *The Tiger's Daughter* runs parallel to Bharati Mukherjee's own experience when she returned to India with her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise in 1973. While she was in Canada, Bharati Mukherjee published *The Tiger's Daughter and wife*. The story is about the traumas of expatriation. She was distinctively afflicted by the

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chaos and poverty in India as well as by the mistreatment and exploitation of women in the guise of tradition. In this novel, she feels a special oneness with India. It deals with the problems of immigrants. It is truly an immigrant novel. In this novel, the theme of expatriation and isolation is handled with assurance. The protagonist Tara speaks for herself. She tries to find new meaning for her life. She is real and life-like. The ethics governing the nature of Tara makes her feel independent and individual.

The protagonist of the novel, Tara Banerjee Cartwright is an autobiographical presentation of Mukherjee. There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and the Indianness in the psyche of Tara. She can take refuge neither in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. The novel is divided into four parts. Part I deals with the part of Tara, her family background, and the process of her settlement in New York; Part II deals with Tara's arrival at Bombay, her journey to Calcutta, and her reaction to India; Part III concentrates on Tara's life at Calcutta and her Catelli-continental friends; Part IV of the novel deals with her visit to Darjeeling with her friends to spend summer vacation, her coming back to Calcutta, her boredom and alienation, her victimization in a mob, and her tragic end which remains mysterious.

The novel begins with Tara's return to India after seven years in America first as a student at Vassar and later as the Indian wife of her American husband, David Cartwright. Tara imagines an India, but she faces a very different India from what she expected. Tara's self-analysis brings about an unhappy conclusion. *The Tiger's Daughter* illustrates the uprooted condition of Tara. Born in the family of Banerjees in Calcutta, Tara Banerjee Cartwright goes to the United States for higher studies. She marries David, an American and settles down in New York. After seven years she returns to Calcutta to locate her home, to trace her cultural roots and to reclaim her inherited identity as the daughter of the Bengal Tiger and as the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Panchapara. She shunts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two worlds, two ideologies, two ways of life and two ways of encountering reality.

Tara returns to India after a lapse of even years. Having married David Cartwright, a writer, she is now Tara Banerjee Cartwright. On her arrival in India, she finds it difficult to relate

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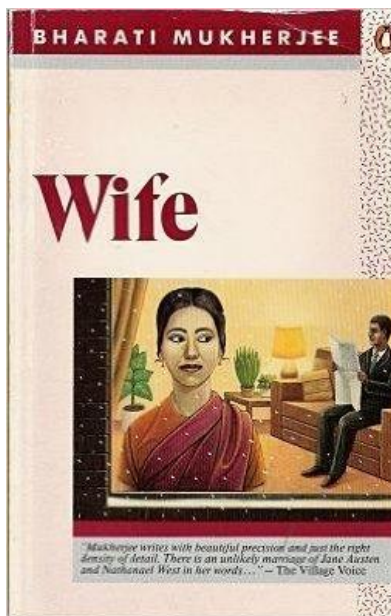
to her relatives in Bombay and Calcutta. They treat her like a foreigner. Though her parents, relatives and friends are eager to own her with her acquired foreignness, Tara feels insecure. Her alienation is deepened as she is welcomed by her relatives as ‘Americawali’ and her husband a ‘meleccha’ which means an outcast. Even at home she finds it difficult to play the role of a typical Bengali Brahmin. She feels guilty every time she enters the pooja room. Even while sitting before the rows of god and goddesses, she is not filled with piety. She thinks only about David. She is not able to sing bhajans. Tara remembers that as a child she had sung bhajans in the same house. But now, she is not able to sing spontaneously. She forgets her various steps in the religious rituals.

At a particular point, Tara realizes that the vacation will not be an easy one. Tara’s visit to Aunt Jharna’s house ends on a disastrous note. Her serious and innocent remarks, about when Aunt Jharna had tried plaster casts and special shoes for her clubfooted daughter, are mistaken. With a quiet violence, Aunt Jharna snubs Tara: “you think you are too educated for this, don’t you? [...] you have come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your *meleccha* husband? [...] or going to a school like St. Blaise’s?” (36-37). But for “a strange, unexpected little twinge called love” (37), Tara would have rushed out of the house to the safety of the car. This bitter incident makes Tara wonder.

Every time she meets her friends at the Catelli- Continental, she feels out of place in their company. She visits the funerary banks with Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, the owner of tea estates in Assam. She also feels that her visits are far from pleasant. All the efforts taken by her friends to treat her depression and fits of hysteria are in vain. When Tara visits Nayapur, a mining town near Calcutta with her friends, P. K. Tuntunwala, a businessman-turned-politician, he seduces her in the Nayapur Guest House. This incident undermines the little self-confidence that she is left with in a culture that is both alien and her own. Tuntunwala’s seduction outrages Tara so much that she resolves to leave Calcutta for good. But before she actually leaves, she is trapped in Sanjay’s car in the midst of a rioting mob on the road facing the Catelli-Continental. The rioters thrash Joyonto when he stirs out of the Catelli-Continental in a bid to save Tara. The mob also attacks Pronob, Tara’s friend violently when he goes out to rescue Joyonto.

Even Tara's visit to St. Blaise to meet the nuns is disappointing. To her the nuns seem "brownier than she remembered, their accents more Indian than she had expected". (200) All her early ideas of love, fair play and good manners had come from these women. But now, their quaint formation on the steps of St. Blaise's seems to be "people in a snapshot, yellow and faded". (201) Thus Tara's Indian dream is thoroughly shattered. She reconciles herself to reality. The story ends quite abruptly. The protagonist is left to wonder whether she will ever leave Calcutta and whether David will ever know that she loves him fiercely. In this novel, Hotel Catelli-Continental described as the "navel of the universe" becomes an important symbol of a rootless existence, a symbol of Tara's expatriate sensibility. In India she travels from Bombay to Calcutta, visits her aunt's place, the Catelli-Continental, Mr. Worthington's Council, the charity carnival, the funerary banks, Tollygunge, Darjeeling and Nayapur. There is also the temporal movement from Old India to New India. As Gillian observes, Old India implies order, safety and comfort and New India implies danger, disorder and confusion. The novel is open-ended as the reader is left wondering whether she could succeed in returning to her husband. The ending of the novel is used as a paradigm to question and discover – rediscover the new ways of defining reality in a world standing on the brink of the glorious mountain consisting of cash and pebbles.

Wife



Mukherjee's second novel *Wife* (1975) takes up a more complex dimension of the theme of immigrant experience. In this novel, Mukherjee deals with the complications that come from being thrown between two worlds and the strength and courage it takes to survive and live. *Wife* focuses on the status of the immigrant women experience, social oppression, east west encounter and cultural conflict. Like Bharati Mukherjee's many novels, this novel also has autobiographical elements. Her novel, *Wife* deals with Dimple, a young Indian woman. Dimple is married to a young engineer named Amit Basu; she was suppressed by the alien culture. She cannot adjust to her life in the USA out of fear and personal instability. She lacks inner strength and she cannot cope with the culture of New York. At the end of the novel Dimple murders her husband due to acculturative stress.

Even though the setting of *Wife* is New York, in the mind of the author it is probably Toronto. In the *first phase*, Dimple is the teenage daughter of Dasgupta, an electrical engineer. Due to a general strike in Calcutta, Dimple's prospects of getting a degree are postponed indefinitely. Mukherjee's *Wife* opens with the line "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads". (Wife 3) As usual only the wishes of the parents are fulfilled. This is the first of a series of disappointments in Dimple's life. Amit wanted to marry a fat and tall woman with fluency in English while Dimple wanted to marry a neurosurgeon. Immigrating to America symbolizes her eschewing from Indian society and the restraints. However, in Dimple's American life, her husband, Amit Basu, becomes an obstacle when she is looking for a new self. There is a tug of war in Dimple's mind. Dimple's endless wait for Amit Basu, a mechanical engineer debilitates her. Amit has an advantage over other grooms. He has applied for immigration to the United States, Canada and Kenya. He will take up whichever offer comes first.

In the *second phase*, Dimple is the wife of Amit Basu. Her life in the joint family of the Basus bristles with problems. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the Basus' apartment in a three-storied building stifles her personality. Lack of privacy, lack of freedom even to choose the colour of her bedroom curtains, absence of basic amenities and the ever-growing demands of the joint family drive her crazy. After marriage, Dimple tries to please every member of the traditional Calcutta based Bengali joint family. When her husband and mother-in-law change her

name, she accepts her new identity. The first jolt to Dimple is the mother-in-law insisting on calling her 'Nandini,' which means the 'holy cow'. When she hears that her husband was planning to go to America, she feels that this decision of her husband could provide freedom and liberty. Both husband and wife are excited to fly, but their reasons for going to America are totally different. The major reason for going to America for Dimple is to be liberated from all ethnicity and tradition. She starts dreaming about her stay abroad without knowing the practical problems she is going to face there.

When Dimple becomes pregnant, she indulges in self-abortion of skipping ropes. She considers that a child will be a deterrent to her migration to America. She also kills a mouse that looks pregnant. To Maya Manju Sharma, Dimple's act of abortion "is a sacrament of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood". (Maya Manju Sharma 1993: 15) Though she does not like Amit's habit of killing crows, she becomes a mute spectator to his sadistic pleasure. He has killed about two hundred and fifty three crows. Dimple's entry into New York is initiated with the role model of Sita. The contrast is quite evident that King Ram is seated on the throne in all regality while Sita is engrossed in hip-deep orange flames. Sita's virtual subordination to Rama is quite evident.

In the *third phase*, Dimple's life begins in the United States. Jyoti Sen, a former roommate of Amit at IIT, Kharagpur puts them up temporarily in his apartment in Queens, New York. Amit begins his long search for a job. Dimple's days are spent in the company of Meena Sen and other Bengali expatriates in New York. It is actually an extension of the Bengali community in Calcutta. Their dream is to return to India with the kind of money which will guarantee them a comfortable life in India. For them America is an alien country, so they want to return to their native land. The two do not stay happily due to their weak economic condition. She feels happy about the new surroundings. She is very much interested in learning how Meena Sen cleared her household items and how she purchased the things for their food. One day Dimple goes to the souk with Meena Sen to buy a cheesecake. Encouraged by Meena, she goes to the shop alone and notices inside the glass, one by one, the cake, the pickles, the salads, hanging salamis, pink roast beef, roast duck, turkey and so on. She asks for cheesecake but the shopkeeper starts staring at her.

Dimple passes time by helping Meena Sen in domestic works and in watching TV or reading newspapers. But she has to live always under fear. Very often she hears only about murder, smugglings in the basement of the building and such things. In the party at the Mullicks, she gets an ample opportunity to meet both Indians and Native Americans and study their culture. She meets Ina, the notorious wife of Bijoy Mullick. Dimple learns that violence is an inevitable aspect of life in New York. There are frequent announcements of murders in newspapers, car radio and in casual conversations. They bring a sort of restlessness and frustration in her. Dimple envies Ina Mullick because of her American life-style. Ina influences Dimple badly.

Unknowingly she starts liking her words and way of life. Ina leads her to fall in love with Mitt Glasser, an American. America's barbarous acts of violence, sex and bloodshed frighten and corrupt Dimple. This leads her to murder her husband later. An Indian in the tradition of an American, divorces her husband for he snored. Even the American cinema displays only sex and violence. When the visits of Milt Glasser and Ina become rare, Dimple feels very lonely, cut off and distraught. The loveless relationship with her husband contributes to her miseries. She suffers from insomnia. Dimple starts to compare him with Jyoti Sen and also with Milt Glassier. Amit worries about his job interviews, whereas Dimple is always in favour of making money, going to parties, conducting parties and getting well settled in New York. Once, Vinod Kanna, a prosperous businessman in the town, invites the couple for dinner. He also offers a job to Dimple but on her husband's advice, she declines it because Amit doubts Kanna's character.

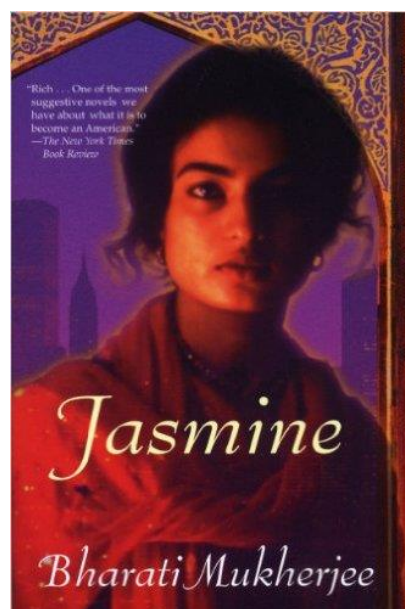
And the *fourth phase*, Dimple's life begins in Mookerji's apartment in Manhattan. The Mookerji's have sub-let their apartment as they are on sabbatical leave. Physically distanced from the 'expatriate' community, Dimple mingles with people like Mitt Glasser, Ina Mullick, and Leni Anspach. She eventually feels very lonely in her apartment in Manhattan. Watching television throughout the day becomes her way of life. Television brings the violence of America into her apartment. She entertains a fear of violence in real life and suffers from insomnia at night. Dreams and illusions haunt her during the day. All these imagined and experienced miseries drive her to the very brink of insanity. In a fit of utter disturbance, when reality and alternate reality coalesce, she murders her husband with a kitchen knife. Rootlessness is the main

causes of Dimple's problems that happen due to the lack of acculturation. Her dream turns into neurosis and finally she murders her husband, and justifies it by comparing to TV serial, 'women on television got away with murder'. (Mukherjee 1975: 213) The images of depression are symbolized by the physical Dimple and the mole on her husband's chest. Dimple's stabbing the mole on her husband's chest seven times symbolically suggests the destruction of their marital bond since the married couples according to the Hindu ritual takes seven steps, which, ritually is supposed to bind them together.

Rootlessness of the First Generation

By analyzing the novel, one can understand the rootlessness the first generation immigrant suffers in an alien country. The novelist has dealt with the event like marriage, love for Calcutta, east/west conflict and trauma or pregnancy. Dimple's fantasies take a violent turn, which takes her towards the negative side besides the stress of an alien culture. Mukherjee presents the expectation, dreams, desires of an Indian woman regarding marriage and married life and describes how her illusions of married life get shattered and how she also becomes embittered, estranged and morbid. *Wife* can be read as a title in irony. The title is significant and suggests the central theme of the novel. The protagonist struggles hard in that social role assigned to her.

Jasmine



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Mukherjee's third novel *Jasmine* (1988) reveals a more positivistic approach to the problem of immigration. *Jasmine* was written after Mukherjee migrated to the US and it is a poignant story of survival, expediency, compromises, losses and adjustments involved in the process of acculturation to American life. *Jasmine*, the female protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* is faced with the problem of the loss of culture and endeavoring to assume a new identity in the US. The novel focuses on *Jasmine*, an underage village girl from Punjab, who ventures as an undocumented woman and as a widow to the United States, where her fate will be "rewritten". The novel has a non-chronological order of events creating a rather cinematic effect, which makes it hard to follow the shifts in location, focalization and time. The narration is in the first person and the time and setting is Baden, Elsa country, Iowa, when *Jasmine* is aged twenty-four.

In *Jasmine*, Mukherjee tries to unravel the difficult layers of cross-cultural reality, through a series of adventures, which the heroine undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. Her struggle symbolizes the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of loneliness all around. Her journey through life leads *Jasmine* through many transformations – Jyoti, *Jasmine*, Jazzy, Jase and Jane via divergent geographical locales like Punjab, New York, Iowa and finally California. The narrative shuttles between past and present, between India of the narrator's early life, and America of her present one. *Jasmine* is a giver. She is a caregiver, recipe-giver, a preserver and a tornado. She is a vital, life-giving force to Bud, Taylor, Duff and Du - they all love her and depend on her. She learns how to reinvent both herself and the American dream.

The novel begins with the retelling of a story from her childhood about an astrologer who predicts her future as a widower living in exile. Then we are transported to see her living in Baden, Iowa where *Jasmine* (known as Jane in Iowa) is 24 years old, pregnant and living with 53 year old banker Bud Ripplemayer, and their adopted son Du. Bud insists on marrying Jane, who refuses for unknown reasons. Bud is also in a wheelchair because he was shot in the back two years ago. Jane and Bud have a neighbor named Darrel Lutz, a recent college grad who inherited his family's farm. He is contemplating whether or not to sell his farm. Bud refuses to loan Darrel

money to inflate his herd and grow his crops because Bud doesn't trust Darrel's character as a farmer and a manager. Darrel also shows some romantic interest in Jane.

Jane walks us through her life with Du and Bud before flashing back to her life in Hasnapur, Jullundhar District, Punjab, India (page 39). Here in India, she is known as Jyoti. She has a teacher named Masterji, who teaches her English. Masterji urges Jyoti to continue with her education instead of getting married. Soon after Jyoti's father passes away, she meets Prakash. They marry and move in together. He begins to call her Jasmine. Prakash works two jobs and studies for his diploma exams while Jasmine runs a Ladies' Group raffle and sells detergent to make money. Prakash receives a letter from Professor Vadhera who encourages Prakash to study in America. While he is making plans to move the two of them to Florida, one day Prakash is killed by a bomb, when he was out shopping for saris, set off by a man named Sukhwinder.

Jasmine continues with Prakash's plans to move to Florida, travelling by plane, train, and ship. Half-Face, the captain of the ship drives Jasmine to a motel when they arrive to land. He then sexually assaults her. Jasmine scrutinizes killing herself but instead kills Half-Face. She burns Prakash's suit that she carried with her and leaves the motel. Jasmine meets Lillian Gordon, who takes her in. Mrs. Gordon is also housing three Kanjobal women. She calls Jasmine "Jazzy," and helps Jazzy get to New York to meet with Professor Vadhera. Lillian also has a daughter named Kate Gordon-Feldstein who works as a photographer in the city. Lillian is later sent to jail for exploiting undocumented fees for cooking, cleaning and yard work. For five months, Jasmine lives with Professor Vadhera, whom she calls Professorji. She becomes depressed because she has qualms, hesitating to leave the house without a green card. Professorji agrees to get her a green card, for fifty thousand rupees, or three thousand dollars.

Jasmine begins working for Wylie and Taylor Hayes, friends of Kate Gordon-Feldstein. She moves in with them in Manhattan to take care of their adopted daughter, Duff. Taylor calls her "Jase." Wylie falls out of love with Taylor and falls for Stuart. Wylie leaves Taylor, but Jase continues to take care of Duff. She falls in love with Taylor, but one day while the three of them are at the park, Jase spots Sukhwinder, the man that killed Prakash. She flees New York for Iowa. She chooses Iowa because Duff's birth mother lives in Iowa. Back in present day Iowa,

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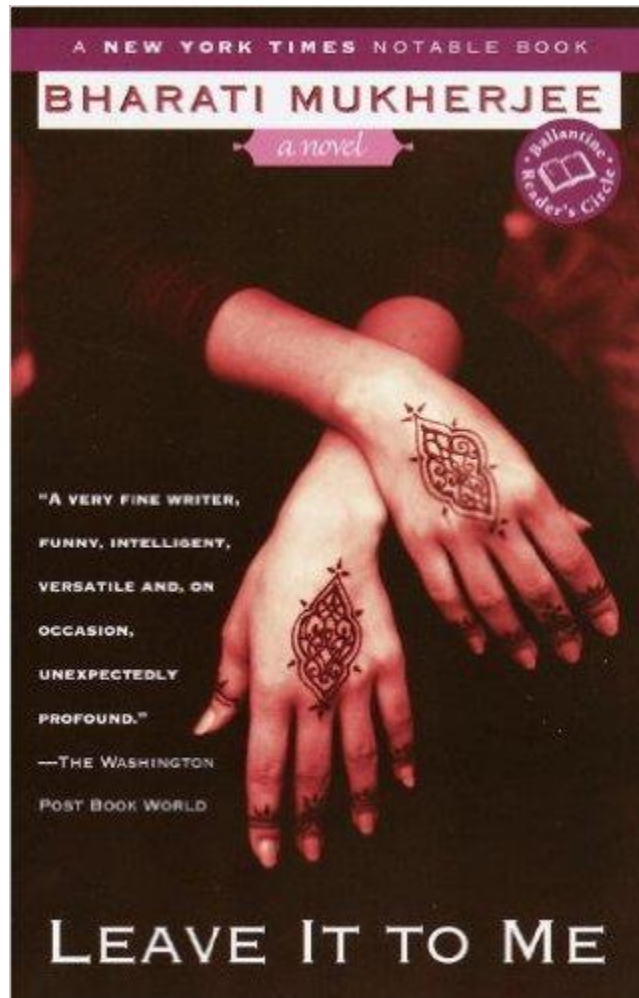
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Jane recalls the night two years ago when Harlan Kroener shot Bud. They were walking to Harlan's car when he shot Bud. He then proceeded to kill himself. Harlan was angry at Bud because of money issues with the bank. Before Bud met Jane, he was married to Karin. Karin initially hates Jane for taking her husband from her, but they maintain a spiritual relationship.

Jane receives a letter from Taylor, letting her know he and Duff are on their way to find Jane. Du figures out Jane is in love with another man besides Bud. Jane goes to visit Darrel because he says he feels crazy, but she leaves soon when he starts insulting her and Bud's relationship. She suspects he might shoot himself that night. When she returns home, Du announces that he is going to L.A. to live with his sister and he leaves with his friend John. Karin visits, and the two of them drive to see how Darrel is faring. He is fixing up his hog house. Back at the house, Jane tells Bud that Du went to visit his sister but he will be back before school starts. Bud later approves of Darrel's loan application, and the two of them drive over to let him know the news. But when they arrive, they discover him hanging from a rafter.

Bud begs for Jane to tell him she loves him, but she doesn't respond. Du has decided to stay in California. While Jane is working in the kitchen, she sees a car pull up the driveway and Taylor and Duff get out of the car. Taylor tries to convince Jane to come with him to California. She is hesitant, thinking of Bud who will lose everything if she leaves. She calls Karin and tells her she's "going somewhere," to see Du. Jasmine stops thinking of herself as Jane and follows Taylor and Duff to the car, whispering "Watch me re-position the stars," to the astrologer who foretold her widowhood and exile. *Jasmine* has achieved a proper identity and balance between tradition and modernity in the concluding part of the novel. The transformation of the heroine satisfies her inner self rather than the society. As social-realism adorns the life of the poor, in *Jasmine* the life of Jyothi is glorified by herself and her inner consciousness which makes her act according to her own wish. Mukherjee's novel reaches the theme of fulfillment within the inner self at the final moment.

Leave It to Me



Mukherjee's fifth novel *Leave It to Me* (1997) reveals the protagonist's ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. It also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main character in her quest for revenge. This work continues the theme of immigration. The story also includes a character called "guru" who has the dubious distinction of leaving behind a trail of used and abused women, illegitimate children, rapes and murders across the Indian subcontinent. An unwanted female child is dropped like a hot brick at the nearest orphanage, where she is called Faustine. The child was later adopted but an Italian-American family and christened as Debby Di Martino.

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Despite the love and affection of her foster family, Debby grows up with the awareness of being different, the feeling that she is an unwanted obstacle in a word that hurtles on towards its mysterious destination. The feeling is sometimes a haunting loneliness, when everyone is surrounded by love while one is feeling alone. She sets out in search of her past, her origins, and the unknown “bio-parents” who had callously abandoned her, as the story draws toward its conclusion. The story progresses with jerks and shocks in a picaresque fashion, bringing together a variety of characters that may or may not help the protagonist in her search for her “bio-mom.” The story mainly revolves around that girl but at the same time is concerned with the individual.

Three Stage of Transition of *Adopt, Adapt and Adept*

Mukherjee, as a woman with the diasporic experience and also as a diasporic writer, has passed through the three stage of transition of *Adopt, Adapt* and *Adept*. It begins with her adoption of Eurocentric norms in *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*. Later with *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World* she passes through the *Adapt* stage with mentors. Mukherjee reaches the *Adept* stage with the publication of *Leave It to Me, Desirable Daughter* and *The Tree Bride*, articulating in her own unique voice and experimenting with hybridity, multiple belonging, and cultural syncretism. The narrative structure also reflects this three-stage transformation. Mukherjee’s life and her work can be divided into “expatriate” and “immigrant” phases. She attributes her representations of South Asian migrants in Canada to the workings of an “expatriate” sensibility, and views the narratives written while she has been in the US as the product of an “immigrant” imagination. While both her immigrant and expatriate characters face the fear of failure, there is a crucial difference in the cultural response of each person, as they struggle with the trauma of displacement in the New World. The expatriate and the immigrant are important figures in Mukherjee’s writing because she uses them to integrate (as well as interrogate) spatial location and dislocation.

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