

**Imagining Female Subjects:
Formation of the Self of Women in Diaspora**

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Inspiring Excellence

BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Formation of the Self of Women in Diaspora**

A Thesis

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“If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men.”
— Monica Ali, *Brick Lane*

This paper is dedicated to my parents,

Muhammad Aftab Uddin and Dilara Aftab

You are the one who brought me in this world and taught me the importance of being a good human

being...

Without your love, care and support I would never achieve what I have achieved in my life...

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	1
 <u>Chapter One</u>	
Introduction	2
 <u>Chapter Two</u>	
Nazneen’s Journey from Immobility to Mobility: Finding a New Self.....	11
 <u>Chapter Three</u>	
Jasmine’s Journey from of Rejection to Acceptance: Exploring a New Self.....	22
 <u>Chapter Four</u>	
Irie’s Journey from Insecurity to Recognition: Discovering a New Self.....	35
 <u>Chapter Five</u>	
Conclusion	46
Works Cited	48

Abstract

This thesis aims to look at the formation of the self of women in diaspora in the selected diasporic novels. The novels which have been chosen to be a part of this research are as follows: *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee and *White Teeth* (2000) by Zadie Smith. Moreover, this paper will also look at the problems involved in negotiating such identities through an exploration of the inevitable self or the other which takes place in the process of identity-formation. This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter will introduce the issues related to the formation of subjectivity of women in diaspora which will be followed by three chapters and lastly the conclusion. From those three chapters, each chapter will discuss the work of each author to explore the way these female characters of each novel are persistently encountered by the crisis of holding or losing the roots, and the way they find their new self by breaking the cage of restriction and achieve independence. Finally, the fifth, the final chapter will be the conclusion of this paper where all of these novels will be compared.

Chapter One

Introduction

While mentioning the ardor for revisiting homeland once Nelson Mandela said, “There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered.” (Gross & Chaplain, 89). This excerpt from Nelson Mandela’s speech represents many ideas about memory and homecoming. In his case, the background is more autobiographical, as once he was exiled. Yet, it can be presumed that once one leaves a place and returns after a long time, everything seems different, but in reality nothing but one’s self has changed. Since the beginning of human history, migration and returns have been taking place. The motives behind these migrations might be diverse but the challenges they faced remained roughly the same. Even after settling down in the new land, people who leave their native land behind and move to unknown lands still long for what they have left behind! Homesickness, unfulfilled dreams and sometimes the wish to return to the familiar – are very persistent in their thoughts.

The term ‘migration’ derives from the Latin verb ‘migrare’ which means “to change one’s residence or position; pass into a new condition; move, shift” (Morwood, 372). Migration is not as simple as moving to one place to another, rather a movement need to have much more attributes to turn into a migration. The moving has to take place between two places which do not share common culture, language or race of the residents and literally, the distance between these places cannot be crossed so easily. While talking about migration, it seems mandatory to mention ‘diaspora’. Generally, the term ‘diaspora’ means a large group of people with a similar heritage, culture or homeland, who have since moved to places far from an established or ancestral home (merriam-webster, n. pg). To initiate the discussion about daispora, people often

mention the Jewish context where harassment and eviction led to the dispersal of Jews away from their homeland but they always carried the fond hope of returning to the motherland. In this contemporary world of increasing interaction and mutual exchange across the borders of national cultures, Diaspora refers to the emigration and settlement of people beyond boundaries of their homeland who try to preserve their cultural identity in the host country. The meaning of the word Diaspora has been stretched in various direction which results in the proliferation of the term in literature in the last decade.

There is already considerable literature on various diasporas such as the Chinese, Caribbean, African and South Asian and most of these are concerned about migration, their socio-economic and cultural experiences, their experiences of adaptation and assimilation in the host countries. Every ethnic group in the host country partially or fully becomes a part of the host culture through various mechanisms such as assimilation, adaptation and absorption. A great transformation is very much visible in the cultures of migrating populations. Though their geographical or physical location is altered, their social and cultural position remains attached to the old memories of the culture from which their living styles have emerged. In this global world where national cultures and languages are mutually exchanged, it is quite impossible for contemporary literature to reflect the context of one single nation and culture, rather it operates in a transnational and open field. Diasporic literature contributes in breaking the boundaries between nations, understanding various cultures and most notably globalizing and spreading universal peace.

In recent years, the theoretical innovations of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and others have reinforced researches related to diaspora and postcolonialism. These writers have succeeded in challenging the way we understand 'culture' and developed new ways

of thinking beyond the boundaries of the nation state. Diaspora can be viewed as the real-life movements of people throughout the world. Postcolonial studies see migration as a process of adaptation and construction as people who migrate go through different phases of changes, dislocations and transformations. According to Leela Gandhi, “these mutual transformations have affected colonizer and colonized, migrants as well as indigenous populations, victims and victimizers”(Gandhi, 131). So, migrants go through various stages of transformation and thus it results in constructing a new form of knowledge while changing their ways of seeing the world. While mentioning about the people in diaspora, Lisa Lau states:

They are people who are as multi-cultural as they are multi-lingual. They do not regard themselves as fully belonging in either culture, and have practically evolved a sub-culture peculiar to themselves. They try to take the best from both worlds, but suffer the sense of hybridity and cultural entanglement (241)

Thus, the people of diaspora belong to a space where they find it difficult to locate themselves between the questions of original and hybrid. In the process of settling in the host country, for having a life in a new land, for establishing a new home in a new land; one loses the grip of roots and eventually senses the loss of identity. Thus, with the cost of losing own traditions, customs, believes, culture and root, one achieves success in the new land. For this reason, the sense of the loss of the identity is the grass root of Diasporic literature.

In my readings as a student, diaspora brings various contested images and ideas to my mind. Nostalgia and melancholia for the past life is very much persistent in Diasporic literature and this struggle for holding or losing the root have made me eager to explore this genre of literature. When I first read *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali and *Jasmine* (1989) by Bharati Mukherjee the issue of immigrants getting segregated in the host country because of their

culture, tradition, language and physical features has made me anxious to explore more about the complexities faced by the immigrants. Moreover, I think my paper will be incomplete if I do not talk about the colossal mental or psychological effect that migration and alienation have on the people that is beautifully discussed by Zadie Smith in her novel *White Teeth* (2000). There are various reasons for choosing these three women's texts in this analysis. Various anthropologists such as Gayatri Gopinath believe that "women in diasporas embody communal identity, home and tradition, and they play a greater role than men in preserving traditional identity"(264). Additionally, the concept of the formation of identity in diaspora can differ from generation to generation and so it is preferable to include both the first generation and the second generation immigrant writers for this research. Monica Ali and Bharati Mukherjee are first generation immigrants, whereas Zadie Smith is second generation immigrant to UK. Both Bharati Mukherjee and Monica Ali are Bengali immigrants, in contrast Zadie Smith shares Jamaican heritage and so I think the diversity of these writers' background will be useful in analyzing the complexity of women in Diaspora.

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), portrays a multicultural London with struggling immigrants and young strivers. The reason why I find this novel very engrossing is because it is quite easier for me to identify with Nazneen's struggle, thoughts and opinions. Through this novel readers can explore the contradictions of life which result into experience. *Brick Lane* is named after a street in London which is considered as a ghetto of Bangladeshi community. The narrator of *Brick Lane* sees things mostly from a female perspective as most of the time the narrator takes on the point of view of Nazneen. Nazneen, the main protagonist of the novel arrives in London as a bride for Chanu who is also a first generation immigrant but because of having an inferior position in the patriarchal society, her feeling as immigrant is quite different

from Chanu. Unlike Chanu, she does not care for social status; rather she searches for a better life for herself both in her traditional marriage and in this East End immigrant community. Initially, Nazneen faces lots of difficulties while adjusting in a new land where she is surrounded by a conservative community. She badly misses her younger sister Hasina who is struggling all alone in Dhaka. Chanu's inability and negligence to empathize with Nazneen makes her to feel isolated and it also resist her in engaging with other fellow members of the Bangladeshi community. After losing her first child Raqib, her life seems meaningless to her but after giving birth to two daughters Shahana and Biby, Nazneen feels a bit settled off in London as now she has learnt English from her daughters and now she can communicate with others through this foreign language. Her life changes when she gets involved with a young British-born Bangladeshi boy, Karim. Her affair with Karim makes her both happy and guilty. Though she gets love and care through this relationship, she feels the guilt of committing a sin. As their affair progresses, Nazneen finds Karim as dominating as Chanu. Gradually Nazneen realizes that Karim loves her because he sees the image of Bangladeshi women in her but he fails to value the true identity of her. Throughout the novel she is found to aspire freedom and progressively she realizes that England is the place where she can exercise the power to choose her own destiny. She rejects both Karim and Chanu as she refuses to marry Karim and also denies returning to Bangladesh with Chanu. Eventually, Nazneen ends up with the desire to lead an independent life in London.

Jasmine (1989) is a novel by Bharati Mukherjee where she depicts the life of an immigrant woman who experiences both trauma and triumph in her attempt of forging a new identity for herself. In her quest for self-empowerment, she goes through multiple transformations. The story is told from the first-person point of view as Jasmine, the female

protagonist dictates the story with multiple flashbacks to fuse her present with the past. The transformation due to migration has affected both her physic and psychology. Unlike the previous novel *Brick Lane*, this novel is steeped in violence. Through this novel, Bharati Mukherjee depicts the life of a woman who suffers from cross-cultural crisis and that leads her to search for identity. Jasmine tries to overcome the loss of culture and endeavors to assume a new self in the U.S. From her birth, she struggles to survive. Being an unwanted child she was almost strangled to death but she somehow survives. This struggle at the very beginning of her life can be seen as a sign that her life will be full of complexities but if she has will power, she can overcome every hardship. The indication of fighting back is very much visible in her character as she tries to fight against her fate. The astrologer foretold her to be widowed but she never accepted that. Her husband Prakash is the only one who tries to bring out the true self of Jasmine but fate snatches him away as he is killed in a bomb attack. Even after becoming a widow Jasmine chooses to struggle and searches for independence in U.S. She is aware of the fact that she has the potential to fight and win against all the battles of life. Fate might have succeeded to snatch her happiness but she has learnt to live a life where her contentment is not dependent on anything else. Like other diasporic novels, the theme of nostalgia is persistent in this novel but unlike other protagonists, the main protagonist of this novel Jasmine finds herself in a new way in this new land. In the beginning of the novel she is found struggling to earn her livelihood in this new land but she leaves no stones unturned to fight against all the troubles. Bud respects her and wants to marry her. For a small span of time Jasmine suffers from indecision as she is unable to choose between Bud and Taylor. Though she is carrying the child of Bud, it does not prevent her to go for her love interest which is Taylor. Even the barrier of duty cannot chain her and stop her from following her heart. She always knows what she does not want to become.

Throughout her life she struggles hard to achieve freedom but in the end she realizes that for being independent and free at first she needs to have peace with herself.

White Teeth (2000) is Zadie Smith's acclaimed debut novel where she portrays London as a restless hybrid of voices, tones and textures. The novel focuses primarily on the parents and children of the culturally and ethnically diverse Jones, Iqbal, and Chalfen families. *White Teeth* deals with the life of the first and second generation of immigrants who find it harder to locate their place of belongings. As they are living in a multicultural neighborhood, they are confronted by a group of people who are trying to assimilate their root culture with the host culture. Moreover, the second generations of immigrants are in more vulnerable position in a society in comparison to the first generation immigrants. Their identity is constructed cross-culturally as they do not have sufficient knowledge about their roots. Being up-rooted from their roots, they face difficulties in following their heritage and tradition. In addition, in spite of being born in British society they are not considered as British. So, they remain in-between of their reality of British culture and the illusion of their roots. The character Irie Ambrosia Jones from this novel is the center of discussion for this research as this paper is concerned about the female characters and their formation of subjectivity in diaspora. Irie is the only daughter of Archie Jones and Clara Bowden. Irie struggles with her racial and sexual identity and find answers in her grandmother, Hortense Bowden. After meeting her grandmother, she gets connected to the "Jamaican Culture". She also gets to know that she is named after her great grandmother "Ambrosia". She resolves to go into the field of dentistry but she is found very enthusiastic about knowing the Jamaican culture. Though in the beginning of the novel, she suffers from anxiety and nostalgia regarding her past, towards the end of the novel Irie is found to be very confident about her decisions and actions. She is also a very flexible character who accepts her realities

without questioning it. In the process of struggle she discovers herself and this helps her to gain confidence and courage to lead a life that she really wants. The racial, cultural differences which previously made her feel disheartened or discriminated, eventually lets her celebrate it with great pride.

Diaspora brings to mind various challenging issues and ideas which can be both positive and negative. Most of the time the people in diaspora fear for losing their heritage, roots and identity but the affirmation of a new identity is also common in diaspora. This paper will try to explore the issues which generally revolve around diaspora, such as: the experiences of displacement, search for root, memory, nostalgia, melancholia, issues relating to race, difficulty in accepting the foreign culture and norms, sense of a loss, uncertain life and significantly the formation of a new self due to all these struggles in a new land. The way immigrants find a new self in the process of becoming independent individual is the central discussion of this paper.

Diaspora is a multidisciplinary field and this paper will look at the writings of Monica Ali, Bharati Mukherjee and Zadie Smith while putting forward the theories by Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and other notable authorities on this subject. These are the writers who concern with postcolonial cultural-identity crisis and cultural hybridity. By incorporating the themes of the novels with the theories of these notable authors, this paper will explore the predicament of female subaltern. Through an exclusive attention to female characters, this paper will explore the process of transition and formation of new identities that blatantly engage itself with notions of hybridity. This paper aims to look at the development of female immigrants who go through a journey from being reliant to be the independent one. In the beginning they are chained by the traditional norms of the society but in the end they escape it by attaining freedom and discovering their new self. The way these women are trapped by the duality and then eventually

get away of it will be discussed elaborately in this paper. These women in diaspora not only simply substitute their old spaces but also form a hybrid space for themselves which is rediscovered in between various identifications.

Moreover, this paper will also look at the problems involved in negotiating such identities through an exploration of the inevitable self or the other which takes place in the process of identity-formation. For this purpose one novel by each author will be given same weight in this paper. This paper aims to explain the psychological and identical development of the immigrant characters. As discussed earlier, this paper is concerned with the journey of the female characters in these novels. This dissertation is divided into five chapters and the second chapter of this paper reviews the life and works of Monica Ali and analyses the development of a new self of woman in *Brick Lane*. The third chapter briefly introduces the life and works of Bharati Mukherjee, while examining the search for identity in *Jasmine*. Then the fourth chapter presents the background of Zadie Smith and studies the identity-crisis in the main characters of *White Teeth*. Each chapter will discuss the work of each author to explore the way these female characters of each novel are persistently encountered by the crisis of holding or losing the roots, and the way they find their new self by breaking the cage of restriction and achieve independence. Finally, the fifth, the final chapter will be the conclusion of this paper where all of these novels will be compared.

Chapter Two

Nazneen's Journey from Immobility to Mobility: Finding a New Self

In 1967 Monica Ali was born in Dhaka but she grew up in England. Being the child of an English mother and a Bangladeshi father, she had realized that she was on the far side of the two cultures. So, from her childhood she had to make special efforts to understand both English and Bangladeshi culture and heritage. As a result, her writings are focused on the struggles of immigrant women in the traditional society. She claims that “I did not have any literary theories in my mind during the writing of my novels but of course, through them [the characters in my novels] I was interested in exploring some questions about the way I lived in British society”(Ali, n.p.). *Brick Lane* (2003) is Monica Ali's debut novel which had been short listed for the Man Booker Prize and for this work she was also selected as one of the “Best of Young British Novelists” by Granta Magazine. This novel can be viewed as a postcolonial work as the novel deals with the lives and struggles of Bangladeshi immigrants in London.

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* has a major contribution to the diaspora literature. This novel deals with the gap between the aspirations and achievements of the immigrants. Nazneen, Chanu, Karim, Mrs. Sen and Laila— all the major characters of this novel struggle in the process of adaptation to the new British cultural space. The colonial history is portrayed through the character Chanu who thinks it is important to remind her wife and daughters that their country is the one that has benefited England and not the other way around. In the beginning of the novel all the major characters go through a phase of dependency as they depend on the connection of their home to define them. According to Salman Rushdie, “Exiles, emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urges to reclaim to look back at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt” (Rushdie, 75). Thus, the people who go through exile and migration, feel the

urge of hanging on the roots that they have in the new land and these urges make them dependent on the memory and customs of their native land. The longing for homeland, revive their dream of going back to native land but only few of them can go through the phase of transformation and finally emerge as independent personas who can adapt in the existing foreign society.

Though this novel discusses the transformation of few immigrants in the process of adapting in a new cultural space, this chapter is exclusively focused on the transformation of the main protagonist Nazneen in an alien land. All the major characters of this novel have been afflicted with scars and traumas to their national, cultural and gender identities. The notion of identity in general and diasporic identity in particular is not “a fixed, set, rigid and essential whole but rather constructed, fluid and multiple” (Brubaker,1). Now-a-days, identities are conceived “as a process, as performed, and as unstable” according to the recent anti-essential theorizing about subject (Pratt, 29). Therefore, subjects of diaspora are trapped in a process of transformation and repositioning of new identities— identities which are always in the process of becoming and transition but never complete (Pratt, 29). For example, in case of Nazneen, in her diasporic experience, “boundaries of the (her) self” are as fluid as ever when the postcolonial concept of “liminality” come to the foreground.

At the very beginning of the novel, the immigrants of Brick Lane are unwilling to form relationship outside their ethnic community and it shows their deficiency to get mobility. Chanu himself describes the people of community as very ignorant. As he says, “ [they] are peasants. Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded. Without ambition”(Ali, 28). So, if Chanu is correct in his assessment then this community is socially immobile because without education and ambition it is quite impossible for them to achieve upward mobility. This attitude of passive inertia is also visible in Nazneen as she thinks “nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. And

since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne.” (Ali, 16). Soon after her arrival in London, initially she fails to recognize the freedom and independence that she can achieve.

Initially, she is amazed by the new things that she encounters with in London. When she learns that the women in England prefer being slim rather than being bulky, she gets puzzled because in her native land, being slim is considered as the sign of poverty. The inability to speak the foreign language works as the biggest barrier in Nazneen’s life in London as she can hardly speak in English. ‘I am sorry’ and ‘Thank you’ are the two sentences that she can say in English.

Although Nazneen gets fascinated by the looks of the tattoo lady and longs to go outside her flat, she find herself too frightened to do that (Ali, 19). She encounters tremendous difficulty in embracing a physical mobility because of Chanu’s unwillingness to encourage her to leave their building without him. Despite lecturing Nazneen about the importance of English, Chanu does not let her learn the language. Chanu leaves no stone unturned to make Nazneen believe in what he says—

Why should you go out? ‘If you go out, ten people will say, “I saw her walking on the street. And I will look a fool. Personally, I don’t mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant. What can you do?”’(Ali, 45).

Thus, Chanu blames other people for having cheap mentality but in reality he uses their example to manipulate Nazneen’s decisions. In his book *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Edward Said mentions how the migrants feel the urge for depending on the taboo norms of their native culture. As he mentions that this dependency on the taboo norms of their native culture hampers the progress of their modern life. Therefore, Chanu’s hypocrisy can be justified as like other migrants he does not want his private spheres to get modernized. Chanu is confined in a spatial sense to London and victims of “Going Home Syndrome” as Dr. Azad comments sarcastically—

“they will never save enough to go back . . . Every year they think, just one more year. But whatever they save, it’s never enough” (32). Thus, people like Chanu are trapped within a country in which they feel unable to set down roots or to be mobile in the social, physical or spatial sense.

Homi K. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) subverts the long-held binary way of thinking about cultural identity in terms of the wide gap between the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’, as he proposes a hybrid version of identity according to which the ‘Self’ is present in the ‘Other’ and vice versa. According to Bhabha,

Self and Other are commingled, interwoven into an indeterminable ‘many-as-one’. While “Hybrid” identity is being both one and the other through invasion of borderlines, “Liminal” identity is being placed on the very frontiers of Self/Other by taking an “in-between” space or being situated on the border or the threshold.
(44)

This notion of “liminality” seems to be much relevant to the present reading of *Brick Lane*. When one learns that “liminal” identity is to be found in some “particular (postcolonial) social spaces” like multicultural British society, due to the constant confrontation of cultural clashes, the Self and Other polarity is constantly threatened. This results in lapsing the boundaries and people like Nazneen, struggles in the process of creating new identities. Posited in a liminal space, she has to confront the culture of the ‘Other’ and is therefore, on the verge of negotiating a new identity.

A detailed study of the character Nazneen proves her to be struggling in the process of adaptation in this new British cultural space. Being the first generation Bangladeshi immigrant, Nazneen faces difficulties such as – isolation caused by uprootedness, fighting nostalgia for

native home, cultural clash and disadvantaged of language barriers. According to John Dunaway, there is an individual's universal strong need for roots. He argues that, there is a both positive and negative side of the act of exile. As he argues, that "the state of an exile becomes a painful separation from one's socio-cultural and spiritual nourishment and from the land if it is a result of an involuntary decision" (Dunaway, 38). However, this argument is not applicable for Nazneen, the main protagonist of the novel *Brick Lane*. Initially, Nazneen experiences a whole range of negative experiences but later she manages to assimilate and thus experiences the positive sides of migration as she finds freedom and more significantly discovers a new self in the host country. Another difficulty faced by Nazneen is fighting nostalgia for native land as the trials of her life in Brick Lane are cut through by the letters from her sister Hasina. The tribulations of this nostalgia in the West are self-indulgent as Monica Ali shows how the choices made by Nazneen's sister in Bangladesh are much starker than her choices.

Encountering cultural clash on the route to assimilation is another obstacle faced by Nazneen in this new land. Mrs. Islam advises her not to mix up with the British people, even if they are good people because if she does so then her culture and beliefs would be contaminated by the foreign culture and she would have to sacrifice her own culture for theirs. Mrs. Islam's words have no influence on Nazneen because when she gets to know the English culture and the British people she is overwhelmed by their self-reliant nature. She begins to admire them because they intent to mind their own business and they live a life that is full of liberty and freedom. Soon, Nazneen starts to dislike the women of Bangladeshi community because they have the tendency to interfere in the individual or private space of other women of their community. Razia's acceptance to British culture makes her to be hated by the women of Bangladeshi community. They feel free to spread rumor about Razia because they fail to achieve

the mobility that she has already achieved in her life. In the process of finding the new self, Razia works as a complete inspiration for Nazneen.

Gradually, Nazneen feel isolated because she has no one with whom she can share her problems, opinions and ideas. The thought of being rumored by these women from Bangladeshi community, refrain her from sharing anything about her life to them and she ended up with being confused about what is right and what is wrong. As excerpted from the novel:

A few times she had imagined conversations with Razia. She played them out, reading both parts, trying a new phrase here and there. It was not possible. (Ali, 393).

Thus, Nazneen suffers from isolation as she fails to share her feelings and emotions to anyone. Though she imagined numerous conversations with Razia, she ends up with not sharing her private sphere with anyone. She thinks that even Razia would not understand her. The cultural fear of being unaccepted by the people of Bangladeshi community and the limitation of being an obedient Bengali woman, refrain Nazneen from being self-conscious and realizing her inner desires.

From the beginning of her life, Nazneen is too much dependent on her fate. This dependency gradually reduces as she finds confidence in herself. Gathering courage, going through different phases of transformation and evolving as a new individual do not happen overnight. According to Lone,

The changes came in gradually through actions that were taken by Nazneen through her journey at a new land. Very gradually she starts to break away from

the thought of predestination which has influenced most of her life and to take steps towards an independent life, making her own decisions. (47)

Thus, she starts to take decisions of her own. When her first child Raqib is hospitalized and nearly dead, Nazneen takes her son to the hospital and does not rely on fate anymore. Though Raqib fails to survive this illness, Nazneen is satisfied that at least she challenges fate instead of relying on it and nurses her son. It can be considered as a vital step taken by Nazneen which helps her to begin the journey of independence. This is the first time in her life that she acts out of her own will and understands that action can be crucial. Through this action, her mother's ideology of depending on fate has been broken by Nazneen and thus it gives her the opportunity to find a new self that her mother failed to achieve.

When Nazneen gathers enough courage and takes the first step to transformation by stepping out of home, it seems like she wants to run away from her reality of life. During this long walk, for the first time in her life she speaks in English to a stranger. This incident helps her to gain self-confidence that is needed for the discovery of her new Self. This self-confidence makes her realizing that her dependency on Chanu is very much self-made and she could have managed not to be insecure and lost in this host country. All these confidence and courage get lost at the moment she returns to her congested flat and soon she realizes that just like this apartment, her life is also crammed with unwanted and useless things which work as a baggage of disappointment for her. Monica Ali uses a number of metaphorical incidents to portray the trapped life of Nazneen. For example, When Chanu and her daughters watch the trapped survivors of the Twin Tower attack in the television, Nazneen tries to relate herself with those trapped survivors. She feels as if she is trapped not only in her home but also inside her mind! From the outside, she looks free but in reality her true Self is hiding somewhere and waiting to

be found by her. Her fascination about the snow storms or snow globes from Dr. Azad leads her to the major transformation of her identity. This tiny globe full of snow starts to mesmerize her as she gets amazed to see how a simple shake fills the globe with snow. Dr. Azad describes the snow globes that he collects and states that:

If you are strong, you withstand the storm. Can you see? The storm comes and everything is blurred. But all that is build on a solid foundation has only to stand fast and wait for the storm to pass. Do you see? (Ali, 317)

Thus, Dr. Azad explains the true meaning of the globe when he compares the globe with human life. Like, globes, human lives are also encountered by numerous storms like problems but one has the courage and confidence then everything including storms in life will sooth itself down. This incident causes Nazneen's epiphany and that leads to the finding of her true identity.

Nazneen takes another step towards her mobility when she proposes her husband to let her work so that she can earn for the family. She takes this life changing decision and starts working to fix the loan that Chanu takes from Mrs. Islam. She breaks the convention of Bengali culture and ends up with being the bread earner of her family. The moment she starts to take control over the financial issues of her family, she gathers enough courage and power to think about herself. She convinces Chanu to buy her a sewing machine and thus starts earning for her family. Sewing becomes the source of income and it also gives her confidence to face Mrs. Islam. Afterwards, she begins to take all the financial and domestic decisions which empower her and let her to stand for herself. Gradually, she realizes that she is not happy in her marriage and it results in her an extra marital affair with Karim. This affair can be seen as a vital step taken by Nazneen towards her independence. As, mentioned by Lone, "For the first time in her life she becomes the dominant part in a relationship with a man. In this respect she is challenging

her cultural background, her religion and her marriage.”(Lone, 43). Thus, Lone tries to justify the reason for which Nazneen gives away her relationship with Chanu and falls for Karim.

According to Lone, this affair helps her to become the woman who has the courage to take her decisions independently. Nazneen’s garment work leads to her eventual independence in the shape of her business with Razia. Both her affair and business are constructed as deeply significant events in the formation of her agency and identity as these are her initial steps toward upward class mobility.

The reason behind Karim’s frequent visits to Nazneen’s home is to bring the piecework for her sewing job but with the depiction of this adulterous affair Ali shows how their physical attraction explodes their moral expectations. While convincing the readers about the inexorable desire of Nazneen, Ali captures all the little details of Karim’s attractiveness to her, from the citrus scent of his shirts to his eager energy when discussing politics. The self-realization about the complexities of Nazneen’s life makes her collapse. According to Banerjee,

The Stress of her affair, the conflict between her dawning self will, her upbringing of uncomplaining acceptance, Chanu’s determination to return to Bangladesh, Shahana’s steadfast refusal to do so and her own ambivalence towards this, along with the fraught father-- daughter relationship, takes its toll on Nazneen and she collapses.(47)

Thus, she collapses not only physically but also morally. Her affair with Karim brings tremendous changes and transformations in her identity. At the beginning of her affair, she used to burn with silent admiration for Karim and his impressive certainty about his pace in life but gradually, Nazneen comes to realize that Karim’s dreams and aspirations are as fragile as Chanu’s dreams of integrations. As excerpted from the novel,

She had looked at him and seen only his possibilities. Now she looked again and saw that the disappointments of his life, which would shape him, had yet to happen. (Ali, 403)

Thus, Nazneen grows as she gains the ability to view all the possibilities and deficiencies of her relationship with Karim. This affair works as a high point for the development of her new self. This affair gives her a sense of courage that she manages to hide their relationship from everyone she knows. The growth in Nazneen's character is very much visible when she talks to him for the last time. As quoted from the novel,

She touched his hand for the last time. 'Oh, Karim, that we have already done. But always there was a problem between us. How can I explain? I wasn't me, and you weren't you. From the very beginning to the very end, we didn't see things. What we did--we made each other up.' (Ali, 454)

Thus, she evolves as a more independent self, who has the courage to accept her own faults and lacking. When Nazneen acknowledges that Karim starts to believe that she is dependent on him for living a life full of freedom, she decides to end this relationship.

Through the letter written by Hasina, Nazneen gets to know about the truth behind her mother's death. The effect of the letter is so powerful that Nazneen looks upon it as a talisman. While packing the girl's accessories she realizes that "there was no escape" and she should not be on the plane when it leaves on the following day (Ali, 437). Her verbal fight with Mrs. Islam can be seen as a sign of her empowerment and gaining courage. When Mrs. Islam realizes that she cannot force Nazneen to pay more, she tries to threaten her to reveal the news of her affair to Chanu. Nazneen counters her threat by insisting that her husband knows everything and so she

invites Mrs. Islam to confront him. Thus, Nazneen discovers her supremacy and exercise her power over Mrs. Islam. This shifts the energy as “the impossible happened” when Nazneen takes the power (Ali, 445) and it surprises Mrs. Islam.

Nazneen takes all these decisions and actions to announce her freedom and independence which leads to the final resolution of her identity; as she takes the most crucial decision of her life to stay in London and raise her daughters all by her own. From the very first day of her arrival in Brick Lane, she always wanted to save money for returning to her roots but after all the hard work and suffering, Nazneen decides to stay back. This choice of Nazneen can be viewed as a way of paying tribute to her newfound mobility as she is not any longer the submissive, passive wife and she has gained enough strength to take control over her own life. This realization of her new self reaches its final stage when she embraces the changes in her life and decides to chase her dreams. This novel ends with the scene where Nazneen is taken to an ice-skating ground. Nazneen always enchanted by the act of ice-skating and at this point, ice-skating can be seen as a way of expressing her freedom. According to Haque, “*Brick Lane* begins with a Nazneen who was sold to the pawnshop of fate and ends with a Nazneen who is enterprising enough to attempt ice-skating wearing a sari” (3). Thus, he describes how Nazneen has achieved her dreams and evolved as a totally mobile character. Though her journey as a diaspora migrant, Nazneen has succeeded to get mobility and finds a new, enlightened, independent self. Towards the end of the novel, Nazneen learns that in order to survive in her new surroundings, she needs to open up herself to the culture of the Other. Thus, being open to the realm of the Other, Nazneen learns to negotiate her new diasporic identity which encourages her to embrace the new life in London.

Chapter Three

Jasmine's Journey from of Rejection to Acceptance: Exploring a New Self

The Indian born Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated writers of the Asian immigrant experience in America. Her personal life and experiences of multiple dislocations largely influenced and honed her writing. Her personal life can be described as a text in perpetual immigration. In July 27, 1940 Mukherjee was born in a traditional Brahmin family of Calcutta. She was exposed to life in the West at a very early age as her parents moved to Britain when she was only eight. By the age of ten, she already knew that she wanted to be a writer and so she started writing short stories. Being a first generation immigrant and a student of ancient Indian history and culture, she has direct knowledge about the history and culture of India. According to Alam, Mukherjee's life as an immigrant has three phases. She tries to find her identity in her Indian heritage in the first phase. In the second phase, she got bitterly disillusioned by racism in Canada. There she felt humiliated, despite being a tenured professor. In the final phase she felt proud to be an immigrant when she moved to USA, the continent of the immigrants (Alam, 3). The immigrant writers in America can be divided into two categories: "Willing Immigrant Writers" and "Unwilling Immigrant Writers". The writers who settled in America from Europe or Asia and made it their home fall in the first category and the writers with American origin whose forefathers were brought to America in slave ships belong to the second category. Bharati Mukherjee does not consider herself belonging to any of these categories and thinks that she is different from other writers. She explains the implications of her identity in the following manner:

I am an American, not Asian American. My rejection of hyphenation has been called race treachery, but it is really a demand that America deliver the promises of its dreams to all its citizens equally. (Alam, 1)

So, Mukherjee considers herself as an American because her whole adult life has been lived in America. She is not ashamed of her past, rather she writes in the tradition of immigrant experience. The ability to define herself in terms of her politics, sexual orientation and education are considered as a luxury of being a U.S. citizen, according to Mukherjee. Thus, she thinks that her association with her readers should not be on the basis of her ethnicity or race, rather it should be based on what they want to read. Through her writings she tries to explore the meaning of life.

Bharati Mukherjee is a third world feminist writer who has received considerable critical attention from almost all the quarters of the globe in a relatively short period of time. Her concern for delineating the struggle of cross cultural conflicts faced by Indian immigrant women, distinguishes her from the other contemporary feminist writers. Most of her female protagonists are immigrants who suffer cultural shock but being bold and assertive they have the potentiality to establish their identity through heroic journeys. According to Longjam Monika Devi,

Her (Bharati Mukherjee's) novels reflect the temperament and mood of the present American society as experienced by the Indian immigrants in America. When a person leaves his/her own culture and enters into another culture, his/her original culture comes into conflict with the new one he/she finds in the alien land. This cultural transplant leads to a crisis of identity. As the immigrants are torn between two different cultures; quest for identity becomes very important and a must in their life. (244)

Thus, Mukherjee's novels deal with the theme of a search for identity. The quest for identity has a very wide meaning as it is manifested in the will to survive against all odds. Her works have been acknowledged for having a voice of expatriate immigrants but a close observation of her novels reveals a predominant feminist view of Mukherjee. She takes an attempt to portray a new relationship between man and woman based on equality, liberty and uniformity. So, that the creative potentials of both man and woman are maximized as individuals and not gender dichotomized. In her novel, the male as a representative of the patriarchal society has been pulled off the center of woman's gravitation and beyond the fullness of patriarchy, the female is prepared to be her own gravitational force. By accepting the bitter truth of life and by living in the firm ground of reality these women achieve freedom from any kind of domination and explore the new Self.

Like other novels by Mukherjee in her third novel *Jasmine* (1989), she has depicted a strong potentiality for adaptability of immigrant woman with the characterization of female characters. This chapter exclusively focuses on this novel which is an account of adaptation and not a defeat. This novel was written during the third phase of Bharati Mukherjee's immigrant life when she finally overcame the nostalgia for home land and appreciated the lucrative opportunities of the host country. *Jasmine* contains the well developed view of Mukherjee on South-Asian diaspora and this is the reason for choosing this novel for this research. This novel examines the way postcolonialism has affected the identity formation of an immigrant woman named Jasmine. Through the novel *Jasmine*, Mukherjee talks about the transnational experience of its protagonist and it is not simply about migrating to and making it in America but about engaging with the literal and metaphorical crossing or re-crossing of the borders. This novel

discusses the dilemma and confusion of an Indian immigrant woman who struggles to adjust between two different cultures. As E P. Lazure states:

Mukherjee portrays the contours of the character's transited identity that are in constant negotiation and transformation because of the interaction between the past and the present (90)

Thus, it is visible that Mukherjee is not interested in the obligations to the past; rather she rejoices in the process of assimilation in her writings. By the end of the novel, Jasmine evolves as a transnational character as she constantly negotiates between "the past and present" (Lazure, 94). *Jasmine* portrays the search for identity by a half educated Indian widow in the alien environment of U.S.A. Throughout the novel, Jasmine tries to overcome the loss of culture and endeavors to assume a new identity in this new land. She combines the quest for identity in herself at two levels. At one level, she seeks to define her identity as an immigrant from the third world to a first world, highly developed, industrial society. At another level, she seeks self-awareness as a woman. Though these two searches are distinct, these are interrelated.

The quest for Jasmine's true self began from the day she was born. Eighteen years after the partition riots, she was born in the village of Hasnapur in Jullundhar, a district of Punjab. Being the fifth daughter and the seventh of nine children, she was considered as an unwanted child to the family. Just after her birth, her mother wanted to kill her because she did not want her daughter to suffer the ache of a dowryless bride. She was almost strangled to death so that her parents could get rid of the burden of another dowry but she survived the attack. She considered this incident as an expression of her mother's strong love for her and said "she tried to kill me, or she would have killed herself" (Mukherjee, 52). As a devoted daughter she was aware of her mother's misery and helplessness. Jasmine remembered: "I survived the sniping.

My grandmother may have named Jyoti, light but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter.” (Mukherjee,40). So, she was given the name Jyoti which means light but when she survived this agony, she already knew that she has the quality of being “a fighter and adapter”. This incident shows her capability to fight against fate and to struggle for establishing her true self.

Jyoti was a poor peasant girl with very modest education. She was the most intelligent and beautiful girl in her family but her life was dominated and controlled by her father and brothers. Throughout the novel, she is assailed by her childhood memories. She uses these memories and flashbacks as the instrument in her fight against fate and her quest for finding a new self. When she was only seven years old, an astrologer predicted her widowhood and exile but she was not dismayed by her fate. According to the astrologer,

Fate is Fate. When Behula’s bridegroom was fated to die of snakebite on their wedding night, did building a still fortress prevent his death? A magic snake will penetrate solid walls when necessary. (Mukherjee, 4)

Though she was surrounded by the people having blind beliefs and superstitions, she always tries to raise herself above these things. Jyoti rebels against her cultural inscriptions. Even in childhood, she knew that she had the potential to fight, win all the battles and to establish a strong identity. Due to a slip and fall, when a permanent star-shaped wound was engraved on her forehead, she considered it as her “third eye”. She compared it to the third eye of Lord Shiva and believed that this third eye would help her to view a wider and true perspective of life.

Unlike other village girls, she has the fearlessness and a sense of defiance which enables her to reject the marriage which had been almost finalized by her family members. She felt an affinity to the electric switch in Vimla’s house because it made her to feel “totally in control”

(Mukherjee, 44). Through these incidents Mukherjee shows that Jyoti was different from the other village girls who had no minds of their own as these “village girls are like cattle; whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go,” (Mukherjee, 46). From this early age, Jyoti learnt identifying “permissible rebellion” (Mukherjee, 47) against the standard of the society which later gives her confidence to go towards the realization of her potential. From the beginning of her life Jyoti knows what she wants from her life, as she says, “I know what I don’t want to become” (Mukherjee, 5). This image of passivity is definitely something she determines not to even go near. Though she is never sure of her future, she always prefers future over the past. According to Oberoi and Sharma, “Often she describes her past identities as ghosts and to herself as astronaut shuffling between worlds never solidly attached to any”(194). As she says, “For me, experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill” (Mukherjee, 29). Thus, it is proved that Jyoti despises any obsession with past! In spite of having strength and determination, she was threatened by many challenges and barriers.

Additionally, breaking from the usual tradition Jyoti chooses Prakash Vijn, an educated, intelligent, engineering student who is a Christian by faith. She does not believe her “Janampatri”, her life as mapped out for her. She believes in repositioning the stars. Thus, she renounces the traditional practice of marriage by matching horoscopes and finally she gets married in a court. Prakash who encourages her and lifts up her spirits, renames and reshapes her as Jasmine. She confesses:

Pygmalion wasn’t a play I’d seen or read then, but realize now how much of Professor Higgins there was in my husband. He wanted to break down the Jyoti I’d been in Hasanpur and made me a new kind of city woman. (Mukherjee, 77)

Thus, Prakash wishes to immigrate to U.S.A and Jasmine appears to be jubilant sharing the ambition of her husband but she is awe struck when on the eve of their departure, Prakash falls a prey to a Sikh terrorist bomb blast. This incident leaves her shattered as she hears his voice exhorting her from every corner of her room, “There is no dying, there is only an ascending or a descending, a moving on to other Planes. Don’t crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism. That Jyoti is dead” (Mukherjee, 86). So, instead of crawling back to a life of gloom and despair, she decides to set out for the U.S.A even if it meant using forged papers and documents. She moves to U.S.A with a religious mission of performing Sati by burning her husband’s clothes and herself in the campus of the engineering college where her husband was scheduled to be enrolled. Here, the anguish of a woman becomes clear who is ready to face any challenge in order to fulfill the last wish of her husband. This kind of inner will helps her to find a new self in this new land. Her migration to U.S.A can be viewed as the beginning of her symbolic trip of transformation and displacement in a new world.

Though Jasmine leaves India with the strong will to survive against the forces of destiny, her journey to this new land begins on a sad note as she is savagely raped by Half-Face, the captain of the ship. This incident leaves her shattered and heart-broken. Initially, she decides to commit suicide but at another moment she is enlivened with the spirit to survive through eliminating Half-Face. She says—

I didn’t feel the passionate embrace of Lord Yama that could turn a kerosene flame into a lover’s caress. I could not let my personal dishonor disrupt my mission .There would be plenty of time to die (Mukherjee, 117)

Consequently, she decides not to interrupt her mission by committing suicide. Then she becomes desperate to emerge like the Indian goddess Kali to slit the throat of her rapist. Thus, Mukherjee

shows Jasmine's transformation from the victim to a vengeful Goddess. Jasmine also performed a kind of death ceremony for herself by burning her dishonored clothes. As excerpted from the novel,

I said my prayer for the dead clutching my Ganapati. I thought, The pitcher is broken. Lord, Yama, who had wanted me, who had courted me, and whom I'd flirted with on the long trip over, had now deserted me ... My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for.
(Mukherjee, 120-121)

Thus, Mukherjee shows the death of Jasmine's old Self by bringing the image of the broken pitcher. According to Samir Dayal, "In killing Half-Face, she experiences an epistemic violence that is also a life time transformation" (71). So, she is reborn not by killing herself but by killing Half-Face. In this way, she begins her journey to this new land to find a new Self.

In addition, Jasmine can be considered as an "assimilating immigrant" who realizes the futility of little ethnic islands in a vast alien sea. Posited in a liminal space, she has to confront the culture of the "Other" and so she is on the verge of negotiating a new identity. She realizes the need for change and so she changes very frequently. Each time when there is a reversal in her role, even her name gets changed. From Jyoti to Praksh's Jasmine, Gordon's Jazy to Tailor's Jase and Bud's Jane to Duff's Day mummy, she is given multiple names and so she feels the urge to live a single life with multiple identities. Whenever, her name changes, she emerges as a new self. She goes through the process of assimilation for multiple times because she wants to survive in this alien land and she is aware of the fact that it will be impossible for her to survive in this land if she continues to hold on to her roots back in India. She is not afraid of changes

because she gets infected by the American spirit which makes her “greedy with want and reckless from hope” (Mukherjee, 241).

During her journey to this alien land, she meets Lilian Gordan who enters her life as a ray of hope. Mrs. Gordan not only educates her but also makes her free from her past memories. As she advises Jasmine, “Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you” (Mukherjee, 131). Her advice helps Jasmine to transform herself both physically and mentally. When Jasmine start assimilating into this American culture, the intrinsic qualities of her personality start fading away, and she moves from a visible minority to being just another immigrant. Mrs. Gordan helps her to meet Professor Vadhera, who had helped Prakash in securing admission in an engineering course. Even though Professor Vadhera and his house have all the elements to give Jasmine the vibe of Indianness, she feels uncomfortable with these surroundings that remind her of the dark past. She dislikes this artificial Indianness and says, “In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti like. (Mukherjee, 140). So, Jasmine takes another step towards transformation by taking the decision of leaving Professor Vadhera’s assistance. According to Gurleen Grewal:

This move indicates that self-actualization was developing in Jasmine’s life and it might be due to the acculturation to the American way of thinking and dressing. Jasmine endures massive wrecking and reconstruction at personal and cultural fronts as she has travelled a long way both on physical and psychological plane, from India, “locked into the inertia of stasis, the land of Yama /Death” to America, “equated with freedom from fate, poverty, and a repressive gender identity.” (186)

Thus, with the actualization of her desire for independence, she shuts the door to passive resignation and consequently embraces American culture and values with proper enthusiasm. Previously, she had tried to escape from reality but now she feels empowered enough to accept it. Subsequently, being self-conscious Jasmine takes another step in becoming a new Self.

Jasmine goes through another level of transformation when she moves to Manhattan, New York to join an emancipated couple Taylor and Wylie Hayes. Being the caregiver of Duff, the adopted daughter of this sweet couple, Jasmine is renamed as Jase and becomes a sophisticated American woman. This time, Jasmine's transformation is not from a reaction but due to her own yearning for personal change. Jasmine boldly asserts:

I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward. On Claremont Avenue, in the Hayeses' big, clean, brightly lit apartment, I bloomed from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase (Mukherjee, 185-186).

Thus, in becoming Jase, Jasmine gets increasingly comfortable with her sexuality which she had always tried to repress earlier. At this stage, Jasmine becomes confident about her personality.

According to S. Indira:

With the healing touch of people like Lilian Gordon, Kate and Taylor, who treated her as an intelligent, refined, sincere and affectionate person, Jasmine blooms from being a different alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase, living only for the present. (70)

So, the pulling between the two opposite forces, the Indian 'Self' and the American 'Other', fail to frighten Jasmine and she ends up being self-conscious and confident. Soon, when Wylie

leaves Taylor and he is in need of emotional support, he confesses his love for Jase and this incident brings them closer to each other.

Jasmine's life is encountered by another struggle when she has to leave Taylor and Duff in fear of the presence of Sukhawinder, the murderer of Prakash. Jasmine flees to Baden Country, Iowa in the hope to begin a new life there. There she meets Bud Ripplemayer who renames her as "Jane". Bud views her sexuality through the lenses of his own oriental fantasy and instead of denigrating, this serves to encourage her with a sexual confidence and she thrives on it. Her racial identity is recognized but not acknowledged and so instead of viewing her as alien the community attempts to see her as familiar. This new perception of her race is an essential element of her identity as it proves her to be fully assimilated in this alien culture. While making Bud comfortable and in her way to ease his pain, Jasmine becomes pregnant. By playing the role of Bud's wife and carrying his child in her womb, she evolves as a completely new person.

Throughout her life, Jasmine takes all these decisions and actions to announce her independence which leads to the final resolution of her identity; as she takes the most crucial decision of her life and thinks of her duty to herself. A letter from Taylor works as a welcome surprise for her. Initially, she is worried about Bud as Du decides to go to California and stay with his sister. As she herself is an exile, she understands Du's condition and gently tells this news to Bud. Taylor makes her understand that there would be nothing wrong to leave Bud and she says, "The moment I have dreamed a thousand times finally arrives" (Mukherjee, 237). Then she makes a confession to herself that "I am not choosing between two men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness... A care-giver's life is a good life, a worthy life." (Mukherjee, 240). This can be seen as a complete response to Jasmine's courage.

She always wants to do the right thing because she does not want to be “a terrible person” (Mukherjee, 239). Until now she has thought about her duty towards other people but now she has reached to that point of her life when she needs to give priority to her own desire and satisfaction. As Jasmine says:

It isn't guilt that I feel, it's relief. I realize I have already stopped thinking of myself as Jane. Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through un-caulked window. Watch me reposition the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove... Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble maker, arising from nowhere and disappearing into a cloud. I am out of the door and in the potholed and rutted driveway, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with a wants and reckless from hope. (Mukherjee, 240-241)

So, Jasmine does not have any guilt when she leaves Bud, rather she feels relieved as finally she has overcome all the barriers and bonds, and achieves freedom.

Like other characters of Mukherjee's novel, Jasmine also develops multiple consciousnesses and becomes a character neither unified, not hybrid, but rather fragmented. She perceives both her race and sexuality through different lenses and finally realizes that the notion of a singular identity is nothing but a fallacy and the reality of diasporic experience is the indeterminate multiplicity. This sense of multiplicity reinforces the notion that her identity is forever evolving and so she cannot have a stable life. Though her journey to this alien land, she has understood that disruption and change are means of her survival. Longjam Monika Devi believes that, “From a passive, traditional object of fate Jyoti transforms into an active, modern, cross-cultural shaper of her future.”(251). Thus, it is visible that her journey from the rural

conservative patriarchal society of Hasnapur to an advanced society of U.S.A transforms her body, mind and soul. Moreover, this journey helps her to accept the reality of her life from which she sought escape. In this regard, the remarks of Susmita Roy is significant: “Consequently, to read Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* as an ambitious endeavor to outline the life of a woman engaged in a serious quest for values is rewarding.” (187). By the end of the novel, Jasmine discovers her true Self and evolves as a strong personality who has an incessant desire to move forward. Finally, she becomes capable of living in a world where individuals exist not as unified persons, rather as many, who have infinite possibilities of inventing new identities.

Chapter Four

Irie's Journey from Insecurity to Recognition: Discovering a New Self

In 1975, Zadie Smith was born as Sadie Smith to a Jamaican mother and an English father, in the north-west London. *White Teeth* is Zadie Smith's debut novel in which she portrays the struggle of three different families of mixed ethnicity and the issues related with their heritage and legacy. Critically acclaimed novel *White Teeth* brings Smith many awards including EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Best Female Media Newcomer. This debut novel brings enormous success for Smith, who wrote her debut at the age of twenty four. Though *White Teeth* essentially deals with issues of race, ethnicity, culture and prejudice, Smith claims this was not a conscious goal but she could not have missed out these issues as these are inseparable from the contemporary London As mentioned by Bruce King, regarding the issue of presenting multi-cultural London in her novel, Smith said that:

I was just trying to approach London. I don't think of it as a theme, or even a significant thing about the city. This is what modern life is like. If I were to write a book about London in which there were only white people, I think that would be kind of bizarre. People do write books like that, which I find bizarre because it's patently not what London is, nor has it been for fifty years. (116)

Thus, by describing a multicultural city and 150 years of history, *White Teeth* encompasses a sly inquiry into race and identity. In this novel, she depicts London as a restless hybrid of voices, tones and textures. The story of the novel revolves around various themes such as conflict between generations, race, history and ethnicity, chance and coincidence, fundamentalism, identity crisis.

People from underdeveloped or developing countries migrate to developed countries such as Great Britain, with a hope that this new land will change their lives in a better way. Being immigrants, they start to live in a foreign country, they work there; they live there with their families but only one thing that threatens their position is the knowledge of still being the “other” in their adopted homelands (Boehmer, 126). These immigrants are dislocated from their homes and have to struggle with the difficulties of living in an alien land. The situation becomes more difficult for the children of first generation immigrants as they grow up in their adopted countries, but they have a keen sense of having their roots in their mother countries. Smith has successfully depicted the struggle of the immigrants of Britain in this contemporary novel. Despite having diverse characters, multiple time-shifts and numerous discourses, all of the issues addressed in the novel *White Teeth* are centered around the problem of the individual forming an authentic identity in a multicultural society and the establishment of a new national identity in postcolonial Britain. Smith uses the background of the characters’ families to explore their struggle in the process of the formation of their identity. Though cultural origins, genetic inheritance and prehistory play an important role in the individual’s development, fate and personal choice have the potential to overrule any predetermined life path. Thus, history and fate are intermingled in this novel. This novel is full with immigrant characters who feel instability and uprootedness due to living away from their native lands but this chapter will be exclusively focused on the development of the character Irie Ambrosia Jones, one of the major characters of this novel. Irie is the only child of a second generation immigrants and so she has to struggle a lot in order to find her place in London’s contemporary society.

Irie Abrosia Jones, the daughter of the English Archie Jones and the Jamaican immigrant Clara Bowden was born and grew up in multicultural London. This biracial background seems to

be problematic for many second generation immigrants like Irie. Her desire to belong is complicated as she is constructed by a multicultural society. Her family history of familial unrest and migration makes it more difficult for her to negotiate with this “mixed” status. Irie’s grandmother Hortense Browden works as a living reminder of her historical roots in Jamaica. Unlike Hortense, Clara feels anxiety while remembering the past. Both Hortense’s diasporic experience and Clara’s discomfort with the past contribute to Irie’s feelings of inbetweenness. These issues make it difficult for Irie to achieve freedom and individuality. Irie’s discomfort with herself is evident even when Smith introduces her for the first time. As excerpted from the novel:

Sometimes she’d be walking through school in a bikini with the lamp-post enigma written in chalk over her brown bulges, over her various ledges (shelf space for books, cups of tea, baskets or, more to the point, children, bags of fruit, buckets of water), ledges genetically designed with another country in mind, another climate (Smith, 230)

Thus, her body is considered as an enigma. In above description, her body shape seems to belong to a different culture. She is uncomfortable with her body and fails to locate herself within the country in which she was born. Smith articulates her uneasiness by saying that “But Irie didn’t know she was fine. There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land” (Smith, 270). By asserting Irie “without reflection”, Smith indicates her struggle for a recognizable identity. This statement also points out her need to recognize herself and to be recognized as a member of the society by others in mainstream Britain.

Homi Bhabha’s theoretical work on the nation in *Nation and Narration* (1990) will help to explore Irie’s discomfort and feelings of displacement. Bhabha argues that the citizens whose

ancestral roots are located outside of Britain feel dislocated and displaced. He cites “ambivalence” as a central cause for some British citizens’ overwhelming feelings of displacement. Though an explanation of how the nation is in a state of transition, Bhabha discusses his idea of “ambivalence”. He asserts that:

The ambivalence of the people who make up a nation emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality (Bhabha, 3).

This uncertainty of the composition of nation that Bhabha describes here is similar to Irie’s feelings of uncertainty in the composition of her own life. Though Irie is not an immigrant, she experiences the ambivalences and dualities that are central to those who are involved in diaspora.

Initially, Irie feels as an outcast and struggles to assimilate in a multicultural society.

According to Edouard Glissant:

When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging.” (Glissant, 143)

Thus, it makes sense to understand Irie’s “split” personality as she feels not fitting anywhere. She feels discomfort and has low self-esteem due to her negative body image. She desires “straight hair. Straight, straight, long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair” (Smith, 277). She blames her black genes for having unwanted hair and wants to straighten her hair. Her attempt to straighten her hair sheds light on

her deep-rooted discomfort with her body. Smith uses Irie's desire for straight hair as a metaphor to explain her desire to resent her "African follicle" (Smith, 279). Like White British society, she fears the 'other' (her own hair) and has a desire to have straight hair what she believes is a more widely accepted version of beauty. Simply, by straightening her hair, she desires to look similar to other female members of her society who have straight hair.

In addition, it is important to examine Irie's past in order to understand her uprootedness because it sheds light on her feelings of instability and her belief that she does not belong to English society. When Clara's father Darcus leaves Jamaica for moving to England, he abandoned them. They are seemingly forgotten by Darcus, after his arrival in England and this type of exclusionary act has clearly affected Irie's feeling of exclusion. The more Irie wants to know her roots; the more she is discouraged by her parents. When she discovers that Clara's front teeth are fake, she considers this secret as just one among a long list of uncertainties of her family's roots. As excerpted from the novel,

To her, this was yet another item in a long list of parental hypocrisies and untruths, this was another example of the Jones/Bowden gift for secret histories, stories you never got told, history you never entirely uncovered, rumour you never unraveled, which would be fine if every day was not littered with clues, and suggestions; shrapnel in Archie's leg ...photo of strange white Grandpa Durham ... the name 'Ophelia' and the word 'madhouse' ... These parents were full of information you wanted to know but were too scared to hear. But she didn't want it any more. She was tired of it. She was sick of never getting the whole truth.
(Smith, 383)

Thus, Irie finds out almost all the secrets that are hidden from her for a long time. She discovers the secrets of past life of her parents. The pain of not getting the “whole truth” increases Irie’s quest for her roots. Though these secrets are kept from Irie to avoid the pain and guilt of remembering, these secrets make her feeling alienated in her own home. So, she decides to leave her parents’ house and goes to stay with her grandmother Hortense.

Additionally, Irie feels comfortable in Hortense’s home which is laden with history. According to Irie, “that house was an adventure. In cupboards and neglected drawers and in grimy frames were the secrets that had been hoarded for so long, as if secrets were going out of fashion” (Smith, 399). Thus, Hortense’s house works as a source for Irie to disclose all the secrets that are kept away from her. She changes drastically with the company of her grandmother. To feel solace, Irie completely immerses herself in the history of her roots and this helps her to feel a sense of belonging for the first time ever in her life. It is significant to notice that though initially Irie want to stay away from her Jamaican roots, gradually she feels more at “home” within her matrilineal Jamaican heritage. Despite having “never been there” her experience of a collective memory places her in a past, where she feels she belongs. As excerpted from the novel:

She laid claim to the past - her version of the past - aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail. So this was where she came from. This all belonged to her, her birthright, like a pair of pearl earrings or a post office bond ... Irie put an X on everything she found ... storing them under the sofa, so that as if by osmosis the richness of them would pass through the fabric while she was sleeping and seep right into her. (Smith, 404)

This sense of belonging allows her to search for her own unified and recognizable ‘Self’. In spite of knowing the fact that mainstream white Britain will still discriminate her on the basis of her Jamaican roots, she boldly claims her right to belong somewhere and challenges those who attempt to call her as an outsider. In this way Irie proceeds on her way to achieve subjectivity and gains self-confidence that she always desires.

Moreover, Irie reaches her second phase of development as a unified ‘Self’ when she becomes aware of her own agency and takes control of her feelings for Millat. Initially, Irie allows Millat to determine her self-worth because she feels discomfort in her own body. Trinh T. Minh-ha takes up the issues of women, subjectivity, identity and authorship in his book *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (2009) and tries to explain the marginalized position of women (immigrants and others) in society. According to Minh-ha:

The search for the claim for an essential female/ethnic identity-difference today can never be anything more than a move within the male-is-norm-divide-and-conquer trap. The malady lingers on (Minh-ha, 101)

He discusses the marginalized position of immigrant women in a patriarchal society and calls for women to search for a place in this male dominated society. Being a member of a male dominated society, Irie feels as though she does not belong here and this unsettling feeling contributes to her low self-esteem and thus her acceptance of Millat’s tendency to offend her. It seems like that Smith sets up a dichotomy between Millat and Irie, noting the ways that Millat is all right, whereas Irie is “all wrong”(Smith,272). This dichotomy can be seen as the basis of Irie’s discomfort regarding her body, especially in comparison to Millat. As excerpted from the novel:

Irie believed she had been dealt the dodgy cards: mountainous curves, buck teeth and thick metal retainer, impossible Afro hair, and to top it off mole-ish eyesight which in turn required bottle-top spectacles in a light shade of pink ... And this belief in her ugliness, in her wrongness, had subdued her; she kept her smart-ass comments to herself these days, she kept her right hand on her stomach. She was all wrong. (Smith, 268)

This sense of “wrongness” reflects her feeling of inbetweenness and instability from both her status as second-generation immigrant and as a black woman. Her inability to meet the standard of white beauty troubles her and causes her to have low self-esteem. Unlike Irie, Millat meets the standard of beauty because of his ideal British male appearance. Smith describes Millat as:

Millat was like youth remembered in the nostalgic eyeglass of old age, beauty parodying itself: broken Roman nose, tall, thin; lightly veined, smoothly muscled; chocolate eyes with irresistible smile, big white teeth (Smith, 268-69)

Thus, Smith describes Millat as near perfect. The differences between Irie and Millat’s appearances become the foreground of Irie’s feeling of inadequacy around Millat. Things start to change when Magid returns home from Bangladesh and Irie finds herself torn between the twins brothers. As a result, she feels tired off Millat and the trouble he has caused her over the years begins to show.

The more she loses interest on Millat, the less she becomes concerned about her physical appearance. Gradually, she realizes that she is responsible for her choices and she no longer wants to be a part of the story of others. Thus, she invests herself with the agency and begins to narrate her own life story. Unlike her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, she does not

accept being marginalized by any men in her life. Although her love for Millat is so strong, she tries to release herself from the burden of an unrequited relationship with him. Irie's decision to stay away from Millat gets hampered when she and Millat unexpectedly make love. The encounter occurs "almost without meaning to" and ends "as suddenly and feverishly as it had begun" (Smith, 465). This unexpected encounter brings embarrassment to Irie as she feels ashamed of knowing that Millat will regret this union. On the other hand, Millat feel extremely guilty and ends up with praying mercy "because he believed he was being watched by the great camera in the sky" (Smith, 465). When Irie leaves Millat, she feels enraged and wishes to seek revenge for Millat's inability to love her. After this sudden encounter with Millat, Irie feels enlightened and releases her anger on Magid. As excerpted from the novel:

Millat didn't love Irie, and Irie was sure there must be somebody she could blame for that. Her brains started ticking over. What was the root cause? Millat's feelings of inadequacy. What was the root cause of Millat's feelings of inadequacy? Magid. He had been born second because of Magid. He was the lesser son because of Magid (Smith, 466).

Thus, Irie blames Magid and takes revenge on him for being the cause of Millat's inadequacies. Moreover, by making love with Magid "without conversation or affection," (Smith, 467) she takes her revenge on Millat. By choosing to avenge both Millat and Magid, Irie feels empowered and thus she moves on.

Moreover, Irie reaches the final phase of her quest for a unified 'Self' when she becomes pregnant as a result of sleeping with both Millat and Magid. Soon, she realizes that both her and her child's life will be bound to the lives of Millat and Magid and thus their relationship will become unbreakable. As excerpted from the novel:

Irie was eight weeks pregnant and she knew it. What she didn't know, and what she realized she may never know was the identity of the father. No test on earth would tell her...She could not know her body's decision, what choice it had made. She could not know if the choice would make any difference. Because whichever brother it was, it was the other one too. (Smith, 514)

Irie is aware of the fact that she will never know which brother is the father of her child but she is happy with her 'choice' that connects her to Millat and Magid. In the above passage, Smith portrays Irie with the freedom of choice. She becomes a woman with power and subjectivity. Thus, she completes her journey from being an insecure, confused 'Self' to a confident, independent and moreover a self-conscious person. So, Irie is no longer dependent on her relationship with Millat as the sole source of her happiness and now she wants to lead a life which is centered around her unborn child. Irie decides to take on the responsibility of her pregnancy because she knows neither Millat nor Magid has the potential to become her appropriate partner. Smith declares that "the past is always tense, the future, perfect"(541). Thus, Smith tries to show that in spite of having a dark past; one's future can be bright! Irie's pregnancy can be seen as a sign of less complicated future. As excerpted from the novel:

Irie's child can never be mapped exactly nor spoken of with any certainty. Some secrets are permanent. In a vision, Irie has seen a time, a time not far from now, when roots won't matter anymore not because they can't because they mustn't because they're too long and they're too tortuous and they're just buried too damn deep. She looks forward to it. (527)

Irie feels a sense of relief that her child cannot be ‘mapped exactly’ as no one can ever discover the true identity of her child’s father. Thus, she imagines of a future where the roots “won’t matter anymore”. James Clifford in his book *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) supports the type of sentiment that Irie is feeling. Clifford explains how one’s roots are essentially constructed, and that we are all basically dwelling in travel (2). So, in future the roots won’t matter anymore in our growing global community. Irie wishes her child would have a less complicated life unlike her.

Throughout the journey of her life Irie realizes that knowledge (about root) is sometimes impossible to retrieve (especially in the form of memories and histories) but true feeling of belongings flourish in the relationships that one forms. In the beginning of the novel Irie is found in a state of ‘ambivalence’ but during the end of the novel she is found to discover her true ‘Self’ and becomes confident enough to celebrate the diversity of her roots. Smith ends the novel with a hope where Irie looks forward to a future where roots won’t matter anymore. In this sense, Irie looks forward to a future where memories of struggle, diasporas and secrets remain intact and so people celebrate their diversity. Thus, Smith finishes her story by transforming a ‘root obsessed’ insecure girl into a confident one who learns to celebrate her diasporic identity.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the way immigrants find new 'selves' in the process of becoming independent individuals, in the novels written by Monica Ali, Bharati Mukherjee and Zadie Smith. The novels selected for this research were published during 1989 to 2003. The diversity of these novels plays a significant role in analyzing the complexity of women in diaspora. According to Easmin Haque,

Though these novels have articulated some common immigrant issues, they substantially differ from each other in their narrative perspectives, which in turn have influenced their tone, characterization, use of language and dealings with contents. (149)

So, in spite of having some commonalities, each of these novels has some unique elements. This analysis of women in diasporas depicted by Ali, Mukherjee and Smith suggests that responses of immigrants to tensions of assimilation are personal and not collective or communal. Both Ali and Mukherjee suggest that the issue of holding the roots is not the pressing issue in the life of the working class who are engaged in a grim struggle of survival. For example, preserving their roots and culture is not the main concern of Nazneen and Jasmine; rather their real challenge is to survive in a hostile environment. In contrast, the urge for holding on to the root is persistent in Irie who is fairly affluent.

To conclude it can be said that, this paper tries to explore the formation of the Self of women in reference to three selected diasporic novels. This paper discusses the complexities of a human identity with its formation, suppression, adoption, loss and recovery. The obstacles that

lay behind these women in diasporas are also mentioned in this research. This paper argues that the construction of personal identity is not a fixed rather a ongoing process. The first generation immigrant women like Nazneen and Jasmine have to deal with uprootedness, language barrier and cultural clash as they go through the process of assimilation, whereas the second generation immigrant woman like Irie, often suffer from identity crisis due to be discriminated and offended by the other White member of the society. Though both the first and second generation immigrants feel a sense of unrootedness, the later ones are in a more vulnerable position as they fail to connect themselves with their past history and the present reality. The more they get mobility, the less they care about their roots. Gradually, Nazneen, Jasmine and Irie succeed in avoiding dysfunctional relationships and recovering their identity crisis. In this way, these women gain confidence to live a life of their own.

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