

Name of the Scholar : **Sarfaraz Nawaz**
Name of the Supervisor : **Dr. Shuby Abidi**

Department of English
Faculty of Humanities & Languages
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Title of the PhD Thesis : **Shifting Identities in the fiction of Bharati Mukherjee**

The present thesis seeks to explore through a chronological study of Mukherjee's works the trajectories that she has taken on the issue of immigrant identity and home, and the shifts in her perspectives that have marked the different phases of her writing. The focus is on the constantly shuttling identities of the characters who cannot have a stable sense of identity in the host land and are hurtled like a shuttlecock in a bid to belong. The question of home becomes very intriguing in the context of displacement that is intrinsically related to migration. The ambivalence that lies between displacement and relocation characterizes the immigrant narratives. The migrant is many often sandwiched between the nostalgia for the homeland and the need to come to terms with the demands of the new culture.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, "Introduction: Diaspora, Identity and Home," discusses at length the very idea of cultural identity and home in the context of the modern globalized world, problematizing the very idea of an essential and monolithic identity that one can lay claim to. The second chapter titled "Straddling Two Worlds: The Dilemma of Dwelling" takes up two novels *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) and *Wife* (1975) and a short story collection *Darkness* (1985) for analysis. The focus is on the struggle on the part of immigrants to carve out an identity, to make sense of the place and to come to terms with the realities of life in

the new world. The third chapter, “Refashioning Life in a New World: The Eagerness to Assimilate,” closely examines the short story collection *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and two novels *Jasmine* (1990) and *The Holder of the World* (1993), where Mukherjee seems to be emphasizing the idea of assimilation into the host culture in order to have a sense of identity. The chapter critically engages with the debate as to what extent the total assimilation could be possible or desirable. The fourth chapter titled “Transnational Identity and Home: Routes to Roots” engages with four novels namely *Leave It to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002), *The Tree Bride* (2004) and *Miss New India* (2012) and tries to trace the shift in the perspective of the writer as evident from the way the focus is more on the history, memory and past than on the exuberance of assimilation. The final chapter, “Conclusion: Constructing a Narrative of Homeland,” while offering an overall assessment of Mukherjee’s oeuvre tries to establish how she skillfully delineates the fluid and shuttling identities of her characters caught in situations which force them to reinvent and rediscover them. They are ever in transit and cannot have a fixed and stable sense of identity.

One can notice that despite her claims of having shed her past and her identity as an Indian, Mukherjee seems to be predisposed towards India. At one level, she is eager to announce her loyalty to America as a citizen by advocating the idea of transformation even if it is at the cost of much suffering and at the other level she cannot sever her ties with the country of her birth and origin. The conflict is tenacious and keeps getting reflected through her works, howsoever much she may try to deliberately curb it. This is the reason that, taken as a whole, her works reflect her shifting point of views with regard to the question of the immigrant experience, as she cannot create a secure space and a stable sense of identity much like her characters who are hurled into a world where they desperately struggle to belong.