

Ritual, Migration, and the Rebirth of Self: Cultural Identity and Spiritual Negotiation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*

¹Mrs. V. Vinotorchali, ²Dr. A. Santhanalakshmi, ³Dr. C. Alagan

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of English, ADM College for Women (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli) Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu.

Email: salvasani@yahoo.com

²Research Advisor, Associate Professor & Head (Rtd), Department of English, ADM College for Women (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli) Nagapattinam, Tamilnadu.

Email: santhanalakshmiadmc@gmail.com

³Research Co- Supervisor, Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Thiru Vi Ka College, (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli) Thiruvavur, Tamilnadu.

Email: alaganaec@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper explores how Bharati Mukherjee redefines cultural self-identity, spirituality, and indigenous practices in her novels *Jasmine* (1989) and *Desirable Daughters* (2002). Through her protagonists, Mukherjee examines how migration transforms not only geography but also interior life, where ritual and spirituality function as instruments of psychological renewal and moral agency. The study demonstrates that in both novels, Mukherjee's heroines navigate displacement through the adaptation of indigenous practices into modern contexts. Their reinventions are at once personal and philosophical, articulating a diasporic theology of transformation that fuses the sacred and the secular. Drawing from postcolonial and feminist theories—especially the works of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, and Victor Turner—this paper argues that Mukherjee's fiction stages a redefinition of identity as a ritual of becoming, emphasizing hybridity, liminality, and the continuous negotiation between inherited and adopted spiritual forms.

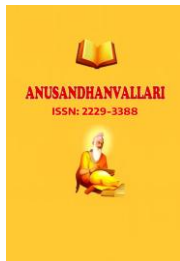
Keywords: Cultural, Self-identity, Spirituality, Tradition, values

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee's literary corpus engages deeply with the spiritual and cultural dimensions of migration. Her narratives foreground the immigrant experience not merely as a sociopolitical condition but as a spiritual and psychological process of transformation. Both *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters* dramatize the immigrant woman's quest for selfhood as a negotiation between memory and reinvention. The heroines in these novels are shaped by traditional Indian values yet compelled to reformulate them in new contexts. The struggle between continuity and rupture—between the rootedness of indigenous practice and the fluidity of diasporic identity—becomes the organizing motif of Mukherjee's fiction.

Mukherjee herself asserted in an interview, "I am interested in transformation, not preservation" (*The Massachusetts Review*, 1990). This statement captures the dynamic energy that animates her protagonists. They are not passive inheritors of cultural memory but active agents of redefinition, reconstructing their sense of self through the interplay of ritual, memory, and experience. In this process, spirituality becomes less an inherited creed and more a creative tool of adaptation.

Jasmine traces the metamorphosis of a village girl, Jyoti, into a series of self-invented identities—Jasmine, Jase, and Jane—each transformation marked by symbolic death and rebirth. Similarly, in *Desirable Daughters*, the three sisters—Padma, Tara, and Parvati—navigate tradition and modernity through stories, rituals,



and myths that tie their diasporic present to ancestral roots. Both novels present spirituality as an evolving practice, rather than a static belief system.

This paper proposes that Mukherjee's fiction can be read as a spiritual cartography of migration, where rituals are transposed, memories reinterpreted, and identities reborn. It argues that for Mukherjee, the act of migration functions as a ritual of passage, a liminal experience through which the self is continually reconstructed. The following sections situate Mukherjee's treatment of identity and spirituality within the frameworks of postcolonial and feminist criticism, then analyze in depth the textual dynamics of ritual, myth, and rebirth in the two novels.

Literature Review

Scholarly interpretations of Bharati Mukherjee's fiction have generally focused on themes of immigration, hybridity, and gendered identity. Early critics like Uma Parameswaran and Vijay Mishra viewed Mukherjee's work as emblematic of the Indian diaspora's struggle to reconcile cultural nostalgia with the demands of assimilation. However, later scholarship complicates this binary, emphasizing the spiritual and psychological dimensions of her protagonists' transformations.

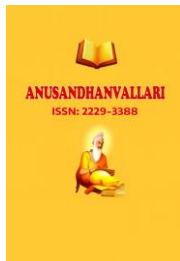
Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity as "a matter of becoming as well as being" (Hall 225) offers a productive framework for reading Mukherjee. Her characters do not possess a fixed essence; rather, they inhabit a continuous process of self-formation. This aligns with Victor Turner's notion of *liminality*—a transitional phase characterized by ambiguity and transformation (*The Ritual Process* 94). In both *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*, identity is performed as a ritual passage through liminal spaces, where the characters symbolically die and are reborn into new social and cultural selves.

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity also provides insight into Mukherjee's diasporic vision. Bhabha argues that the "third space" of cultural negotiation enables new identities to emerge beyond the binaries of colonizer and colonized (*The Location of Culture* 56). Mukherjee's protagonists inhabit precisely this third space, where indigenous practices coexist with modern secularism, generating what might be called a *spiritual hybridity*—a negotiation between traditional faith and individual agency.

Feminist critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have critiqued the representation of Third World women as passive victims of tradition. Mukherjee subverts this stereotype by portraying women who reinterpret, rather than reject, their heritage. As Spivak asserts, the subaltern woman must "speak through her own reconstituted subjectivity" (*In Other Worlds* 114). In this sense, Mukherjee's heroines reclaim their agency through acts of storytelling, migration, and moral decision-making, transforming cultural constraint into creative renewal.

Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992) further informs the analysis by redefining ritual as a strategic mode of action rather than fixed observance. Her insight that "ritualization is a way of acting that differentiates and privileges certain activities" (Bell 91) applies aptly to Mukherjee's protagonists, whose daily acts—cooking, storytelling, naming—become sacralized gestures of identity-making. Similarly, Peggy Levitt's *God Needs No Passport* (2007) underscores the portability of faith in global contexts, demonstrating how migrants adapt religious practices to sustain belonging. Mukherjee's work illustrates this portability with remarkable nuance.

Overall, while previous critics have examined Mukherjee's treatment of cultural hybridity and gender, relatively few have analyzed her fiction through the lens of spirituality and ritual. This paper fills that gap by foregrounding how indigenous spiritual practices serve as adaptive strategies in the diasporic experience, illuminating the moral and emotional architecture of Mukherjee's fiction.



Ritual, Death, and Rebirth in *Jasmine*

In *Jasmine* (1989), Bharati Mukherjee dramatizes the immigrant experience as a sequence of symbolic deaths and rebirths. The protagonist, Jyoti—later known as Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, and Jane—embodies the fluidity of identity within diasporic consciousness. The novel opens in rural Punjab and ends in the American Midwest, but its real journey is spiritual rather than geographic. Mukherjee uses ritual, myth, and violence as instruments of transformation, reconfiguring traditional Hindu notions of karma and reincarnation into secular metaphors of self-making.

The novel begins with the astrologer's prophecy that Jyoti will "travel far and marry a man of foreign lands" (*Jasmine* 3). What appears as a folkloric prediction soon becomes the axis of her destiny. The palm-reading ritual situates Jyoti within the matrix of Indian belief, yet Mukherjee subverts it: the prophecy becomes self-fulfilling not through divine will but through the heroine's defiance. This inversion signals Mukherjee's thematic interest in the *agency within destiny*—the possibility of transformation through self-willed ritual.

When Jasmine migrates from India to America, she performs what Victor Turner calls a "rite of passage"—a liminal crossing between worlds. The most dramatic ritual occurs when she burns her widow's clothes after her husband Prakash's death, symbolically annihilating her past. Mukherjee writes: "I burned Prakash's suit and my widow's sari in the defiant flames. I was never the same again" (*Jasmine* 97). This act fuses ritual destruction with personal liberation, replacing the Hindu *sati* with a feminist act of resurrection. As critic Vijay Mishra observes, "Jasmine's journey reimagines sati not as immolation but as migration" (*The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* 203).

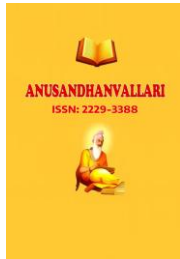
Mukherjee stages this rebirth through a series of liminal spaces—ports, motels, and foreign homes—that function as ritual thresholds. When Jasmine arrives in America, she renames herself "Jase," marking the shedding of her old skin. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity is vividly realized here: "It is in-between spaces that new signs of identity are formed" (*Location of Culture* 56). Jasmine's multiple names—Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane—constitute what Stuart Hall calls "the articulation of identity in difference" (*Cultural Identity and Diaspora* 236). Each name is a ritual utterance, an invocation of a new self within new coordinates.

One of the novel's most spiritually charged moments occurs when Jasmine recalls her grandmother Dida's instruction in Hindu domestic rituals. Even in America, these memories persist as moral residues, guiding her through alien spaces. However, Jasmine's spirituality evolves from submission to autonomy. She declares, "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (*Jasmine* 29). This statement encapsulates Mukherjee's theology of transformation—the immigrant as a self-made deity who reconstructs the sacred from the fragments of displacement.

Jasmine's successive reinventions are not linear but cyclical, mirroring the Hindu concept of *samsara*—the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Yet Mukherjee secularizes this cycle, translating metaphysical rebirth into psychological and social adaptation. Each metamorphosis is accompanied by ritual gestures: burning, naming, sexual awakening, migration. As critic Rocío Davis notes, "Mukherjee converts mythic rebirth into the grammar of migration" (*Transcultural Reinventions* 184).

Furthermore, the novel redefines purity and pollution, two key categories in Indian ritual culture. In Punjab, Jasmine's widowhood is seen as contamination; in America, her sexual and emotional rebirth reverses that stigma. When she becomes Jase, the lover of Taylor, her sensuality is an act of moral defiance against patriarchal codes. As Gayatri Spivak's notion of the subaltern's speech implies, Jasmine "talks back" to cultural prescriptions through embodied acts rather than ideological slogans (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 308). Her sexuality, often misread by critics as assimilation, is instead a ritual reclamation of selfhood—a performance of the sacred feminine in a secularized context.

The novel also engages with the ritual of storytelling itself. Jasmine reconstructs her past through narrative retellings, transforming trauma into myth. The act of narration parallels the Hindu *katha*—the storytelling ceremony that sustains collective memory. Through language, she ritualizes her displacement,



asserting continuity amidst flux. This aligns with Catherine Bell's notion that ritual is "a mode of strategic differentiation," a way to endow ordinary acts with transcendent meaning (Bell 92). Jasmine's life, in this sense, becomes a series of improvised rituals—each transformation both self-destructive and self-creative.

In the closing scene, Jasmine's decision to follow Bud's son, Du, signifies another rebirth. The narrative ends not in closure but in motion, echoing the cyclical rhythm of ritual renewal. The open-endedness of the novel implies that identity is never completed; it is a perpetual negotiation between the sacred and the secular, the indigenous and the foreign. Mukherjee thus constructs a diasporic spirituality rooted not in geography but in transformation itself.

Tradition, Spirituality, and Self-Reclamation in *Desirable Daughters*

In *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Bharati Mukherjee deepens her exploration of cultural identity and spiritual negotiation by focusing on the tripartite relationship among three sisters—Padma, Tara, and Parvati—whose lives unfold between India and the United States. Unlike *Jasmine*, which foregrounds physical migration, *Desirable Daughters* interrogates the spiritual and psychological migrations that occur within tradition itself. The novel is both a reimagining of ancient myth and an intimate study of female subjectivity caught between the forces of heritage and individual will.

The novel opens with Tara's invocation of a mythic ancestor, the eleventh-century saint Tara Lata, the "Tree Bride," who was married to a tree to save her from widowhood. The ritual act of marrying a tree—an indigenous custom drawn from Bengali folklore—anchors the novel in the spiritual logic of Hindu cosmology, where ritual mediates between human suffering and divine order. Mukherjee's use of this legend serves as a counterpoint to Tara's modern life in California, illustrating the coexistence of the sacred and the secular within diasporic consciousness. As the narrator confesses, "The Tree Bride's story is my story. Her roots are mine, her branches are my reach" (*Desirable Daughters* 17). The metaphor of rootedness and branching encapsulates the duality of belonging and dispersion that defines the diasporic condition.

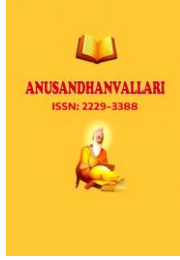
Myth and Modernity

Mukherjee reinterprets Hindu mythology not as a set of fixed doctrines but as a living cultural archive through which her characters negotiate meaning. Tara, though educated in Western rationalism, remains tethered to the mythic consciousness of her Bengali upbringing. The Tree Bride becomes a spiritual alter ego, a symbol of endurance and feminine sanctity. Yet Mukherjee's genius lies in recontextualizing myth as metaphor rather than prescription. Tara's identification with the Tree Bride signifies her desire for moral grounding in a fragmented, transnational world. As critic Priya Kumar observes, "Mukherjee's invocation of myth functions not as regression into tradition but as a creative reauthorization of selfhood through cultural memory" (*Transnational Feminisms* 244).

In contrast to Jasmine's fiery reinventions, Tara's transformation is introspective and mediated through family, narrative, and ritual remembrance. The novel's structure itself resembles a *puranic* text—a cyclical layering of stories within stories, where the act of remembering becomes a ritual of self-discovery. Each retelling of the Tree Bride's story reanimates Tara's spiritual consciousness, offering moral lessons for modern dilemmas. Mukherjee thus constructs a narrative theology of diaspora, where the sacred text is no longer scripture but lived experience.

Ritual as Negotiation

Throughout *Desirable Daughters*, ritual serves as both constraint and liberation. The marriage rituals of the sisters—Padma's traditional union, Parvati's arranged yet successful marriage, and Tara's divorce—become moral signifiers of their differing relationships to culture. Tara's decision to leave her husband, Bish, disrupts the sanctity of marriage as defined by Hindu orthodoxy. Yet her separation is not a rejection of tradition but a



reinterpretation of it. She continues to perform small domestic rituals, lighting incense, chanting Sanskrit hymns, and observing festivals—acts that signify continuity within transformation.

Catherine Bell's theory that "ritual is a way of establishing and negotiating power relations through performance" (Bell 108) illuminates Tara's practice of ritual in exile. By maintaining selective elements of her heritage, Tara asserts agency over her own spiritual identity. In one telling scene, she observes the *Durga Puja* festival with her son, Rabi, in San Francisco. The ritual becomes an intercultural dialogue rather than an act of nostalgia: "The goddess's eyes looked out over a crowd of Indians and Americans, all drawn into her gaze. I felt her power, and it was not about India—it was about me" (*Desirable Daughters* 134). This moment captures Mukherjee's core vision: spirituality as self-realization within multiplicity.

Storytelling as Sacred Continuity

Storytelling in *Desirable Daughters* functions as a ritual parallel to *pūja*—an offering of memory. Tara's narration is structured as confession and invocation, bridging personal and ancestral histories. Mukherjee's narrative strategy mirrors oral traditions where history, myth, and ethics coalesce in collective remembrance. As scholar Gita Rajan notes, "Mukherjee transforms storytelling into a diasporic ritual that sanctifies hybridity" (*South Asian Review* 27.2, 2006). Tara's recollections of Calcutta, her reinterpretations of family myths, and her exploration of her sister Padma's conservatism all enact a ritualized search for coherence in the face of fragmentation.

In this sense, *Desirable Daughters* expands upon the spiritual model established in *Jasmine*. Whereas Jasmine enacts transformation through external metamorphosis, Tara embodies an inward pilgrimage. The two trajectories—one of motion, the other of meditation—represent complementary aspects of Mukherjee's spiritual cartography of migration. Tara's spirituality is rooted in the *bhakti* (devotional) tradition of emotional surrender, yet it is refracted through modern self-consciousness. Her eventual reconciliation with her family and culture signifies not regression but integration—a sacred balance between autonomy and belonging.

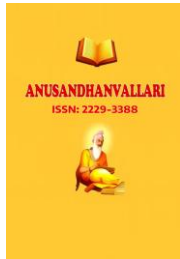
Reinterpretation of Indigenous Practices

Mukherjee's engagement with indigenous ritual practices is neither nostalgic nor ethnographic; it is adaptive. The Tree Bride ritual, once a symbol of patriarchal subjugation, is reimaged as a metaphor of endurance. Tara's discovery of her ancestor's story through historical research becomes an act of reclaiming women's agency within the spiritual history of India. This aligns with Spivak's argument that "the subaltern can speak when she re-inscribes history in her own voice" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 273). By recovering the suppressed narrative of the Tree Bride, Tara performs a feminist ritual of remembrance, converting myth into moral autonomy.

The tension between tradition and modernity is further dramatized in Tara's relationship with her son and her American lover, Andy. Their domestic arrangements blend Indian customs with Californian liberalism, illustrating what Homi Bhabha calls the "third space of cultural enunciation" (*Location of Culture* 55). Tara's home becomes a ritual space of hybridity where East and West coexist in quotidian harmony. Cooking Indian meals, teaching Sanskrit prayers, and decorating her house with Bengali artifacts are not mere cultural residues—they are acts of spiritual translation. Through these practices, Tara constructs what Peggy Levitt terms a "transnational sacred community," where faith migrates alongside the body (*God Needs No Passport* 82).

Spiritual Reconciliation and Moral Agency

By the novel's end, Tara undergoes a spiritual reconciliation that mirrors Jasmine's perpetual rebirth. She learns to see the Tree Bride not as a relic of oppression but as an emblem of resilience. When Tara declares, "I am my own Tree Bride," she fuses ancestral myth with personal awakening. Mukherjee transforms spirituality from ritualistic observance to existential insight, from social prescription to moral self-fashioning. The novel



closes with Tara poised between worlds—no longer divided by geography but unified by a deeper spiritual synthesis.

As critic Bharati Ray notes, “Mukherjee’s women inherit the moral imagination of their ancestors, yet they rearticulate it through the grammar of freedom” (*Modern Indian Women Writers*, 2004, 212). *Desirable Daughters* thus transforms indigenous spiritual practices into dynamic forces of self-renewal, affirming Mukherjee’s belief that migration is not merely a geographical passage but a sacred metamorphosis of consciousness.

Comparative Discussion — Migration as Spiritual Rebirth

Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters* share a profound structural and thematic kinship: both trace the odyssey of women who redefine themselves through migration, myth, and ritual reinvention. Yet their trajectories differ in tone and method. *Jasmine* dramatizes transformation as rupture—an ongoing process of death and resurrection—while *Desirable Daughters* enacts transformation as return, an introspective pilgrimage toward integration. Taken together, the two novels articulate Mukherjee’s vision of migration as a sacred process, a ritual of rebirth that reconfigures the immigrant experience into a spiritual vocation.

Hybridity and the Liminal Self

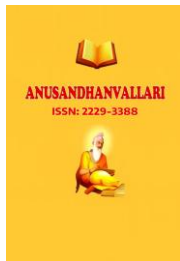
Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space” provides a unifying framework for both heroines’ journeys. Jasmine and Tara occupy liminal cultural zones where identity becomes a fluid construct, sustained by negotiation rather than inheritance. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist’s constant renaming—Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, Jane—represents the performative dimension of identity. Each name signifies a stage in her metamorphosis, echoing Turner’s ritual structure of *separation–liminality–reincorporation*. Jasmine’s ritual self-destructions—burning her widow’s sari, crossing oceans, renouncing names—illustrate the violence of rebirth within diaspora.

In contrast, Tara of *Desirable Daughters* performs hybridity through continuity. Rather than erasing her origins, she reinterprets them. Her spiritual practice—observing rituals, retelling myths—becomes a strategy of integration, not rejection. Stuart Hall’s formulation that “cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as being” (Hall 225) resonates strongly here. Jasmine’s identity is perpetually becoming; Tara’s identity reconciles being and becoming. One destroys to create; the other remembers to renew. Together they map two poles of the diasporic feminine experience: radical reinvention and spiritual synthesis.

Ritual as Transformation

Ritual, as defined by Catherine Bell, “marks boundaries and creates distinctions through performance” (*Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* 81). In both novels, ritual functions as a performative act that sanctifies transition. Jasmine’s burning ritual transgresses Hindu orthodoxy, transforming widowhood into autonomy. Tara’s retelling of the Tree Bride myth transforms passive endurance into active moral continuity. Both acts exemplify ritualization as empowerment.

However, Mukherjee’s treatment of ritual diverges sharply from anthropological fixity. She desacralizes traditional forms and relocates the sacred in lived experience. For Jasmine, ritual becomes existential; for Tara, it becomes mnemonic. The body itself is ritualized—the migrant body bearing scars, desires, and memories that bridge the sacred and secular. When Jasmine declares, “We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams,” she sacralizes transformation as a divine act of will. Similarly, Tara’s declaration, “I am my own Tree Bride,” internalizes the ritual symbol, turning it into a metaphor of moral endurance. Both statements collapse the distance between ritual performance and spiritual essence.



Spiritual Portability and the Diasporic Sacred

Peggy Levitt's theory of "transnational religion" elucidates Mukherjee's portrayal of spirituality as portable. Levitt argues that migrants carry faith across borders, adapting it to new moral economies (*God Needs No Passport* 112). In *Jasmine*, this portability manifests as secularized karma—the belief that every rebirth (each new identity) carries moral residue from the last. Jasmine's multiple incarnations are karmic continuities, translating metaphysical rebirth into cultural adaptation. In *Desirable Daughters*, spirituality migrates through narrative and domestic ritual. Tara's San Francisco home becomes a miniature temple of blended faiths, where the goddess Durga presides over a multicultural altar.

Thus, in both novels, Mukherjee imagines spirituality as a transcultural language—a grammar of survival. She proposes that the sacred is not confined to place but sustained through practice. The immigrant's adaptation of ritual becomes a form of resistance against erasure, ensuring moral coherence amidst global dislocation.

Feminism and the Sacred Feminine

Mukherjee's engagement with spirituality is inseparable from her feminist politics. She reconstructs the sacred feminine within modern subjectivity. Both Jasmine and Tara reclaim religious symbols traditionally associated with female submission—the widow, the bride, the goddess—and reinterpret them as emblems of autonomy. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist's widowhood, initially a state of ritual pollution, becomes the ground for rebirth. Her burning of the widow's sari reverses the meaning of *sati*, transforming self-immolation into self-creation. Mukherjee writes, "I had never been so alive as when I burned what I was supposed to be" (*Jasmine* 98). This act epitomizes what Spivak calls "strategic essentialism"—the reclamation of cultural forms for feminist purposes. Similarly, in *Desirable Daughters*, the Tree Bride—once a symbol of patriarchal preservation—is reimagined as an archetype of resilience. Tara's recognition of herself as her ancestor's spiritual heir signals an evolutionary feminism, where reverence and rebellion coexist.

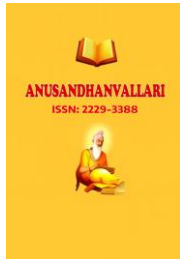
Through these transformations, Mukherjee suggests that ritual itself can be feminist when reinterpreted through agency. The immigrant woman does not abandon her spiritual inheritance; she edits it. In this sense, both novels articulate a theology of female autonomy, one grounded not in rejection of tradition but in its creative transmutation.

Mythic Time and Modern Migration

Both novels employ mythic temporality to transcend the linear logic of migration. In *Jasmine*, the cyclical pattern of death and rebirth mirrors the Hindu concept of *samsara*, though translated into secular terms. In *Desirable Daughters*, the myth of the Tree Bride compresses centuries into living memory, creating what Mircea Eliade calls "sacred time," where past and present interpenetrate (*The Sacred and the Profane* 86). Mukherjee fuses these mythic structures with the modern diaspora's fluid temporality. The immigrant's life oscillates between nostalgia and aspiration, between homeland and hostland. Rituals—whether Jasmine's burning of the sari or Tara's observance of Durga Puja—momentarily reconcile these temporal fractures. In performing ritual, the immigrant participates in sacred time, affirming continuity within displacement.

Narrative as a Ritual of Healing

Storytelling functions as a healing ritual across both texts. Jasmine narrates her transformations retrospectively, converting trauma into narrative control. Tara reconstructs her family's mythic past to restore moral coherence to her fragmented present. The act of narration itself becomes what anthropologist Victor Turner calls "communitas"—a liminal space of shared meaning. As readers, we are drawn into their ritual speech, witnessing the sacred process of re-membering the self.



Mukherjee's narrative voice often oscillates between confession and invocation, echoing the cadence of prayer. This stylistic ritualization reinforces her thematic concern with spiritual negotiation. By turning migration stories into sacred parables, she transforms the diasporic woman from victim to visionary.

Cultural Identity as Sacred Becoming

Ultimately, both novels argue that identity is a sacred process of becoming. As Stuart Hall posits, identity is "not a fixed essence but a positioning" (Hall 231). Mukherjee expands this insight into a spiritual register: the immigrant's positionality is not merely cultural but metaphysical. Migration becomes a ritual of transcendence, a journey from determinism to creative freedom. Jasmine's open-ended journey—her final decision to follow Du—embodies faith in perpetual transformation. Tara's reconciliation with the Tree Bride represents the sanctification of hybridity—the realization that belonging can exist without boundaries.

Both protagonists demonstrate what might be called *postcolonial spirituality*: a mode of faith not anchored in dogma but in motion, memory, and moral reinvention. Through ritual, storytelling, and mythic reconstruction, Mukherjee transforms cultural displacement into a sacred aesthetic of self-making.

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction redefines the parameters of cultural identity, migration, and spirituality by portraying the immigrant woman not as an exile but as a seeker. In *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters*, she dismantles the binary of homeland and hostland to reveal identity as a spiritual continuum rather than a geographical condition. Her protagonists—Jasmine and Tara—embody the creative tension between memory and transformation, between rootedness and mobility.

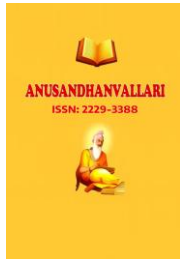
In *Jasmine*, migration is a violent rebirth. The protagonist's metamorphosis from Jyoti to Jane dramatizes the destruction of inherited identities in the crucible of displacement. Every name she assumes signifies not fragmentation but regeneration—an affirmation that identity, like spirit, is infinitely renewable. Mukherjee thus transforms the immigrant's survival instinct into a sacred ritual of self-recreation.

In *Desirable Daughters*, the process is more meditative. Tara's journey is inward; her confrontation with the myth of the Tree Bride leads her to a reconciliatory understanding of hybridity. She discovers that the sacred need not be confined to tradition or temple but may thrive in the plural spaces of modern existence. By reimagining the goddess and the ancestor as inner archetypes, Tara achieves a spiritual synthesis that harmonizes her past and present.

Both novels celebrate what might be termed a *migrant theology of selfhood*: a belief that migration can be a sacred process of moral and cultural renewal. Mukherjee's protagonists do not escape the past; they translate it. Ritual becomes the grammar of this translation, transforming ancestral memory into a living language of belonging. Whether through the burning of the widow's sari or the retelling of family myths, ritual serves as the immigrant's means of sanctifying change. Mukherjee's narrative art reveals that spirituality is not antithetical to modernity but integral to it. Her heroines embody a form of postcolonial mysticism—a spiritual modernity born from migration, loss, and reinvention. The sacred, in her vision, is neither static nor sectarian; it is dynamic, inclusive, and profoundly human.

Ultimately, *Jasmine* and *Desirable Daughters* testify to the power of women to recreate themselves beyond the confines of culture, patriarchy, and geography. Mukherjee's protagonists perform what can only be described as ritual acts of freedom—burning, naming, storytelling—each gesture affirming their agency in a world that seeks to define them.

Thus, Mukherjee transforms the narrative of exile into one of transcendence. She elevates the immigrant woman from a symbol of displacement to a priestess of transformation. Through Jasmine and Tara, she proposes a new sacred geography—one where identity is not given but continually reborn through the ritual of migration and the faith of selfhood.



Works Cited

- [1] Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. OUP, 1992.
- [2] Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- [3] Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Harcourt, 1959.
- [4] Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–237.
- [5] Levitt, Peggy. *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*. The New P, 2007.
- [6] Mukherjee, Bharati. *Jasmine*. Grove Press, 1989.
- [7] ---. *Desirable Daughters*. Hyperion, 2002.
- [8] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, OUP, 1988, pp. 3–32.
- [9] Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine, 1969.