

BHARATI MUKHERJEE (b. 1940) is known for both her fiction and her sometimes controversial social commentary. Born to a wealthy family in Calcutta, India, she was raised in both India and England and knew at a young age that she wanted to be a writer. Mukherjee earned a BA from the University of Calcutta and an MA from the University of Baroda before coming to the United States in 1961 to continue her study of creative writing at the University of Iowa. There she earned an MFA and a PhD and also met and married her husband, Clark Blaise, an American-born Canadian. The couple lived in Montreal for several years before returning to the United States. After teaching at several American colleges, in 1989 Mukherjee joined the faculty at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is now a professor of English. The many books Mukherjee has published include novels, collections of short stories, a memoir, and three nonfiction books, one co-authored by Blaise.

Much of Mukherjee's work describes and analyzes the experiences of immigrants to the United States. In "Two Ways to Belong in America" (1996), Mukherjee brings a personal perspective to this issue by contrasting her experience as an immigrant with that of her sister. As you read, notice how she contrasts their attitudes and the decisions they've made—and draws distinctions between her own experiences in Canada and those of Mira in America. Consider, too, the long-term implications of each sister's decisions.

THIS IS A TALE OF two sisters from Calcutta, Mira and Bharati, who have lived in the United States for some thirty-five years, but who find

"Two Ways to Belong in America" by Bharati Mukherjee from *The New York Times*, September 22, 1996. Used by permission of The New York Times.

themselves on different sides in the current debate over the status of immigrants. I am an American citizen and she is not. I am moved that thousands of long-term residents are finally taking the oath of citizenship. She is not.

Mira arrived in Detroit in 1960 to study child psychology and pre-school education. I followed her a year later to study creative writing at the University of Iowa. When we left India, we were almost identical in appearance and attitude. We dressed alike, in saris; we expressed identical views on politics, social issues, love and marriage in the same Calcutta convent-school accent. We would endure our two years in America, secure our degrees, then return to India to marry the grooms of our father's choosing.

Instead, Mira married an Indian student in 1962 who was getting his business administration degree at Wayne State University. They soon acquired the labor certifications necessary for the green card of hassle-free residence and employment.

Mira still lives in Detroit, works in the Southfield, Michigan, school system, and has become nationally recognized for her contributions in the fields of pre-school education and parent-teacher relationships. After thirty-six years as a legal immigrant in this country, she clings passionately to her Indian citizenship and hopes to go home to India when she retires.

In Iowa City in 1963, I married a fellow student, an American of Canadian parentage. Because of the accident of his North Dakota birth, I bypassed labor-certification requirements and the race-related "quota" system that favored the applicant's country of origin over his or her merit. I was prepared for (and even welcomed) the emotional strain that came with marrying outside my ethnic community. In thirty-three years of marriage, we have lived in every part of North America. By choosing a husband who was not my father's selection, I was opting for fluidity, self-invention, blue jeans and T-shirts, and renouncing 3,000 years (at least) of caste-observant, "pure culture" marriage in the Mukherjee family. My books have often been read as unapologetic (and in some quarters overenthusiastic) texts for cultural and psychological "mongrelization." It's a word I celebrate.

Mira and I have stayed sisterly close by phone. In our regular

Sunday morning conversations, we are unguardedly affectionate. I am her only blood relative on this continent. We expect to see each other through the looming crises of aging and ill health without being asked. Long before Vice President Gore's "Citizenship U.S.A." drive, we'd had our polite arguments over the ethics of retaining an overseas citizenship while expecting the permanent protection and economic benefits that come with living and working in America.

Like well-raised sisters, we never said what was really on our minds, but we probably pitied one another. She, for the lack of structure in my life, the erasure of Indianness, the absence of an unvarying daily core. I, for the narrowness of her perspective, her uninvolvement with the mythic depths or the superficial pop culture of this society. But, now, with the scapegoating of "aliens" (documented or illegal) on the increase, and the targeting of long-term legal immigrants like Mira for new scrutiny and new self-consciousness, she and I find ourselves unable to maintain the same polite discretion. We were always unacknowledged adversaries, and we are now, more than ever, sisters.

"I feel used," Mira raged on the phone the other night. "I feel manipulated and discarded. This is such an unfair way to treat a person who was invited to stay and work here because of her talent. My employer went to the I.N.S. and petitioned for the labor certification. For over thirty years, I've invested my creativity and professional skills into the improvement of *this* country's pre-school system. I've obeyed all the rules, I've paid my taxes, I love my work, I love my students, I love the friends I've made. How dare America now change its rules in midstream? If America wants to make new rules curtailing benefits of legal immigrants, they should apply only to immigrants who arrive after those rules are already in place."

To my ears, it sounded like the description of a long-enduring, comfortable yet loveless marriage, without risk or recklessness. Have we the right to demand, and to expect, that we be loved? (That, to me, is the subtext of the arguments by immigration advocates.) My sister is an expatriate, professionally generous and creative, socially courteous and gracious, and that's as far as her Americanization can go. She is here to maintain an identity, not to transform it.

I asked her if she would follow the example of others who have decided to become citizens because of the anti-immigration bills in Congress. And here, she surprised me. "If America wants to play the manipulative game, I'll play it too," she snapped. "I'll become a U.S. citizen for now, then change back to Indian when I'm ready to go home. I feel some kind of irrational attachment to India that I don't to America. Until all this hysteria against legal immigrants, I was totally happy. Having my green card meant I could visit any place in the world I wanted to and then come back to a job that's satisfying and that I do very well."

In one family, from two sisters alike as peas in a pod, there could not be a wider divergence of immigrant experience. America spoke to me—I married it—I embraced the demotion from expatriate aristocrat to immigrant nobody, surrendering those thousands of years of "pure culture," the saris, the delightfully accented English. She retained them all. Which of us is the freak?

Mira's voice, I realize, is the voice not just of the immigrant South Asian community but of an immigrant community of the millions who have stayed rooted in one job, one city, one house, one ancestral culture, one cuisine, for the entirety of their productive years. She speaks for greater numbers than I possibly can. Only the fluency of her English and the anger, rather than fear, born of confidence from her education, differentiate her from the seamstresses, the domestics, the technicians, the shop owners, the millions of hard-working but effectively silenced documented immigrants as well as their less fortunate "illegal" brothers and sisters.

Nearly 20 years ago, when I was living in my husband's ancestral homeland of Canada, I was always well-employed but never allowed to feel part of the local Quebec or larger Canadian society. Then, through a Green Paper that invited a national referendum on the unwanted side effects of "nontraditional" immigration, the Government officially turned against its immigrant communities, particularly those from South Asia.

I felt then the same sense of betrayal that Mira feels now. I will never forget the pain of that sudden turning, and the casual racist outbursts the Green Paper elicited. That sense of betrayal had its desired effect and drove me, and thousands like me, from the country.

Mira and I differ, however, in the ways in which we hope to interact with the country that we have chosen to live in. She is happier to live in America as expatriate Indian than as an immigrant American. I need to feel like a part of the community I have adopted (as I tried to feel in Canada as well). I need to put roots down, to vote and make the difference that I can. The price that the immigrant willingly pays, and that the exile avoids, is the trauma of self-transformation.

YI-FU TUAN

*American Space, Chinese Place*

YI-FU TUAN (b. 1930), a native of Tientsin, China, attended University College London in 1947 before completing his BA and MA at Oxford University in 1951 and 1955, respectively, and his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1957. As a professor of geography and East Asian studies at the University of Minnesota from 1968 to 1983, Tuan began researching human geography, which involves analyzing the many ways humans engage with the earth—physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. His groundbreaking book *Space and Place: The Perspectives of Experience* (1977) urged scholars to examine how different cultures perceive physical space and discussed not only obvious representations of place, such as homes or towns, but also cultural artifacts such as armchairs and classical music. Tuan completed his academic career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught until his retirement in 1998. His other books include *Coming Home to China* (2007) and *Human Goodness* (2008).

In “American Space, Chinese Place,” Tuan explores how two cultures perceive the concept of “home,” and how their different attitudes reflect American and Chinese cultural ideals. Tuan structures his essay by focusing on American and Chinese ideas in separate paragraphs before looking at them side by side in the final paragraph. As you read, consider where your own point of view enters the conversation. Are you more concerned with the *space* around you—or the *place* at the center of your life?

AMERICANS HAVE A SENSE OF space, not of place. Go to an American home in exurbia, and almost the first thing you do is drift toward the picture window. How curious that the first compliment you pay your

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