CHAPTER FIVE
Leave It to Me

5.1 Cross-cultural Background: *Leave it to me*

*Leave It to Me* is Bharati Mukherjee’s fifth novel published in 1997. The novel becomes a meditation on the Indian Concept of ‘karma’ and the Greek idea of destiny. The story of Goddess Devi in the prologue is the starting point that foreshadows the reading of the novel. In the myth Devi the goddess slays the Buffalo Demon because she is charged with that mission by the cosmic spirit. The Cosmic Spirit makes her its agent for eliminating the world of evil on that occasion. It is intended by the novelist that all of Debby-Devi experiences are to be interpreted by the reader as visitations from God. Along with this Hindu myth, Bharati Mukherjee has made use of the Greek Electra myth. In these days of megascale diaspora, when people are crossing borders the cross-cultural application of myths, seems the most appropriate way to go. ‘Leave It To Me’ begins with a Prologue and concludes with an Epilogue. The novel has three parts. Part One has five chapters and Part Two has nineteen chapters. Part Three has seven chapters. The structural division is of these thirty three units.

Prologue of ‘Leave It to Me’ tells the story of Goddess Devi. In Devigaon Village, old Hari tells of times before the long ago of fairy tales. The story that children beg him to repeat at twilight is of Devi the eight armed killer dispenser of Divine Justice. Just as the Buffalo Demon is about to destroy Gods and Goddesses, Devi will muster the full powers of vengeance. She will fling her lasso around the demon’s neck and cut off the usurper’s buffalo-head. The cosmic spirit will smile on its daughter Goddess, and then go back to creating, preserving, breaking and re-creating the cosmos as always.
Part one, chapter 1: The narrator states that for all official purposes she was Debby DiMartino, a fun loving twenty three years old American girl. She was adopted into a decent Italian American family in the Hudson Valley. The other two she owed her short life to were lousy people. They had considered her lousier still and who had left her to be sniffed at by wild dogs like a carcass in the mangy shade. The unclaimable part of herself always intrigued her. The part that intrigued her was the part that came to life in a desert village and had the name baby Clear Water Iris Daughter until it was christened in a Catholic orphanage. At the age of thirteen Debby DiMartino shoplifted some items and was sent for correction. Wyatt, who was doing his masters in social work, was responsible for her rehabilitation. It was Wyatt who questioned her about how she got adopted. She had never asked and they had never told her. Debby always thought that Schenectady was her fate. Wyatt left making the most important prediction of Debby’s life, “You know Debby I can tell you’re going to be tall and beautiful very soon, and someday you’re going to be rich and powerful” (Mukherjee 1997:14). By her senior year, she became at five nine the tall girl in a small school, a beautiful girl in a plain family and an exotic girl in a very American town. There was something to nurture to nature and to the tyranny of genes. Destiny is the bully you can’t outpunch or outsmart. She realized, “You’re just on loan to the Di Martinos. Treat them nice, pay your rent but keep your bags packed”. (Mukherjee, 1997:17). Debby made up her mind to find if she was something special or just another misfit. Back then in Schenectady she waited for the call “I knew by then there was a life beyond the stateliness waiting for me to slip into star quality. All I’d have to do was be beautiful, be available and my other life, my real life would find me.” (Mukherjee, 1997:18).

Part one chapter 2: Debby DiMartino joined in sales promotion job of Elastonomics the product manufactured by Fong Home Products, a multinational fitness equipment company. Debby did not need her boss to tell her that she was very good at pushing his exercise gizmo. The boss called her from Kuala Lumpur and promised to keep in touch with her. In about a week her boss Frankie Fong took her to dinner and to bed on the first date. He handed Debby the keys of her
first apartment three nights later. Frankie had been Francis, the Flash Fong, star, director producer of dozens of Hong Kong kick boxing. Frankie’s memories of growing up on permanent tours of China-in-exile made squalor and malice sound educational. From the way he talked about life from-a-suitcase in hotel rooms, Debby understood why owning showy property on Union Avenue was so important to him.

Part one chapter 3: Debby Di Martino visits Frankie’s mom Baby Fong. Frankie had perhaps presented Debby to Baby Fong as a simple Saratoga Secretary. Baby Fong gave her a freebie toilet bag. Part one chapter 4: Debby drives straight. That ended Debby’s relationship with Frankie Fong. Part one chapter 5: Debby prepared to find her Bio parents. Mama D Martino tried to persuade her telling her that Debby’s family was DiMartino family. Debby was told that there was some police record and that her bio mother had made them buy a ticket to San Francisco. The detective agency advised Debby to contact their office in San Francisco. Debby got ready to track down Clear Water Iris Daughter on the other side of the continent. Before she got in her car, she saw Fong house on Union Avenue surrounded by rivers of flame.

Part two chapter 1: Debby moves from the East to the West of America. To find out the difference between Serena Di Martino and Clear Water Iris daughter, Debby moved through Ohio, Indiana, Utah and Nevada, she moved westwards to California. Part two chapter 2: Debby attempts to call Mama first and then Angie but could not connect. She tried San Francisco information but could not get any information. Part two chapter 3: Debby Di Martino becomes Devi Dee on the Donner Pass in front of the California Fruit Inspection Barrier. She was quicker, stronger as Devi, The golden state offered freaky-costumed freedom and more over it offered immunity from past and future sins. Part two chapter 4: It states Debby’s or Devi’s situation, who but a foundling has the moral right to seize not just a city, but a neighborhood and fashion a block or two of it into home? “When you inherit nothing you are entitled to everything. That’s the Devi Dee philosophy.”(Mukherjee, 1997:67). Part two chapter 5: For a whole week she did
not have any call from the Vulture Inc. One morning a film company showed up with a convoy of trailors, Devi was asked to move her car but she refused to do so. She mentioned Flash’s Boss Tong of Hong kong and there was miraculous change. She automatically became a member of the Flash Fan Club and Ham invited her to lunch the next day. Part two chapter 6 : Throughout the drive to Hari’s office Devi continued to speak about the highhandedness of the movie people who come into their neighbourhood. Ham the chain telephoner was first talking to a woman whom he called Jess. Ham informed Devi that Jess owns the hottest media escorting business in the country. Ham informed her that Flash was being investigated about his house being burnt in New York. Devi told him about her search for her bio mother. Ham took her to the studio’s guest suite. Part two chapter 8: Devi called Fred Pointer of Vulture Inc. When she called Ham and got a job at the Steep Steps. That made her to move into a second floor no lease rental in a rooming house. She met Loco Larry, the war veteran, Vannatu Man, a political refugee and a Somali medical student. Part two chapter 9 : Devi has reached the boss Bean. She was waiting for Fred Pointer who recognized her, she presented her case of finding her parentage details to him. Part two chapter 10 : Devi and Fred meet and Fred reports her about the fact finding done by Rajeev Raj in India. He wants to know if Rajeev Raj should continue his search or not. She wants the search to continue. Part two chapter 11: four events typical in American life style are reported. She gives her message to Fred to give her facts fast.

Part two chapter 12: Devi comes across Jess of ME- Media Escorts. Then she got the Jess and Ham story. They had been lovers in Berkeley. They had protested against Vietnam together, lived in a commune together and in 1968 they had worshipped together at Baba Lalji Ashram at Napa. Devi wanted to meet Loco Larry. Ham and Devi decided to meet at Vito’s Thursday night. Devi wanted to get closer to Jess but Ham told her that Jess would come if she waited for some time. Part two chapter 13: Fred Pointer gave her history. Rajeev Raj located files of cases and also heard Hari, the oldest resident of Devigaon. Hari told lurid tales of a sahib and memsahibs, who smoked lamp, danced and made human sacrifice. He told that one man and one baby were sacrificed. Hari reported about the death of
the woman and her baby. He did not report to the police but reported the matter to the nuns. Devi’s Bio dad had killed. He was a serial murderer charged of killing seventeen. Sister Madeleine reported about her meeting the woman prisoner and giving her cigarettes. Part two chapter 14: Ham and Devi went to the Vito’s, Jess made inquiries about the place Devi came from. Then Ham had to lead Jess to dance. Ham concentrated on keeping Jess engaged and Devi thought something was still going between Ham and Jess. Part two chapter 15: Devi was sleepless for three nights. Her neighbour Loco Larry’s motto was, “You can never be sure, never get careless.” (Mukherjee, 1997:139). The lesson Larry was teaching was “Things are out there.” Vietnam had been the central experience for Ham and Jess. “But what about the women? What about that flower fraulein, Bio-Mom? Should I envy the mother who had put her bad karma behind her in an Indian prison, dumped her bastard child on Hindi-speaking nuns and moved on?” (Mukherjee, 1997:141). “But what about us, Vietnam’s war bastards and democracy’s love children?” (Mukherjee, 1997:141). Part two chapter 16: Fred Pointer reported Devi about the continuing investigation. The report stated about the unlawful activities of Caucasian females. One Caucasian female had deposed in court against the Eurosian male. “Your mother could be Jess Dufree of this city, currently doing million-dollar-plus business as a CEO of a hot author-escorting agency, I showed Jess a copy of a courtroom transcript Rajeev sent.” (Mukherjee, 1997:146). Part two chapter 17: Devi joined Ham on a two day location shoot and Ham called Jess on his cell phone. Devi was hired by Media Escorting. Jess told her about the dos and don’ts of ME, Devi came to know how Jess was made Wanton in the Indian village of Laxmipur. Part two chapter 18: Devi is on her job of Media escorting Starkie Swann. His interview and reading the first chapter of his new novel went well. Part two chapter 19: Ham was consoling Jess but Devi did not confuse hugs and pats with grabs and gropes. She heard the sweet, low moans of invitation and acceptance. Ham pushed open the door guided Jess in, then kicked the door to shut it behind; She could not tolerate her mother and her lover making love in the crumbed loo of a houseboat. It was Mother stealing Daughter’s Boyfriend. Yet she stayed rooted, she stared, she envied. Jess and Ham
inhabited space where all actions were guiltless, all feeling natural. She could not stand- her lover and her mother go at it any longer. She rushed to Loco Larry’s apartment Loco Larry took her out for gardening in his truck. She suggested Beth Hendon’s summer shack in Lafayette. Beth and the woman with the shaved head came to the spot while Loco Larry was drilling deep holes. Larry hacked a thumb and a toe off Beth and then Devi shot. Then she drove Larry’s truck back to the height. The dead women were the smart age as Jess; two stand in for Mother down. She was closing in, closer to her Bio-parents.

Part three chapter 1: Devi was alone in Leave It To Me Office one morning eleven days after the death of Beth and Hairless Salome. The mailman Troy Tran delivered a heavy package addressed to Jess. That package contained transcript pages in which Jess appeared as the approver in a case against Romeo Hawk. Devi searched in the drawers to find some other documents. There she found a single snap shot of a mother and her just born. Jess called her and was upset on account of Beth and Salome’s murders. “The sins of my youth have come back to haunt me big time”, she said. (Mukherjee, 1997:186). The boss Jess begged her employee-Devi-to work overtime and to take over her authors for the rest of the week. Devi came out of the office and strolled around and then entered the agency office again to find two more messages from Jess’s Tormentor on the tape. Part three chapter 2: Devi escorted Pete Curo, the Random House author and took him to Snow White in Elis. There the author met his former buddy from his marine days Stanko. When both were engaged in their conversation, Devi left the bar by a back exit without bothering to tell the author of her departure. Part three chapter 3: Devi was busy with the cancellation of Cindah Slater’s tour, Jess tormentor called again. She got busy with Ma Varuna’s tour preparations. Part three chapter 4: Ma Varuna arrived with the monkey. Ma Varuna questioned Devi about her name by explaining the female gender of Deva, which comes from the Sanskrit word ‘shine’. Part three chapter 5: Ma Varun’s encounter with the interviewer Jocko Rice is presented. Then Ma Varuna surprised her by taking off her clothes to reveal “the apparition” Romeo Hawk. He recognized Devi as his daughter and commanded her to take him to her boss of ME-Jess with whom he got a score to settle. He gifted her a set
of five different passports of her Bio mom-Jess in five different identities as a French woman, a German, a South African, another German and a British person. Part three chapter 6: Devi drove Romeo Hank to Jess and Ham. He told her how in Saigon the Americanized name Hawk was taken. He told her about Jess and read out portions from court transcripts. Part three chapter 7: Romeo Hawk was kicked by Jess many times and then Romeo retaliated. Devi asked Jess why Jess did not keep and not want her as her daughter. Romeo Hawk closed his killer hands on Jess’s shoulders. Then he dragged Jess to Devi’s car. Devi waited till Ham returned and asked her about what had happened to Jess. He after some time again inquired who that friend was for whom Jess had dumped him. She asked Ham why Ham did not marry Jess and he answered that it was because of the times then. Romeo Hawk came back and with the blade on the base of Ham’s neck cut his head off. She then dialed 911. Epilogue Devi made the call and waited for the sirens. The houseboat skimmed a molten gold sea carrying its cargo of dead and living towards a horizon of flames.

5.2 Reflecting the East

Reflection of Eastern culture is observed in the following examples.

i. “In Devigaon, a village a full day’s bus ride into desert country West of Delhi, old Hari tells of times before the “longago” of fairy tale, when celestials battled demons and the Cosmic Spirit revealed itself in suprising forms to devotees.” (Mukherjee, 1997:05).It is not just ‘long long ago’, the traditional opening of the fairy tales. The story teller reminds of the timelessness of the ancient Oriental civilization in India. Hari tells about the times when gods and goddesses fought and defeated the demons. In the eternal cycle of creation, preservation and destruction, the cosmic spirit revealed itself in different shapes to devotees. Timelessness and divine intervention in the eternal battle between good and evil characterize the old
civilization in the East. These features are reflected in Hari’s tales of Devigaon.

ii. “The story that children beg him to repeat at twilight that smoky quarter hour most full of menace- is of Devi, eight- armed flame- bright, lion-riding dispenser of Divine Justice.” (Mukherjee, 1997:05). The village Devigaon is named after Devi goddess. Children demand the same story of Devis victory over the demon at the twilight hour. Devi the goddess is believed to be riding on a lion. She is as bright as the flame of fire. She is believed to have eight arms, each arm carrying a mighty weapon. Devi the goddess is the dispenser of Divine Justice. The myth making and belief in the legends as facts of life are the traits of the Oriental civilization.

iii. “Before twilight blackens, Devi will blow the conch-shell call, and brandish in her many arms a lasso, a trident, a fire-tipped spear, a demon- splitting disc, a bow and arrows, a death- dealing staff, a thunder- sparkling axe, a pitcher of water and necklace of blessed, and will lead her soldiers on lionback.” (Mukherjee, 1997:05). The village is named after the serene slaughterer of a demon. The children know the story’s ending. Devi the goddess has eight arms. In each of her arms, there are weapons, Devi the goddess carries a lasso, a trident, a spear, a disc, a bow and arrows, a staff and an axe in her arms. She carries a pitcher of water and a necklace of blessed beads. She commands her soldiers’ war from her lion. The adversary of Devi the goddess is the Buffalo Demon. He has inherited his brute strength and physical appearance from his buffalo mother. He has inherited the deceit, rage, cunning and magical powers from his demon father. He will vanquish some of her soldiers as he will gore some to death, he will strangle some and others will fall with his tempest like breath and with his tail.

iv. “Then he’ll let loose the full ferocity of his bestial hate on the earth itself.” (Mukherjee, 1997:06). The buffalo Demon with the strength and the cunning inherited from his parents will kill some of the goddess’s soldiers. His
beastly hatred will be directed against the earth itself. He will exert his full power. The Buffalo Demon is fierce looking, beastly full of immense physical strength and will release his full ferocity on the earth itself. The folk-tale and mythology are part and parcel of the culture of the East. The Buffalo Demon will cut deep trenches with his hooves; with his horns he will scoop mountains of soil. He will generate hurricanes with his tail. The buffalo Demon with his physical strength will dig trenches, send up mountains of soil and will build up hurricanes. The belief in such legendary tales and myths is a characteristic trait of the cultures of the East.

v. “And just as he is about to declare himself destroyer of gods and goddesses, Devi will muster the full power of vengeance.” (Mukherjee, 1957: 06). The pattern of the mythological stories repeatedly demonstrates the initial rise but the ultimate fall of the evil power. The Buffalo Demon is such an evil force. He gets so strong and so puffed up that he challenges gods and goddesses. This makes him over reach and violates the limits. The battle of good and evil is the common theme of these stories. Now the force of goodness represented by Devi the goddess gets ready to seek vengeance against the Demon of evil. The triumph of good over evil is celebrated in many ways in the culture of the East in particular in India. Throughout the calendar year, the festivals celebrate the victory of Goodness against evil. Devi the goddess will defeat the Demon and cut off his buffalo head. The forces of goodness are considered to be positive forces in the Oriental culture and evil is a negative force.

vi. “While the children, comforted by story, curl into sleep on their bed-pallets, the Cosmic Spirit will smile on its daughter – goddess, then go back to creating, preserving, breaking and re-creating the cosmos as always”. (Mukherjee, 1997:06). The Cosmic Spirit has many roles to play and many functions to perform. The cosmic spirit will be satisfied with the goddess’s performance of defeating the evil Demon that is buffalo-shaped. The Cosmic Spirit will be satisfied to note that the Goddess has successfully
completed the task assigned. The Cosmic Spirit too has many tasks on hand. Creation, Preservation and Destruction present the trimodal task that is assigned to the Cosmic Spirit. This is a peculiar cycle that goes on repeating itself innumerable times. The cycle of Generation-Preservation and Destruction is emphasized. The role of Cosmic Spirit is revealed here which is peculiar to the Orient culture.

vii. “And Devi?” The Earth Mother and Warrior Goddess wipe demon blood off weapons and put them away for the next time they are needed.” (Mukherjee, 1997:06).

Devi the Goddess acts only on the commanding directive issued by the Cosmic Spirit. Divine intervention is part of the Cosmic Order. Devi the goddess represents goodness. Thus the symbolic representation is peculiar to the culture of the East. The incarnation of divinity is a feature of the culture that has prevailed for centuries in India. Devi the Mother and Warrior Goddess will perform the task. Then Devi, after wiping blood from the weapons, will put them away for the next occasion when they will be needed. The Oriental culture is reflected throughout prologue of the novel Leave It to Me.

viii. “I tell myself I must have been left unattended in the sun. Maybe the sand-yellow sun was low in the morning sky and whichever Gray sister was charged with caring for me had been detained in the fields as the sun mounted.” (Mukherjee, 1997:9). Devi was left in the sun by her Bio-mom. She was unattended there as a piece of garbage. She was thrown away. She was abandoned. In the morning sky the sun must have been low and sand-yellow in colour. It must have mounted up afterwards detaining that Gray sister, who was given the charge of attending Debby. The abandonment of the child is not new in a country like India. Kunti abandoned Karna. The sand-yellow sun on the low horizon and sun moving up are the images of the sun quite peculiar to the country that is being reflected. The abandoned baby grew in the orphanage run by Gray Sisters. It was not to get rid of
bastard half American child that the orphanage arranged to give her to DiMartino family for adoption. One attempt had already taken place to get rid of her when she was abandoned by her mother. Charity and sympathy are noticed.

ix. “Who are you when you don’t have a birth certificate, only a poorly typed, creased affidavit sworn out by a nun…?and that name?” (Mukherjee, 1997:16). Debby’s situation is revealed here. She has no birth certificate; she has only an affidavit that too is signed by a Nun. She is an orphan. She has been abandoned by her mother she felt all alone in the vast universe without a name. She feels isolated and therefore dejected. There is nothing that can delight the person herself. She was lonely. There is the Indian atmosphere that is reflected in this case. What was her name? Neither the name of her mother nor of her father was mentioned. She was abandoned by both of them. The search for bio-parents begins on account of this namelessness of her parents. There were only the blank spaces in the columns meant for mother’s and father’s names. The blankness, her lack of knowledge, the helplessness made her searches her own identity. The impressions of white hot sky and burnt black leaves are peculiarly Indian. Leave It To Me narrates how a child abandoned in India has no identity of her own as she has no proper birth certificate nor mother’s nor father’s name. This blankness leads to the loss of her identity. Identification marks are important in every culture and even in the Oriental, Indian culture, but Debby lacks these.

x. “The first time I heard of Karma was from the Indian burger-muncher at MacDonald’s, the one who’d ask me out to an Indian movie. A moonfaced man … he’s made his move and then handled my rejection philosophically.” (Mukherjee, 1997:80). The man she met in the eatery asked her to go for a movie. She rejected the offer. This rejection was taken by him in a philosophical manner, Karma theory is quite significant in the Indian way of thinking. It is believed that Karma is doing what a person is destined to
do. This depends on the actions of the past and the present which shape the actions in future. The Indian in the eatery took the rejection for watching a movie together as his karma. He did not take it as a personal disappointment but blamed it on his karma, on his fate. What is fated, what is destined is going to happen. It has already been willed that she will reject his offer and so the same has taken place. The Indian mentality accepts that rejection.

xi. “The concept of karma is that fate is very dynamic. True concept of Karma is: when on a dead-end street, jump into alternative paths.” (Mukherjee, 1997:80). Karma is fate. Fate is dynamic. Many people do not understand this part of Karma. They blame karma thinking it to be something close-ended. That is not so. Karma means finding out alternative paths Karma involves choosing options. The philosophical interpretation of the concept of karma is offered. The Indian Concept is interpreted from the angle of Indian philosophy. Karma is jumping into options choosing form alternatives. Indian culture is reflected here.

xii. “I answer your question with my own question. I ask you, sir, I ask you who wear expensive watch bought in foreign, what is time when our universes rise many times and fall many more times within one eye-wink of God Brahma?” (Mukherjee, 1997:119). When asked about the time of the visits of the foreign ladies, Hari the watchman asks his own question to answer the question asked by the person who is making inquiries. The question is how many times do the universes rise and fall in one eye-wink of God Brahma. The eye-wink of God Brahma is believed to be one age. The rising and falling of the universe is repeated many times as believed to be so from ancient times. It is based on the mythological stories of old times. The way Hari talks is peculiar, while answering a question, he puts up a question. The resort to mythology is a characteristic trait found among Indians.

xiii. “When the event came to pass, I was a fit fellow, I was carrying three four suitcases on my head and running from the train station to the tourist guest house with no stop no drop, no cough. No arthritis in neck nor knees, and my
teeth …. my teeth were so strong I used to chew sugarcane stalks.” (Mukherjee, 1997:119). Hari relates that he was fit and his teeth were strong when the event took place. There were no arthritis, no cough and he chewed sugarcane stalks. Hari digresses quite often in the course of his narration. The rambling, digressive, involved manner of speech is peculiar to the Indians in whatever way they report. The use of mythological stories and the peculiar manner of speech reflects the culture of Indians. Hari’s replies are metaphysical riddles.

xiv. “First everybody was living, one two, three and the baby, so altogether four dancing and singing. Then two became corpses and two-kept dancing.” (Mukherjee, 1997:120). This is how Hari reports about the event in which the foreigners were found singing and dancing and two including the baby became silent, became in Hari’s opinion, corpses. Hari reported about the incident to sore grease women. Sore grease is an Indianization of Gray Sisters in English and Soeurs Grises in French. They were the nuns. They were known for their charity. Hari did not report to the police but reported to the Gray sisters who took care of the young. Hari was impressed by their charity and kindness. He relates the cultural affiliations with the old Indian culture.

xv. “Ministering to women prisoners, especially firangi(foreign white) women prisoners, that was on of our duties. The warden told us the mother wanted cigarettes.” (Mukherjee, 1997:125). The Gray sisters of charity were required to look after the demands and the needs of the women, in particular, foreign women prisoners. The warden informed them of the requirement of the cigarettes for the mother. The sisters of charity were respected as the bringers of Mercy to the women prisoners. The Indian mentality of tolerance is noticed here. The prisoners were treated as human beings sympathetically.

xvi. “……... Next time we came with Faustine and more cigarettes. That was the name we gave, we named our orphans like typhoons…..she was our
sixth that year, such a pretty little imp.” (Mukherjee, 1997:125). The sisters brought cigarettes and the Bible the first time and the next time her daughter and the cigarettes to the mother. The young child was named after a typhoon-Faustine. It is humanitarian gesture that the sisters took the daughter to her mother. This humanitarian sympathy is shared by both the sisters and the Indians around. The woman thanked the sisters for the cigarettes and rest for bringing her daughter to her; even the gray sisters are surprised to find this kind of attitude adopted by the mother. The reflection of the Indian culture is noticed in this interaction between the child’s mother and the Gray sisters.

xvii. “Subsequent to the unauthorised examination of the orphanage files, a thorough search was conducted into court documents of Jaipur, Rajasthan State, India of the period 1968 through 1977, specially into those documents that pertained to the……Caucasion tourists of the female sex”. (Mukherjee, 1997:144-145). The Report of the Investigation in India stated that after the search of documents of orphanage case, the court documents were thoroughly examined. The documents were from 1968 to 1977. The cases were those in which Caucasian females were involved. A thorough search of the court documents gives an idea about the conditions in India as reflected in this statement.

xviii. “Only two apprehended Caucasian females were found to have been convicted of or indicated for, unlawful activities.” (Mukherjee, 1997:145).

The cases of the foreign tourists were treated without any prejudice to those involved of the foreign tourists, only two Caucasian female tourists were found to be involved in unlawful activities. One of those was perhaps the mother-The Bio-mom in whose search Debby, that is Devi, came from Schenectady to San Francisco. The baby’s mother became an approver. The approver made a deposition against the baby’s bio-dad. The deposition made the conviction possible. The reflection of the life-style and of thoughts which suits the Indian environment is noticed in this incident.
xix. “The more significant part of Sri Hawk is immersed in Eastern philosophy and ancient wisdoms.” (Mukherjee, 1997:180). The case against Hawk was being argued by the pleaders in the court. The baby’s Bio-mom had turned approver, the advocate for defendant tried to argue that she was an accomplice though she was now an approver in the present case. It was being argued that Hawk or Haq was immersed in the Eastern culture. He was an Oriental. He knew Eastern philosophy. He was well versed in ancient wisdom. This reflects the fact that the Eurasian who has been charged of certain facts was well-versed in Oriental philosophy and was a thorough Oriental.

xx. “The Accomplice –turned- Approver perpetrated sexual enjoyment on my client in order to coerce him into participating in her plot.” (Mukherjee, 1997:180). The argument was put forward in terms of the two characters belonging to the East and the West. Hawks represented the East; the Bio-mom represented the West. It was claimed that the sexual appetite and proclivities of the men and women of the West were more pronounced. The contrast between the two cultures is presented in the argument. The Public Prosecutor presented the argument that the defendant had inborn knowledge of the conduct and attitudes of the Western men and women. It was argued that he exploited that. The contradiction between the two cultures is presented. The reflection of the East is clearly noticed.

5.3 Mirroring the West

The mirroring of the West is found in the following examples.

i. “What have I done but what my mother did? The one who gave me birth and the one I am just beginning to claim.” (Mukherjee, 1997:09). Debby Di Martino is contemplating on her own state. She has realised that she has been influenced both by her birth and by her adoption. By birth she is of a mixed descent. Her mother came to India on the Hippie trail. She came in contact with Debby’s Bio-dad. When she was two, Di Martino’s adopted
her. Serena Di Martino was her mother right from the day of adoption to her graduation. It is on account of this she says that what her mother has done is what she has done.

ii. “My mothers luminous as dewdrops in downlight, weightless as the wings of a newborn dragonfly, float towards me from the place where I was born.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 09).Debby Di Martino has been brought up by the DiMartino family. She lived in Schenectady with them. She was educated there and completed her education to the level of graduation. Even then from her birth place weightlessly and luminously, they float towards her. She is attached to her birth place but she has been brought up as an American girl. Debby has just a faint impression of her birthplace in India. She just remembers the heat and light of the sun, the harsh hills, the moaning desert winds and the desperateness of the twilight. These are like the veins on the inside of her eyelids. Her impressions of her birthplace are dim and weak. She was born there but by upbringing, Debby is an American. Her upbringing mirrors the American way of life.

iii. “For all official purposes like social, security cards and unemployment benefits, I am, or was, Debby DiMartino, a fun loving twenty three year old American girl.” (Mukherjee, 1997:10).Debby repeats that for all official purposes she has been Debby Di Martino. During the last twenty-one years, she was truly the adopted daughter of Pappy and Maria Di Martino. She was just like any other American girl of the age of twenty three years. The mention of social security cards and unemployment benefits mirrors the life in the West, in particular in the countries like the US. The American lifestyle is mirrored.

iv. “The downside is knowing that the other two I owe my short life to were lousy people who’d considered me lousier still and who’d left me to be sniffed at by wild dogs ,like a carcass in the mangy shade.” (Mukherjee, 1997:10).Debby is reminded of her bio-parents. They did not care for her. They had left her as garbage. That was the downside. Debby is an American
girl and her life is just of twenty three years of which two in the orphanage and the rest were spent in DiMartino family at Schenectady. Her American way of life is clearly noticed. Her thinking to be characterized by her upbringing, her lifestyle and her thinking reflects the culture in the West. The upside of adoption was that she Debby DiMartino-belonging as a daughter to the decent Italian-American family at Schenectady in Hudson Valley. Yet Debby cannot forget or rather get over the reality of downside.

v. “That unclaimable part of myself is what intrigues me, the part that came to life in a desert village and had the name Baby Clear Water Iris Daughter until it was christened in a Catholic orphanage.” (Mukherjee, 1997:10). Though grown to be a school graduate Debby is attracted towards the past, towards her root. She became restless and desired to know who she was and who her bio-parents were. She was intrigued to know that she was not Debby but was Baby Clear Water Iris-daughter. The name assumed by her bio-mom was recorded as Clear Water Iris-Daughter and she was Baby of that woman. That was a part of her life. It was unclaimable but it intrigued her and incited her to begin her search for her bio-parents. Debby wants to know what is still unknown to her. She has realized that she is not Debby but then who she is. The curiosity to know the roots is peculiar to the culture in the West.

vi. “Until that poem I had been Debby Di Martino, second daughter of Manfred and Serena DiMartino, hardworking, religious parents.”(Mukherjee, 1997:15). On assignment Debby wrote a poem that was read out loud in the class. Her teacher Mr Bullock declared that Debby had a natural poetic talent. Till this time, Debby was just DiMartino girl. She was the second daughter of Manfred and Serena Di Martino. They were hardworking and religious parents. Debby would be the same. Her circumstances were normal and she hoped to remain the same. She would be as hard working and religious as her parents. This changed on account of the poem. She realized herself as different.
viii. “Hawaii actually! The telephone voice taunted. Sun’s just going down. It’s lei and luan time….Expiration date?” (Mukherjee, 1997:22). Debby would pretend to be speaking from Hawaii, She did take liberties deliberately, that flattered the customers. It was one of the secrets of successful salesmanship. She was an expert rather a major in marketing. Selling through telephone is a feature of the commercial culture of the West. Debby knows the tricks of the trade such as the use of voice, pep talk, pretending and persuading. This mirrors the West.

ix. “The war screwed us up. He wasn’t speaking to me.” (Mukherjee, 1997:88). Devi-Debby-told Ham that she wanted to search for her Bio-mom. She had no clue about the whereabouts of her mother at present. Ham told her that half the girls in Berkeleys in those days were on those trips. Ham’s message was that the times had been unique and her mother was the product of her times. Devi asked him if her story had bored him. Ham’s answer was that the war screwed up them then in those days. In those days of desperate frustration, the trail of hippies was on the rise in the West.

x. “No force in nature is stronger than a child trying to find her mother.” (Mukherjee, 1997:88). Ham remarked that there was no stronger force than the force of a child trying to find her mother; he agreed with Devi that the search would be a matter of forceful strength. The story of the child is depressed, lost person and the loss of the mother’s whereabouts is a powerfully emotion-packed adventure. Devi solicits Ham’s help in this. The times and the situations mirror the culture in the West.

xi. “It was true; I needed Ham, needed the nets he is cast, the people he knew, the visitors and delusions he’d survived. Without him I’d be drifting downstream in the trivia of my mother’s times”. (Mukherjee, 1997:89). Devi realized that her legal parents were not her biological parents. She strongly desired to find out who her Bio-mom was. She had no clue about the whereabouts of her Bio-mom. She now realized that Ham has relationships with people, he had contacts, and so Ham was needed in the search for her
Bio-mom. Without him, Devi would be just lost in the trivia of these times; Ham was needed as he was familiar with those times. Devi realized that Ham’s help was needed in the search of her Bio-mom. Her mother was the product of her times. Her mother belonged to the generation of the Vietnam war. The seventies 1970s were uneasy and restless times. Those troubled times were the times of protest and desertion. These were the times that were anti-establishment. The hippie cult was the product of those times and half the girls in Berkeley joined those groups that protested. Devi had to understand the times. She had to understand each of those persons and the Berkeley groups and the Berkeley times. It was necessary to understand the girls of Ham’s youth. It was necessary to know the times and the persons of those times. It was necessary to know the spirit of times in America then. This mirrors the West.

xiii. “They had friends who had, others who’d changed their lives and moved into the Establishment. Like Jess, Like Ham, Like Fred, Even old Bio-Mommy. “(Mukherjee, 1997:128). Unlike the Vietnam veterans these men and women protesting against Establishment finally joined the establishment. Those who survived had to change and they indeed accepted the change. This was almost inevitable. Life in the West changed as these men and women changed their positions. The generation that protested came very close to change the nation. They have now become Rodney Dangerfield generation. Those times and those changes have revealed two different aspects. That has been the way it had taken place and the same cultural change is mirrored here.

xiv. “His war poems made me mourn the major job Vietnam had done on boys like him, the tinkerers.” (Mukherjee, 1997:136). Loco Larry was the Vietnam Veteran on the height. He spat out his Vietnam stories which were like his war poems. Those recruited for the Vietnam War included such tinkerers of cars, the village idiots, the farmers, the labourers from Mexico and the Armenians. Those were the victims of the war. The war was fought
to prove America’s status as the supreme super power. That goal could not be achieved. The exposure of the myth had made Americans and the Westerners to think about their own status of superiority to others. The notions that prevailed then were given a big jolt, a shock. The characters in the bay area represent those times and those shocks. The mirroring of the West is found here.

xv. “I didn’t know shit about his California either, but I know it okay to be Loco”. (Mukherjee, 1997:136). Devi had collected the information from the bits she came to know from the Vietnam veterans in the area. She did not know Vietnam, nor did she know California through her own experience. She believed whatever these participants reported now. Loco Larry and others in the Area as if formed a Bank of Craziness. Devi was missing her card. Devi was younger, the after-effects of Vietnam war and the situation before and after in California was matters she learnt from these persons. Ham held the wake for freedom Lost Chance. There Devi came to know about Berkeley and its real spirit. It was a fraternity, a union, a close knit group, and an integrated community. It was on account of the experiences during and after Vietnam encounter and the anti-Establishment protests that the members of this group were linked closely, Devi was too young to understand their fraternity. She came rather late to realise the spirit of the times.

xvi. “It was the only place in America…… over thirty.” (Mukherjee, 1997:165). Berkeley was the only place in America in which all the members of the community were closely related. Everyone over thirty had slept with everyone else over thirty. This could be said of that place. Such closeness such intimacy, such relationships were only possible in Berkeley. The spirit of the place is the spirit of America. That Berkeley was no more. It was gone in the same way as people in the East talked that old Manhatthen has gone. Berkeley was a site of possibility, recovery and forgiveness. The peculiar period of the 1970s and 1980s has been crystalized by Berkeley
and those who made Berkeley possible. That historical period is mirrored here.

xvii. “He, Jess and Fred had marched for peace for civil rights, for women, gay, migrants, had gone to jail, signed petitions, run for city councils, run radical campaigns” (Mukherjee, 1997:166). Ham, Jess and Fred were the members of that generation that protested for many causes and fought against many types of injustice and discrimination. They took out processions for peace and for civil liberties. They led anti-war, anti-racist movements. They demanded rights for women and for gays and migrants. They contested elections. They organised campaigns. They sent petitions of mass signatures to establishment. These movements present the picture of those times in America.

xviii. “Food revolution, sex, art, ecology, drugs, music, books, writers, Films, E-pictures, Sensualists. “(Mukherjee, 1997:166). These were the marks that characterised the life-style of the last quarter of the twentieth country, in particular the 1970s and 1980s. The conservation of ecology, the drive against drugs, the popular arts such as music, literature and films and the enjoyment of pleasures, food and other joys of life and the revolutionary stance are the traits that depict the Age and the Scene that the Generation of Ham, Jess and Fred created. That is mirrored in the incident. Berkeley represented the life-style of the West Coast of the United States of America. It taught to accept the world as a cool place which is not to be disturbed. The spirit of American life is embodied in Berkeley and that is how the culture of the West is mirrored.

xix. “His take on the city, the country, the world, came from some alternative in formation bank.” (Mukherjee, 1997:189). Emad, the Somali tenant in Devi’s apartment building, talked at the head of the dinner table. His talk contained information from perhaps some alternative information bank. It was a prejudiced talk. It was one sided account that he presented about the city San Francisco, the country the US and the world as a whole. It was an
account from the perspective of a man from Somalia. It was more or less a hate speech that he made. The United States of America boasts of being a melting pot. Here, it was noticed that there was a section of people who lived in America out of necessity and for purely monetary gains but nurtured ill-will towards the country to which they had migrated.

xx. “America’s whole energy, its entire national military and economic output was directed like a laser against Somalia for the killing of American marines.” (Mukherjee, 1997:189). Emad was convinced that America was all out against Somalia. America, according to him, American militancy and American economy were directed against Somalia. The claim was baseless and totally biased. The clash of cultures is found in the US and that is mirrored here. Generally Emad avoided talking to Devi. The head of the table changed him so much that he talked like an oracle. He predicted the end of Western civilization. This negative tendency exists in the US at present. That aspect of Western culture is mirrored here.

5.4 The Phase of Alienation

The protagonist’s phase of alienation is shown and observed in the following examples.

i. “I’ve been reading your file, Debby,” Wyatt’d say once we were out of the circle. “How did the DiMartinos come to adopt you?” (Mukherjee, 1997:12)

Debby DiMartino, the adopted daughter of DiMartinos just desired to be like Mama and her elder sister Angie. The acts of shoplifting brought Wyatt on the scene. He began to give this consuel to Debby. One day he asked after this reading of her file. How did DiMartinos adopt her as their daughter? This question stirred Debby. It had never occurred to Debby to know how and why she was adopted by the DiMartino family.
ii. “I’d never asked, and they’d never told….I knew only that they found me in an orphanage run by Gray Nuns. You’re not even interested?” (Mukherjee, 1997:12). Debby had not asked DiMartinos and they had not told her about her adoption. She only knew that she was found in an orphanage run by Gray Nuns. She was not curious to know how the family of DiMartinos adopted her. She was just desirous of becoming one of the families and just wanted to follow Mama and her sister Angie. She was not yet alienated from her adopted family. Debby told Wyatt that she always thought it was fate to be adopted by the DiMartino family; Wyatt was surprised to know that Debby thought Schenectady to be fate. Wyatt’s questioning about her being adopted by DiMartinos made Debby aware of the fact that she was an adopted girl. She came to know that she was an outsider and not an insider in the DiMartino family. That began the process of her alienation.

iii. “I’m saying you’ve got a chance, don’t blow it, you might never have made it out of that orphanage, someone must have seen something.” (Mukherjee, 1997:13). Wyatt told Debby that she had got a chance to know about her own identity. She would not have done that if she had remained in the orphanage. Now she was out of it and that was her chance to get to know her roots and to find out her bioparents. She was now aware of the fact that she did not really belong to the DiMartino family. DiMartinos were her legal parents but not the bioparents. It was of course through their adopting her that she got a chance to know what she actually was. In the adoption papers Debby’s mother’s name was put up as Clear Water Iris-Daughter. Her father was called Asian National. Both her parents were unnamed. The adoption papers did not mention much. That aroused Debby’s curiosity to know her origins. That was how the sense of alienation began.

iv. “The nuns weren’t interested in my origins, they didn’t care about filling in the gaps of my life; they were into good works. It was the mid-seventies and I was just a garbage sack thrown out on the hippie trail.”.
The nuns were doing a work of charity. They did not care to fill in the gaps of Debby’s origins and her life. The details about her bio-parents were scanty. These facts made Debby alienated from her adopted family and she became curious to find out her origins and her bio-parents. Debby in her thirteenth year liberated some items worth more than a hundred dollars at Radio Shack and got a police record and a sort of correction, Wyatt was given the task of her rehabilitation. He was the first to ask her about adoption. He put a lot of stress on it. Then he signed off Debby’s parole but then he dropped out of his course in social work. He knew that she was older than her actual age at least by three years. He had different, mixed and difficult emotions regarding Debby. He of course made Debby aware of the difference and began the process of her alienation from the DiMartino family.

“I was just a small dark thing”, and he said, “You know, Debby, I can tell you’re going to be tall and beautiful very soon and someday you’re going to be rich and wonderful.” (Mukherjee, 1997:14). Wyatt predicted that Debby would be tall, beautiful, rich and powerful in the days to come. That prediction changed her attitude to herself. She became aware of her difference from the family of DiMartinos. She began the process of her alienation from the parents who adopted her. She began to think of her different origins. Her desire to search her origins became stronger.

Frankie’s father Alloysins Fong, with the freakish Sinatara-like voice, was a singer. Debby pictured Al Fong as a sleek man with dyed hair, entering the stage. Al Fang and the other members were Frankie’s origins. Debby then became aware of her shadowy parentage.

“Pappy became my dad a million times removed.” (Mukherjee, 1997:27).

Debby was robbed off her Asian childhood, which she desired to claim. The Gray nuns had placed her oceans away from her orphan origins. The DiMarinos believed that love would wipe away misery. That did not happen. She strongly desired to get to know her past, her origins, her
parentage, she realised that her legal parents had adopted her but had not
given birth to her. She therefore wanted to know who her bio-parents were.
This made Pappy- Manfred Di Martino- her legal father a million times
removed.

vii. “Thanks to these stories, for the first time. I felt connected. The DiMartinos
were the aliens.” (Mukherjee, 1997:27). The stories of Fang family, in
particular Frankie’s father Al Fong’s stories made her aware of the fact that
she had lost her childhood. Her parentage had remained unknown and
shadowy. She felt connected with the fact that her bio-parents were
different from those who had adopted her as a daughter. They gave her love
and all that. They could not wipe away the misery of the loss of the
knowledge of the origins. She realised that the Di Martinos were the aliens
for her. She was connected with the others who were her bio-parents.

viii. “An orphan doesn’t know how to ask, afraid of answers, and hopes instead
for revelation. Ignorance isn’t bliss, but it keeps risky knowledge at bay.”
(Mukherjee,1997:41). Debby was an orphan; she was left in a garbage sack
not to survive. Yet she survived as the Gray Nuns picked her up and took
her to the orphanage. She was then adopted by the Italian-American family
of the DiMartions. She did not ask any questions. As an orphan she did not
know how to ask questions. She was afraid of answers. Her ignorance
helped her to keep risky knowledge away. The same suited to her Mama
Serena DiMartino; Mama did not want Debby to be inquistive in these
matters. Serena Di Martino, Mama to Debby in the family that adopted her
kept her origins quite simple. She was taken in by the Gray Nuns to the
Orphanage and named Faustine. DiMartinos changed the name to Debby as
Debbie Reynolds was Mama’s favourite. In spite of these few details,
Debby became curious about her origins. She desired to know her identity.
She desired to know the facts of her parentage. She got alienated from the
DiMartino family.
ix. “We’re your family, aren’t we your family Debby? I need to know.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 49). Mama DiMartino was told by Debby that she had contacted an agency to find out who her bio-parents were. Serena DiMartino- Maa was surprised and was almost shocked to know that. She asked Debby if they were just members of one family and that she was the part of that family. Debby told her that she needed to know her origins and to know who her bio-parents were. DiMartinos brought up her well. She was attached to them but she needed to find out her parentage and to know why she was thrown in a garbage sack.

x. “About crossed signals and conflicting impulses. They say there’s a time every adopted kid suddenly has to know.” (Mukherjee, 1997:49). Debby wanted to know about her origins in order to be free from crossed signals and conflicting impulses. This phase comes in the life of every adopted child. There is a sudden urge to know. There is this intensely felt desire to find out the origins. Debby experienced that she was now in this phase. Searching out origins makes a person get alienated from the family that has adopted him or her as a young child. Debby told her Mama- Serena Di Martino that she had no idea about her origins. She was ignorant about her bio-parents. Without that, she felt alienated from the DiMartino family.

xi. “Mama sobbed “Why, Debby? What didn’t we do? It’s not about us.” (Mukherjee,1997:50). Serena DiMartino, Debby’s Mama sobbed. She was shocked to know that Debby had hired an agency to find out her origins, her bio-parents. She naturally asked why Debby was doing that, and what was there which was not done by DiMartinos. Debby too loved the woman. Love was not enough in the phase of need. Need teased out that part of Debby that the orphanage had wiped out. Debby therefore assured that it was not something about her and DiMartinos. Debby comforted Mama that it had nothing to do with the family that adopted her. She was alienated but not on account of them but on account of her strong need to know her origins.
xii. “We don’t have a name, hon; we have a confused kid turned hippie. What kind of real last name is Iris Daughter?” “I will find out soon enough”. (Mukherjee,1997:50). Debby comforted Mama telling her that it was not something between them. The DiMartino family was nice to her but she needed to know about her bio-parents. Her Mama told her that Debby’s bio-mother did not even have a proper name. She called herself Iris Daughter, what did that mean? Debby assured her that she would soon find it out. Debby’s Mama told her that there was not much to find. The Nuns were not great at paper work. Debby would not get much information out of her search. Debby’s reply was that she had no choice. Debby and her mama’s conversation bring out the fact that though she intended to search, perhaps little information would be available. Though she was alienated from DiMartinos, there was nothing against them. She loved them but her need was greater than her love for them.

xiii. “Well there would’nt have been much more to tell you in person, I guess our lawyer said the one thing we had in our favour was that the women was an American citizen”. (Mukherjee, 1997:51).Debby was told by her Mama-Serena DiMartino that in person she would not have told more than what was told telephonically. She of course adds that their lawyer had said that the bio-mom’s American citizenship was a matter that was favourable to them. That woman was an American and that Debby an American citizen. Serena DiMartino, Debby’s Mama told her that they wanted to give Debby a clean start. They changed her name from Faustine to Debby. They didn’t want to see the woman, Debby’s Bio-Mom. They just paid for her ticket from Delhi to San Francisco. They wanted to keep Debby’s Bio-data just the minimum and they did not want any complications in her future life. Mama was therefore surprised to find Debby so curious.

xiv. “Why’re doing this now, Debby? You didn’t show the least curiousity before you never asked questions”.... “It’s not because I miss them, Mama. Its about medical history” and psychic legacies.” (Mukherjee,1997:51-52).
Debby’s mama was shocked to find that Debby was never curious before. She never asked any questions. She was now determined to find out her origins. She wanted to know why Debby was so curious. Debby’s answer was that she does not miss her bio-parents. It is the psychic legacy that is prompting her to find out. It is the inner urge that is prompting her to know who her Bio-parents are. She is alienated on account of this urge. Debby was about to start her journey towards the West coast towards San Francisco. She was about to track down Clear Water Iris daughter, her Bio-mom. She did not know her current name but she knew that this was the name that was recorded by the Gray Nuns in the orphanage.

xv. “One Late –August night, I stood with gawkers across from the turreted and gargoyle Fong house on Union Avenue and watched rivers Flame lick at Vintage Velvet drapes, then split off and multiply, and crawl like amoebas across massive oak doors and carved- glass windows.” (Mukherjee, 1997:52-53). She settled the score. The Fong house on Union Avenue was on fire. Rivers of flame surrounded and crawled around. She had sought her revenge against the treatment given to her. It was some compensation for the loss of past and loss of pride. She became alienated from this part of the country. Debby watched the fire at Fong house. It was an extravaganza of light, sound and heat. Debby thus got alienated from the DiMartino family and also from the Fong house.

xvi. “Deep down, I envied the Chinese waiter and the Indian student. The guys were geeks, but they knew who they were. They knew what they’d inherited”. (Mukherjee, 1997: 66). Debby Devi came to California, to San Francisco. In a Chinese restaurant, a Chinese waiter mumbled something on a soft gloomy voice, and then hovered for an answer. An Indian student blurted to her for watching a film with him. Debby envied the waiter and the student because they knew who they were. They knew what they had inherited. She envied them because they were not like her. She had no idea about her bio-parents. That way she was not connected. She did not have
what the Chinese waiter and the Indian student had knowing what they were and what they inherited. Debby Devi was not a ferule, she was not a geek and she was not a weird person. She has a life and the chance at a Big Life. She has lost that chance temporarily. The only trouble with her was the lack of knowledge about her parentage. She has no idea about her parentage. She was adopted and her legal parents have treated her well and were still ready to do so. They were her legal parents. She has alienated herself from them. She was keen to get the knowledge about her bio-parents.

xvii. “I told myself, for now why not be Devi the Tenderloin prowler, all allure and strength and zero innocence, running away from shame, running to revenge?” (Mukherjee, 1997: 66-67). Devi desired to prowl, to allure. She was running to seek revenge. She self alienated as she did not know who her parents were. She was searching for them. She did not know where and how to find them. She has come to the West Coast, getting alienated from those with whom she lived for twenty-three years of her life on the East Coast of the US.

xviii. “I didn’t have to go on those dawn walks in Lands End with Fred… I didn’t have to find out what act of charity sister Madeleine Corveau originally of Levis ,Quebec, had performed in Devigaon the same night that Hari’d come running to her with his tales of human folly and wickedness.” (Mukherjee, 1997 : 124). In her search for her Bio-parents in particular her Bio-mam, Debby-Devi was not required to go and talk to Sister Madeleine. She was not required to be present herself to know what happened on that night when Hari had come to report to her with his account of human folly and wickedness. Devi comes to know about it through the agency she has engaged. It was the account that the agency gave to her at regular intervals. Sister Madeleine gave the account of what happened on that night. She gave the account to the representative of the agency. She has lived in the village for more than forty years. She could use the dialect of the region quite fluently. Her literary output is available to all. The best account was put to
utilization by the group that she adjudged to be the most suitable. The full report was not brought by Fred. Debby was given a couple of sheets by Fred. Debby desired to know but was not successful in getting the full report. The other reports made her task easier. She got alienated from others but just concentrated on getting to know about her bio-parents.

xix. “But what about the women? What about that flower fraulein Bio-Mom? Should I envy the mother who had put her bad karma behind her in an Indian prison, dumped her bastard child on Hindi-speaking nuns and moved on?” (Mukherjee, 1997: 141). Vietnam has been their central experience. Vietnam War, civil liberty movements, protests for social security and such were the experiences that shaped their careers. Then what about the women who went on the hippie trail? What about Devi’s Bio-Mom who tried to dump her bastard child? Her Bio-Mom moved on without the baby child. This was the generation that was alienated. This generation felt that it was lost. Desperate frustration made her feel uprooted, dejected and isolated. It is this sense of loss and alienation that has characterized the decades of 70s and 80s of the twentieth century in the West.

xx. “But what about us, Vietnam’s war-bastards and democracy’s love children?” (Mukherjee, 1997: 141). The men and women of the generation when Vietnam war took place did what they thought right then. They did not care for the consequences. They felt alienated but then what of the war-bastards and democracy’s love children? These children like Debby-Devi were helpless, hopeless, rootless and alienated from all others. The war-bastards and love children like Devi are still groping. They are still coping with what the elders had done. They are still suffering for what they dumped on. Debby’s generation is still facing the consequences of the actions of the seniors. Devi is one such seeker and one such representative of the generation that is groping.
5.5 The Phase of Assimilation

The protagonist finds American atmosphere so captivating. She starts assimilating with Western culture. The phase of cultural assimilation is noticed in the following examples.

i. “Okay, I have to call time for a confession. Frankie Fong took me to dinner and to bed on the first date. And handed me keys to my first apartment three nights later. It has mesmerism at first sight.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 24). Debby DiMartino was appointed as a telemarketer for Elastonomics for her voice of a sexy nun. She was high on her salesmanship performance and that pleased the Boss. He called her from Kuala Lumpur and then invited her to dinner when he landed in the US. Debby confessed that she was taken to dinner and then to bed. Three nights later she was given an apartment of her own. That was mesmerism at first sight. Dating is a part of American lifestyle. Debby is assimilated in that.

ii. “Let’s say he leveraged me into dependence. You took in the hair, which was blue-black and wavy. You started.” (Mukherjee, 1997 :24). Debby was made habitual in depending on Frankie. She was attracted towards him through the charming effect of his personality. He as if cast a spell of mesmerism on Debby. She got entangled in him. Frankie Fong had impressive physical features. His cheekbones, shoulders, waist, buns were quite charming. It was all taken in a flash. Debby was caught by this charm and impressiveness. Debby has registered the attractions and has got assimilated. She finds American atmosphere so captivating that she joins in. This assimilation of the culture of the West is noticed here.

iii. “It didn’t express what I really felt about mothers discarding daughers..... Frankie’s make believe.... Must have been- a careless hippie mom’s Asia.” (Mukherjee, 1997, 28). Frankie Fong stirred up the picture of Asia before her through his description of the same. Debby felt that this must have been her hippie mom’s Asia. This Asia was different from the place to which
Debby belonged now. There was a difference between the West and the East. Frankie’s Asia was different from Debby’s America. The vast cultural difference was there. Then of course Debby was ready to get assimilated in the culture of the West.

iv. “You see, this is one more side effect of adoption. I can imagine myself into any life. I can wrench myself away from a thousand backgrounds”. (Mukherjee, 1997: 28). Debby considers that one effect of adoption is that a person is able to imagine any life and can wrench thousand backgrounds. This is the gift of adoption. Getting assimilated, getting into different worlds, imagining various backgrounds, absorbing and assimilating in various forms is what you are able to do because of adoption. Debby’s assimilation in the Western culture, in American lifestyle is notable. Debby is not shocked by whatever she is told. She does not find that either absurd or false. She is ready to take in. She is willing to grasp. She is determined to get assimilated in the life of the West.

v. “Frankie would file an inflated insurance claim… The costs I extracted loss of past and loss of pride- were unreimbursable, permanent.” (Mukherjee, 1997, 53). Debby saw the turreted and gargoyled Fong house on Union Avenue wrapped in flames. That was her justice for and that was her revenge. The loss of past and the loss of pride were reimbursable. The losses were permanent. The house on fire was some compensation for her. Debby knew that Frankie would claim insurance, would file an inflated claim. Frankie’s loss was in terms of money and damage of his property and for that he needed compensation. That was okay with Debby. She was of course merely concerned about her losses. The loss of pride and the loss of past which could not be compensated in such terms.

vi. “Frankie wouldn’t pursue any case of arson. He couldn’t afford to invite too much investigation.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 53). Debby knew that Frankie would not propose the case of arson. There were Chinese aliens in his basement. Too much investigation would be avoided by him. That was not
reasonable for him. The financial loss he would bear without much of protesting and taking recourse to legal action. Debby knew that Frankie would continue to hire new waifs. He would hire telemarketing sales girls as he did with Debby. He might be luckier next time. The claims for insurance, the interviews for jobs and some of the understand dealings are all way of American and Western lifestyle. Debby is assimilated in the Western culture being a product and a part and parcel of that culture.

vii. “Inner peace. That’s what I gained that smoky summer night as a wide gracious porch smoldered and Frankie wept.” (Mukherjee, 1997:53). Debby watched the fire that has an extraganza of sand, light and heat and encircled Fong house on Union Avenue with rivers of smoke. The wide porch of the house smouldered in that fire on that smoky summer night. What Debby got was inner peace for her. Her losses were not to be reimbursed. There was no compensation that could measure her losses. Those were detrimental to Debby’s career and personality. She took courage and decided to move forward in spite of these losses. She has sought justice for herself. Frankie wept and reacted. Weekly Debby’s inner strength came out as she gained inner peace.

vii. “Nirvana is finding the tiger balls within you.” (Mukherjee, 1997 : 53).

Debby realized that liberation really means finding tiger balls within oneself. It was the inner strength that on account of the inner peace that one attained. Debby attained that as she claimed justice for herself. Frankie’s reactions were just the opposite. He has no inner peace and so no inner strength. He could not find the tiger balls within him. Debby started her journey to the West Coast. She started her mission. She started her search for her bio-parents. Frankie’s dream house was collapsing but Debby moved on with her life, with her mission. Her grasp on life was firm. She was closely assimilated with the American way of life, with the culture of the West.
ix. “Eastern Central, Mountain, I ate the zones a day at a time, Chicago to Cheyenne to Salt Lake and Reno. For twenty years. I’d set my watch back and forward twice a year, now I was turning it back every day.” (Mukherjee, 1997:57). Debby was moving Westwards with her determination to conduct her Bio-mom and make thorough search for her. In her journey Westwards Debby cut the time zones everyday. She had to watch that she used to set twice a year but now she has to set time back everyday. She was getting assimilated to the American environment and that was a part of her cultural assimilation to the American way of life. Debby cut through the time zones from Eastern time to Central time and then to Mountain time. She moved westwards to find that she got three extra hours. Californians have more daylight to do things and longer time to sleep. That is what makes the United States a country as vast as a continent. Debby for the first time realized and got herself assimilated into it.

x. “That went a long way to explain the difference between Serena DiMartino and Clear Water Iris-Daughter.” (Mukherjee, 1997 : 57). Serena DiMartino lived on the East Coast. Clear Water Iris-Daughter belonged to the West Coast. The vast geographical difference in the backgrounds from which both came reflected in their different temperaments. This difference Debby began to perceive now. That’s how she is getting assimilated to American Culture and culture of the West as a whole. Debby reached the West Coast; she has still no idea about the whereabouts of her Bio-Mom and did not exactly know who she would be. Debby has come to this Height region in San Francisco. She decided to stay there. She decided to stay in her Corolla. She put up her dirty laundry around and taped the papers on the windons. Neither cops nor creeps disturbed her. The Corolla becomes her motel room.

xi. “What they said of the Height. I mean the historical epoch, the mood I’d missed, I mean my bio-mom’s times and wants and needs and not the place, was still true.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 68). Debby missed the mood of the
historical epoch of the 1970s and 1980s. She missed her bio-mom’s times. She missed the wants and need of those times historically significant. The generations of Vietnam war, Civil Liberties and Protest and marches for social uplift causes were missed from the scene when Debby decided to settle there in her Corolla. Debby’s life in her corolla as a motel room on the Height has been free. She was not bothered by anybody. She felt free. She did her own thing and did it proudly. She was freer and felt stronger than what Clear Water might have felt. Debby’s freedom and her decision to stay in Corolla show her assimilation with the surroundings.

xii. “Stoop man becomes my ticket to soup kitchens. The street people accepted me as his girlfriend.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 70). The lodging problem was solved by Debby by staying in her Corolla making it as a motel room. The boarding for her came from the soup kitchens that distributed food for charity. Stoop man became her ticket to soup kitchens. She was accepted as his girlfriend by the people on the street. That solved Debby’s food problem. She becomes totally assimilated on the street and in the Height area. Though a stranger from the East Coast, in a short while she became an accepted familiar one in the area she lived.

xiii. “That’s how he introduced me; Say hi to my girlfriend, she touched down from another planet. “Must have”, they’d kid, she hasn’t the sense of an earthperson, that’s for sure. The Street people made room for me in soup lines.” (Mukherjee, 1997:70). The street people accepted her as stoop man’s girlfriend when he introduced her to them. This acceptability indicates her getting assimilated in the surroundings where she stayed. The street people told her which stores to avoid and when to be ready for the tourist buses. These tips made her a part and parcel of the famous corner of Height and Ashbury. That was how Debby DiMartino has been assimilated in the American lifestyle on the West Coast.

Hongkong, parts I through VII,” I sneered. “My God! You know the flash films of Francis Fong.” (Mukherjee, 1997:78). Debby protested against being pushed off by the film unit that came to the corner for shooting. Then a person was called to deal with her. He introduced himself as Hamilton Cohan who had produced the films. The father of this country in four parts, Debby taunted him saying that these films were the imitations of Hong Kong in which Flash featured. Ham, Hamilton Cohan, was surprised that Debby knew about Fong that is Flash and his films. The mention of Francis Flash Fong changed the entire perspective of the encounter Debby was having with the film unit. Ham’s face brightened and Ham explained to Debby that his films have been homage to Flash Fong and not imitations.

xv. “He stroked the same wrist, had kissed, then gripped my hand and gave it a reverent shake. I can’t believe you know Fong’s films! That makes you an automatic member of the Flash Fan Club. Want to know who else belongs? Tarantino and me.” (Mukherjee, 1997 : 79). Ham respectfully treated Debby and admitted her into Flash Fan Club instantly. Debby as a telemarketing salesperson got admitted her to be very close to Ham who would help her in her mission to find her roots. Debby’s assimilation in American and Western Culture is the result of her upbringing by DiMartinos.

xvi. “Ham introduced the woman as Jess DuPree, the Jess of media escort agency Leave It to Me. Didn’t I remember him calling her that first time I stopped by his office? Wasn’t she the one who always came through for him?” (Mukherjee, 1997: 113). Ham and Debby meet a woman who almost forced Ham to kiss her. Ham introduced the woman to be Jess Dupree. She runs that media escort agency ‘Leave It to Me’. Ham tells Debby that from his office to which Debby came for the first time he has called Jess. She was the one who always came through for Ham. The dramatic irony in this situation shows how unknowingly Debby and Jess daughter and mother-share the same lover, Ham. Jess explains the pun on me and Media Escort. Media Escort is Me in Jess’s opinion. She is accompanying a mystery
writer who is busy in the fitting room. She is the escort to the author of the print media and so for me she is media escort and being the CEO of Leave It to Me. She explains that she herself is all in all of Media Escort. Debby understood clearly that there has been and there must still be something a heavy thing going between Ham and Jess. They were and are still lovers. Though a woman of fifty, Jess has still her attraction kept intact. This strange relationship among Jess and Ham on one hand and Ham and Debby on the other hand reflects the socio cultural complex prevalent in the Western world.

xvii. “The soundtrack of the Big Easy was playing on the CD player, …. Got to be closer to you… wrapped in your arms, holding you tight, whispering faintly, baby, deep in the night…….” (Mukherjee, 1997: 227). The music on the CD player was full of the melodious tunes and musical words in which the lovers desired to be very very close, wrapped in arms holding tight and whispering faintly to be deep in the night. The music was suitable in the mood of the Valentine day. Jess was on the houseboat along with Ham. Both Ham and Jess were in the romantic mood. They were enjoying but then Debby and Romeo came in as apportions Jess and Romeo went out. Now Debby and Ham were together to get absorbed in the romantic mood of the Valentine’s Day. Debby’s assimilation in culture is mirrored here.

xviii. “I arched my neck. Frankie once told me that I had the sexiest neck and clavicle he’d ever seen. Ham didn’t notice the seductive stretch.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 229). Though Debby and Ham were together Ham’s attention was on something else. Debby tried to attract his attention by stretching her neck in the most seductive and sexiest manner. Ham did not notice that, he was thinking about something and about someone else. This attention was driven by the absence of Jess. Ham told Debby that the house that his ex-wife a CIA dropout has claimed was burnt in fire and that was how he got his justice. Debby knows that he is still bitter and she asks its reason. Ham’s bitterness about Jess is absence and the fact that some friend
of hers has taken her out when they were about to begin their celebration of Valentine’s Day together. Debby has got fully assimilated in the culture of the West. That is exemplified here.

xix. “Propensities? He laughed; I like your violent propensites. Sounds like a designer perfume. Pro-pen-sity by Devi Dee! Propensity. Give me a break!” (Mukherjee, 1997: 232). Debby DiMartino that is Devi, Devi tells Ham that Ham should have married Jess Dupree. That would have saved her violent tendencies. Devi right from her time of adoption knew about the family that adopted her at the age of two from the orphanage run by the Gray sisters Pappy DiMartino loved her and brought her up just like his own daughter. She came to know about her Bio-dad but his appearance as Ma Karuna and his presence as Romeo Hawk has made her aware of the who and the what of her own Bio-dad she has known from the day of her arrival to the West coast about the relationship between Jess Dupree and Ham Cohen. She desires that Ham’s marrying Jess would have made her a different person. Ham does not yet know the full significance of Devi’s suggestion.

xx. “He ambled over to where other running shoe has scudded to rest. Anyway, what’s my old life with Jess got to do with you?” (Mukherjee, 1997 : 232). Ham Cohen does not fully grasp what Devi means by saying that Ham should have married Jess and that would have spared Devi from her violent tendencies. He therefore desires to know what his old life with Jess has anything to do with Devi and her life. Devi’s answers Ham’s query about what his past life with Jess has something to say about Devi’s life. Jess’s entanglement with Ham before she went on the hippie frail and his association with Romeo Hawk when she wandered as a hippie are closely connected with Devi’s birth and life after that. Her assimilation in American culture has materialized after her adoption by the DiMartino family.
5.6 Summing up

Debby DiMartino is an American girl of twenty three who has never been in trouble with what her origins were. Her acts of shop lifting needed correction and then the questions about her parentage began to torture her. The desire to find her bio-parents became an obsession. She started her search and toured from East Coast to the West Coast on this psychologically powered journey of hers. The past is connected with some years of the stay of her Bio-mom in India and her giving birth to a baby daughter. The birth is characterized by the brutal attempt of exposure and later the daughter’s entry in the orphanage. At the age of two, she is adopted. Debby DiMartino is thus a thorough American girl. The Western Culture is transparent in her movements, words and actions. India of the past and America of the present weave the design of the novel. The stage of assimilation is attained right from the age of two.