CHAPTER SIX
Desirable Daughters

6.1 Cross-cultural Background: *Desirable Daughters*

*Desirable Daughters* is a story of a traditional family and of an American woman who has broken with the tradition in many ways but still remains tied to her native country India.

Chapter One: Traditional family begins with a one-way procession of flickering oil lamps along the muddy shanko between rice paddies and flooded ponds which finally disappears into a distant wall of impenetrable jungle. The narrow, raised trail stretches ten miles from Mishtigunj town to the jungle’s edge. In a palanquin borne by four servants is a rich man’s youngest daughter dressed in her bridal sari. The bride is named Tara Lata. The name of the father is Jai Krishna Gangooly Tara Lata is headed deep into the forest to marry a tree. The family history begins with a family wedding on the coldest, darkest night in the year 1879. Ever since this story was told by her mother, the narrator Tara felt that there had been a profound connection between her as she had been named after her and Tara Lata the Tree Bride. Tara Lata Ganguly (1874-1944), known to the world as Tara-Ma, lived as an untrained Nurse, Spiritual healer, inspiration to generation of peace-loving and peace seeking individuals. During the Bengal famine of 1942 she fed the town and the outlying villages. She rallied around the cause of an Independent India and United Bengal and protected Young Freedom Fighters from British arrest. She herself was dragged from her home on the Night of October 12, 1944 by colonial authorities and never heard from again. Her death was announced on October 18, 1944, and attributed to a heart attack. That was the connection between the Gangopadhaya line that leads directly to the narrator Tara’s mother, her sisters and herself which ran through Jai Krishna’s ninth wife and the birth of her grandfather in 1909, when Jai Krishna was seventy years old.
Chapter Two: “Sisters three are we….as like as blossoms on a tree”. Her eldest sister Padma was born eighty years after that marriage ceremony in the Shoondar Bon. Her second sister Parvati was born on the same day three years later and Tara the narrator came along the same birthday three years after that. Tara was nineteen years old, holder of a B.A. honours and M.A. first class from the University of Calcutta. She married Bishwapriya Chatterjee and Rabi was her son. Tara and her son Rabi were tracked down in San Francisco by a boy from India who claimed to be the son of her oldest sister Padma. The young boy handed over a note supposedly written by Dr. Ron (Ronald) Swarup Dey. The note informed that Chris Dey was the son of Padma and Ron Dey.

Chapter Three: Tara lives in San Francisco with her Son Rabi and also with Andy, her balding, red-bearded, former biker, Hungarian, Buddhist contractor, yoga instructor, whom Brish calls Tara’s mistri, her carpenter her live-in partner. Andy processed the story of the surprise visit and then Andy read the letter supposedly written by Dr. Ron Dey. Andy concluded that the kid would find his bio-mom and she would accept him or else she would refuse and that would end the story.

Chapter Four: Her sister Parvati lives with her husband Aurobindo Banerji and their teenage sons Bhupesh and Dinesh, on the fifteenth floor of a spectacular high rise on Marine Drive in Bombay. Parvati married a Bengali from a reasonably good Tollygunge family, his caste and regional origins were more a matter of coincidence than calculation. Tara contacted Parvati and found Parvati excited, almost hysterical on account of the breakup. Tara did not bring up Chris Dey but then she called Parvati and disclosed the details the boy had brought out. Tara told Parvati had directed him to Tara and demanded Padma’s address from Tara.

Chapter Five: Andy’s Hungarian connections kept popping up in the strangest places. Some weekends Jason Peters, Andy’s life-long friend, calls Andy for celebrating an obscure anniversary in their collective pasts. She registered an Indian in a Giant Base Ball Cam. Rabi was at ease with the man and Tara was sure it was Chris Dey. Tara rushed out but Rabi and Chris were not there. When Rabi came home, Tara warned him about Chris Dey being a dangerous person. She
called Padma but Padma did not call her back. There was a packet from Mrs. Parvati Banerji, Bombay.

Chapter Six: Parvati’s letter is written in a period of about three days or four with delays of posting and adding post scripts many times. She does not want to write but will prefer to talk on the phone. Evasion is not the same as lying is the rule she desires to follow. Padma was sent to the finishing school in Switzerland. Parvati then gives a piece of advice to Tara. Didi has always had a great capacity for starting over, for wiping her slate very clean. Daddy is becoming more and more detached from the world.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 106).

Chapter Seven: Padma did not call back and Tara’s message went unanswered. Parvati informed Tara that Dr. Dey and his wife were at the fund raiser party. They had a son and he informed Parvati that, that was the only son he had. Tara’s son Rabi found the address of Dr. Dey on the net and Tara sent him a letter. Tara had gone neighborhood market and when she returned Chris Dey accompanied her. He said that he wanted to belong to Tara’s family and did not want to destroy it. Then Andy arrived with his truck and took Chris Dey away, Tara made a call to Padma and when Padma heard about the appearance of a young man in San Francisco, She changed the topic and closed the conversation.

Chapter Eight: Dr Ronald Dey sends an answer to Tara’s letter. Ronald accepted the misalliance but the bio-mother’s identity was not revealed and wanted that be declared by the party concerned. He was not the author of the letter of introduction. His son was tall and did not speak Bengali. He asked her to read Tennyson’s poem-The Kraken. He warned Tara about the young person of being an imposter. That’s what Ronald Dey’s letter was all about, the Kraken, the stiff formalities, the elaborate hints about height and Bengaliness.

Chapter Nine: Tara promised Andy to give it a rest, do absolutely nothing with sister’s nephew or distant family friends. Andy was determined to extract a promise from Tara. Tara was required to show up at her son Rabi’s school that evening to see his work and meet his teachers. Tara went to the police station at the base of Stanyan by Golden Gate Park. She was assigned to Sgt. Jasbir Jack
Singh Sidhu, a tall Sikh with a trimmed beard and a thoroughly American manner and accent. Tara told the sergeant about the young man who called himself Christopher Dey, an Indian Christian, supposed to be Tara’s nephew. She told about her suspicion that the boy who called himself Christopher Dey might not be the real Christopher Dey. Christopher Dey was supposed to be tall, well educated, accomplished and totally non Bengali speaking. The young man she met was short, uneducated and rather rude and Bengali speaking. The sergent has taken Tara’s inquiry quite seriously.

Chapter Ten: Tara visited Rabi’s school. Rabi was working with cartoons with dramatic production. Tara was then asked to meet the counselor Dr. Miguel Salvidar. Salvidar was the gay students’ advisor. He read Rabi’s letter addressed to Tara in which he disclosed his different sexual orientation. Tara told Rabi that she liked the letter Rabi wrote. Andy did not like Tara’s going to the police to Jack Sidhu Andy left her. Her Zen master just disappeared from her life as leanly as he had entered it. The first part of the novel is of the first ten chapters.

Chapter Eleven: Tara desired to find out once and for all, the story of Ron Day. Her sister Padma came and informed Tara how their father presented Padma being the “New girl” to be cast in Satyajit Ray’s film. Then Padma and Tara talked about the old days in Calcutta. Padma disapproved Tara’s saris. Padma would take her to hair and nails girl, her makeup man, her hair stylist and then would take her to the sari shops and jewelry shops.

Chapter Twelve: Padma told Tara about the guest list for the party that night. Padma told Tara about the guests through her comments. Padma made inquires about Jack Sidhu and was told by Tara of his being a police officer. Padma warned Tara about her maintaining her reputation in New York.

Chapter Thirteen: Padma took Tara to Mei’s Calcutta Hair Studio, the sari shop and Dhiren-da’s jewelry stores. They left the jewelry store with half a dozen cases-bangles, earrings, the Byzantium set for Tara and earrings choker and nose jewel for Padma. Dhiren-da had not tendered a bill and Padma had not signed a paper. Jack Sidhu was sending her the photographs and that Ronald Dey was killed in an
automobile accident. Tara told Padma about Dr. Dey’s death and Padma was thinking about what Danny Jagtiani was going to think.

Chapter Fourteen: Both the sisters got into Danny Jagtiani’s office. He welcomed them warmly. He was a presentable man, and Tara had found Padma depending on his generosity. Jack Sidhu sent through fax the photographs of the man who met Tara was Abbas Sattar Hai. Christopher Dey’s photograph was also faxed. Padma put on a mask. She was now a television star, the anchor of “Namaskar Prabasi Show” Padma Mehta is a television personality. She is an icon among Bengalis. What she wears and what she recommends are taken as fashion statements in the community. Padma thought of these parties as a kind of home shopping service for upscale Indians. There was an economic benefit for participating merchants, but the social values far outweigh it.

Chapter Fifteen: Padma told Tara how she had struggled. The party at the grounds of the basking Ridge Estate is presented. There was a call and Tara picked up her mobile. Bish was told by Tara about Christopher, Dr. Dey’s death, the impersonation by Abbas Sattar Hai and perhaps Rabi being the target.

Chapter Sixteenth: Rabi, Bish and Tara are in the house. Rabi remarked about a voice that he heard. The house was bombed. Bish made a call to Jack Sindhu telling of the explosion. Bish then lost consciousness. Tara turned to the writing and telling of stories.

Chapter Seventeen: The story that Tara was writing had begun to emerge out of the century of the tree bride and the class of Calcutta girls born a century later, both of them witness to dying traditions. Tara Lata’s lifetime virginity turned into a model of selfless, saintliness, Tara’s story was different, perhaps even an inversion, “The tree bride, the aged virgin who did not leave her father’s house until the British dragged her off to jail, the least- known martyr, to Indian freedom, is the quiet center of every story. Each generation of women in my family has discovered in her something new. Even in far flung California, the Tree Bride speaks again. I have come back to India this time…… like a pilgrim following the course of the Ganges all the way to its source.” (Mukherjee, 2002:289).
Chapter Eighteen: Auro, Parvati’s and Tara’s mummy was offered to come to Bombay or California for the best medical treatment. Mummy’s response was “she wrote one sentence in English and two sentences in Bengali. Her penmanship was almost as neat around and evenly paced as it had been. The English sentence was simple; Tara dear you and your sisters have proved that a daughter is as good as a son. Her husband would not leave the mountains and she would not leave him. “Goddess Kali, the Destroyer of time, the Dissipater of darkness, the Scourge of sinfulness, I too beg you to free me from earthly terrors and longings.” (Mukherjee, 2002:292).

Chapter Nineteen: Mummy, Daddy and Tara are drinking tea on the roof terrace watching the cold December dawn and Rabi is on the terrace too. The house is actually beyond the town limits of Rishikesh and its clusters of ashram tourist lodges and pilgrim hostels. Daddy chose on an impulse Marjorie instead of Darjeeling for the annual two week summer vacation. Daddy therefore came to Rishikesh and the same Swami appeared and gave him three blue flowers.

Chapter Twenty: Tara and Rabi stroll through the ruins of the palace house in Mushtigunj but this woman does not look like a woman and she certainly does not behave as a woman……. In the third part of the novel Tara has come back in her quest of identity and relationship with the homeland.

6.2 Reflecting the East

The following examples reveal different cultural traits of the Eastern culture. The Eastern cultural traits like dowry system, Indian customs, auspicious hour of the wedding, traditional Indian life styles, rituals, religious ceremonies; moral and ethical codes, human values and social manners have been observed and discussed.
i. “The marriage did not take place”, he said, his voice lawyerly, loud, authoritative, “Therefore, there is no question of dowry giving.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 14). Jai Krishna Gangooly was informed by the bride groom’s party of the death of the young man of snake bite. Surendranath Lahiri, still holding the body of his son in his arms demanded the dowry cash and dowry gifts. He left it to Jai Krishna babu to do whatever he desired with the wicked girl Tara Lata. The pleader knew the claim to the dowry was untenable. The Hindu father knew the working of the faith was more complicated. His daughter’s true fate had revealed: a lifetime’s virginity, a life without a husband to worship as god’s proxy on earth, and thus the despairing life of a woman deemed to be reincarnated. Therefore in his authoritative voice, he rejected the demand for the dowry cash and dowry gifts. He pointed out that the marriage did not take place and so the question of giving dowry did not rise at all. The father turned his back on them and declared. The dowry system reflects the Eastern cultural custom.

ii. “I will see my daughter married to a crocodile, to a tree before you get a single pice!.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 14). Jai Krishna Gangooly was resolved to carry out the ritual though the tragedy had befallen. The dowry given as a social custom traditionally practiced in India. Jai Krishna Gangooly and Surendranath Lahiri followed the customary practice but Fate interfered. The marriage had to be performed and Jaikrishna Gangooly according to the practices in India decides to marry his daughter to a tree. He makes his resolve clear. The auspicious hour of the wedding will be observed in the traditional Indian style. The reflection of the ancient cultural traditions and social customs is found in this incident of marrying the daughter to a tree as a Tree Bride.

iii. “Sister’s three are we…….. as like as blossom on a tree. But we are not……” (Mukherjee, 2002: 21). The same nursery rhyme of three sisters like blossoms on one flowering tree is applicable to Padma, Parvati and Tara. After the marriage of the tree bride Tara Lata after a period of eighty
years, Padma was born and after an interval of three years each the two younger sisters Parvati and Tara were born. Padma in New York, Tara in San Francisco and Parvati in Bombay were settled in their various careers. Padma Mehta a TV Personality, Parvati a house wife in the house hold of a corporate magnet and Tara, a divorcee of Bishwapiya – Bish – her San Francisco House with her son Rabi and her “ live in Partner”, Andy, the Hungarian “retrofit biker”. Their Indian roots are clearly mentioned and that indicates their belonging to the old traditional social life in the Indian culture.

iv. “The city was Calcutta in the late fifties and early sixties”. (Mukherjee, 2002: 21). The three sisters-desirable daughters grew in Calcutta in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, they survived and prospered and spread out. Tara’s Californian friends suggested that existence in Calcutta was like living on the other planet or rather an unearthly place. The city had negative connotations all over the world. It was associated with Mother Teresa’s works of charity- a place known for poverty, the sick and the orphans. Belonging to Calcutta meant belonging to India – an old cultural spot but surrounded by poverty, pollution and corruption.

v. “Businessmen aspired to join the Bengal club. Matrons fought to be seen at the Turf Club during the racing season.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 22). In the West, Calcutta is considered to be the city of despair, but for the Bengalis and the Indians as a whole and in particular in the East it is not so. It is the city of Joy, the city of hope, the magnet of opportunities, the target of ambition, the holy place of the goddess Kali – on the Kali ghat. Therefore the businessmen pinned the hopes on getting the membership of the Bengal Club. The Indian traditions and cultured set attached a great importance, considered it a mark of prestige and almost a symbol of power and authority of belonging to the higher set of social fraternity in the Oriental culture.

vi. “To be Calcutta bhadra lok, as we Bhattacharjees were was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement and
beauty that was the envy of the world”. (Mukherjee, 2002: 22). To belong to the elite society, the upper class strata, the cultured set meant sharing a tradition of leadership, sensitivity, achievement and refinement. To belong to the group of the Bhadralok- in Calcutta meant to belong to a chosen group of people that was a class in itself, a class of leaders, sensitive achievers, a group of people who have the aesthetic sense and refined taste. These are the marks of the refined group of persons in a city like Calcutta. The legacy of high class society has a cultural tradition. In such a cultural group, Padma, Parvati and Tara were brought up. That reflects Indian cultural background.

vii. “Ballygunge Park Road was an outstanding address in those years, one that practically shouted “Old money!”, But we were not “old money”. (Mukherjee, 2002: 33). The family to which the three sisters belonged was living on the Ballygang Park Road. This was an outstanding address from the city of Calcutta that proclaimed belonging to that class of families that possessed money from the old times. Their being landlords and having estates in the countryside made them claim the legacy of the old Bengali culture. Their family did not belong to the groups of old moneyed class. They claimed to derive their status from the old customary Indian culture of traditional rituals, old world charm and moral and ethical code of great human values and social manners.

viii. “Both of my parents were born in Calcutta, but their parents still pined for the eternal greenery of East Bengal.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 33). Though the parents of the three daughters were born in Calcutta, their grandparents came from the provincial established families. They belonged to the small towns from Bengal- East Bengal in particular. This indicates their being rooted in Indian culture. In the way of provincial gentry, Tara’s father’s father was the bright boy with prospects his wife, her grandmother, was the comely town girl from an established family, her dowry enabled her grandfather to complete his education and move to Calcutta. The old world
charm is noticed in the cultural heritage of the family. The true Indian cultural setting is there in the family tradition of the Bhattacharjee sisters.

ix. “Parvati now lives with her husband, Anrobindo Banerjii and their teenage sons, Bhupesh and Dinesh, on the fifteenth floor of a spectacular high-rise”. (Mukherjee, 2002:50). Tara’s second sister, the pliable middle sister Parvati had made a love match. Parvati wrote to her father that she had fallen in love. Now, she lived with her husband. The boy of her choice Aurobindo Banerjee and her two sons lived in a high-rise building on the Marine Drive in Bombay. The high-rise apartment, luxurious with a monthly rent of twenty five thousand US dollars and the fishermen’s colony of tents below, the poverty striken slum below and the sky scrappers overlooking the sea presented the two sides of Indian life- the opulent and the deprived- the high and the low-the contrasting opposites co-existing in India the Orient.

x. “They consider themselves lucky to have found such a reasonable place before the prices shot up.” (Mukherjee,2002:50). The high rent, the payment of rent in dollars, the remittance in a foreign bank, the over and above charges of lease and the whole bill being paid by the company and considering it a reasonable deal- are all reflections of the new commercial corporate culture that too has become a part of Indian way of life. Parvati’s choice was coincidently of a Bengali Brahmin from a Tollygung family. She did not calculate but the caste and region of her husband made her choice acceptable. This too reflects that aspect of Indian culture which is essentially a determining factor in the matter of choices in relationships.

xi. “When we were little…Shitala, the goddess of smallpox and malaria visited a king… and demanded king Virate to worship her….. in return she would grant him a long life free of disease…the living refused to goddess.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 57). The story told by the maternal grandmother was the story of the village deity, the goddess of smallpox and malaria. The goddess visited king Virate in a dream and demanded worship and sacrifices but was
refused. It was believed that gods and goddesses talked to mortals through dreams. They demanded and even warned the mortals of the consequences of the refusal of their demands. The king did not heed to her warning and so. The refusal brought the spreading of diseases. Like a mortal the goddess paid in the same terms in order to punish the king for refusing her demand of worship and suitable gifts and sacrifices. The wrath of the gods and goddesses was considered to be the prime cause of the disease. The scientific view of germs cause diseases was yet not accepted by those who believed in such superstitions and myths. The traditional beliefs maintained that the pleasure or displeasure of the gods and goddesses brought disease to men.

xii. “I have lost my Indian radar. My mother used to enter in her little laundry books every shirt…and then check them…The elaborate counting and checking was the final act…in a…drama ending in payment.” (Mukherjee, 2002:71). Tara remembered her mother making the entry of each shirt, sari, a pair of underwear. She got every item checked and counted physically. The checking and rechecking was a part of the routine. It was a routine drama-the first act being the entering of each item in a laundry book, the rechecking, the physical counting and then the final act of payment. When Tara was growing up she observed many such instances taking place around. That was a part of growing up. It was not distrust at all. It was something accepted as a routine course. It was a part of the system. It was a way of conducting transactions. It did not doubt, it was not questioning anyone’s integrity but it was a caution necessarily taken from both the sides in India.

xiii. “My father used to stand at the counter of any shop, loudly re-adding every bill. He rechecked the waiters’ calculations in restaurants even fancy ones.” (Mukherjee, 2002:71). Tara’s father too made additions to check the bills at the counter of each shop. He checked and examined bills and calculations even in the restaurants that were habitual for Indians. Both the sides did not mind such cautious moves. Tara’s father watched the driver while filling up
at the petrol pumps. That was part of the way of life – a cultural trait. That was the culture of watchfulness, vigilance, caution and not doubt, distrust. That was Indian way of thinking and conducting business.

xiv. “For Hindus, the world is constructed of calamities. The stories are wondrous, lurid and beautiful, full of shape-changing, gender bending, grand-scale slaughter, polymorphous sexuality.” (Mukherjee, 2002:148). The stories from Indian Hindu mythology are full of wonderful happenings. Those are the events that take place on a grand scale, Shapes Change….with four hands, ten heads, human heads and animal bodies or human bodies and animal heads. There are slaughters on a scale beyond imagination. Genders transform –even gods taking the female shapes as in the Bhasmasur Mohini myth. There are conflicts, violent clashes, war ranging though the changes are terribly wonderful and even shocking. The myth and the stories tell about how to get rid of the horrible happenings, the terrible tragedies and the great calamities. There is an order of action and reaction chain and if it is not performed properly, the goddess Manasha will invade the wedding. This happened in the case of Tara Lata- the Tree Bride.

xv. “My mother told me hundred of stories from the Puranas and the Mahabharata- even girls from the upper classes…got the classic exposure”. (Mukherjee, 2002:148). Tara got the exposure to classical stories from the Indian mythology and epics. Even the elder girls than her had such an exposure. Exposure to Indian myths is peculiarity that is a part of the reflection of Indian culture in the life style of an Indian.

xvi. “The sari shop and jewelry stores were located on side streets….Old Mr. Bose... was small and bald, bird like……….old style observant Hindus who met all their ritual obligations and practiced morning and evening yoga and lived on a daily spoonful of yogurt and a slice of fruit.” (Mukherjee, 2002:203). Tara’s eldest sister the TV celebrity, Padma Mehta took her to a jewelry shop and there was Mr. Bose. He was an old person but appeared to be an observant Hindu. He must have been a practitioner of yoga exercises
daily in the morning and evening. He must have consumed a spoonful of yogurt and a slice of fruit every day. The yogic exercises and the sparse diet made him move like a bird. He appeared to be an active person in spite of his old age. His diet and habits made him disciplined and composed. His balanced view point indicates the way of Indian life style shapes the physical and psychological well being of an individual.

xvii. “According to Parvati, our father in his mountain retirement was fast becoming one of them.” (Mukherjee, 2002:203). Tara’s father had retired to the mountain residence in Rishikesh. He led the life moderated by his disciplined habits and controlled diet. He maintained his daily routine observing the regular rituals and his spiritual meditations. That made him balanced. This is the result of the disciplined systematization of life in the third stage- in an Indian life style and in the same manner in New York too. The dress put on by Mr. Bose was the traditional Indian dress. Simple Living was the dictum followed in daily habits, diet and dress and that is why he was so quick and active in spite of his age. The advantage of Indian way of life is clearly indicated as the reflection of the culture of the East.

xviii. “My grandmother, Didima was the first girl in her family to be sent to school, which in her case was Bethure High School in Calcutta. Though she was married off the week after she’d sat for her matriculation examination, she considered herself a modern woman.” (Mukherjee, 2002:288). Tara’s grandmother was the first girl in her family who went to school. That was the change in the family of the Tree Bride and Tara herself. Didima considered herself quite a modern woman. Her school education ended with her matriculation examination and her marriage took place after a week after the examination. This marks a change in the life-style of Indians, as female education continued to spread among the educated families. Tara’s grandmother Didima spoke at length the way in which the Tree–bride’s father JaiKrishna proudly dismissed the schemes for collecting the dowry. He stood against the practice of dowry collection. Didima
emphasized this aspect of defending the family honour and opposing the crude inhuman and commercial custom of dowry. He insisted on maintaining the prestige of this family- through his actions.

xix. “Next thing I know, Daddy has launched into a long strange story about Manasha, an insecure and therefore demanding goddess. It was Manasha in her familiar cobra form that had killed the Tree Bride’s boy-husband to be.” (Mukherjee, 2002:304). Tara’s Daddy began the story of Manasha. That goddess is a demanding goddess. She demands worship; she demands every ritual to be properly performed. She transformed her shape in a cobra. This was the same cobra that killed the Tree-Bride’s boy-husband-to-be. The Tree-Bride’s-boy-husband-to-be lost his life and that was Manasha’s revenge on those who displeased her. She was neither half-goddess nor half-sage but she identified herself as the queen of snakes. She therefore demanded respect through the infliction of pain, through the venom of the snakes. Manasha, the goddess of smallpox and malaria and the queen of snakes, commanded respect through making her snake bite those who did not perform the rituals properly. This story of Manasha is a peculiar Indian myth that reflects the cultural aspects of Indian life style.

xx. “The winter night of East Bengal falls quickly. The mosquitoes are fierce. Rabi and I walk along the paved road from the Tree-Bride’s house to the last of the permanent structures.” (Mukherjee 2002:310). The darkness of the night has enveloped around. Tara with Rabi has visited the house of the Tree Bride Tara Lata Gangooly in Mishtigunj she has made the visit in the search of her roots. It is the search of the traditional past. It is her search of her own identity. She has broken away with the tradition in many ways in San Francisco. She is most removed from the traditions but she had to turn to her homeland-India. She is drawn to her namesake Tara, the Tree Bride Tara Lata Gangooly. She visits the house at Mishtigunj in her search and in her pilgrimage, her journey into the past and her understanding of the contemporary situation. She suddenly remembers the word she has not used
in her life. She remembers the word shanko. That takes her back into the past down memory lane. She becomes a ground of quarrel of both the traditional past and the contemporary setting. She remembers what has passed from the times of The Tree Bride to this visit of hers when she remembers “Shanko” all of suddenly. Now she finds the trail lighted by lamps and this turning from darkness to brightness is the miracle that Tara wants Rabi to remember as the march from the darkness to light, the way to light.

6. 3 Mirroring the West

The term culture is unique. Each culture has its exclusive and special traits which are uncommon. In the present study, the researcher has observed the continuous oscilliation between Eastern and Western culture. The following examples show how the Western culture is different from the Western. The cultural traits like social status, duties-towards family and society have been observed and discussed with proper illustrations.

i. “It’s about width, using the whole field, connecting to in the flat…. shouted out the magic word together: Bandwidth.” (Mukherjee 2002:24). Bishwapriya Chatterjee, Tara’s husband, with his friend Chester Yee, developed a process for allowing computers to create their own time. The process involved recognizing signals indented only for them, for instantaneously routing information to the least congested lines. They were watching football game and were suddenly inspired by the width that connected a billion short passes. The width used the whole field and connected and therefore was called Bandwidth. Bandwidth was the term that became acceptable. Chet Yee went to the piece of paper, it was now essential to protect the process most vigilantly. It was the moment of immortality. The Company was to be established. That would make the process properly established as an item for use in the dissimulation of
knowledge through the computer. It became a part and parcel of the lifestyle
in the West.

ii. “Chester got the patent, Bish formed the company. They or I should say, we
own fifty one percent of the stock. The system is called “CHATTY”. And
without it nothing in the modern world would work.” ((Mukherjee,
2002:24). The two friends now found the company to be proper sons. They
would get and establish their sovereignty over the process. Bish Chatterjee
and Chester Yee formed the company on appropriate terms. They
established their sovereignty over the process. Bish Chatterjee formed the
company for CHATTY. It was something without which the modern world
would not work. The mirroring of the progress of the principle of science
put into technology in the formation of the system, CHATTY, The Western
culture is mirrored here.

iii. “Love” is a slippery word when both partners bring their own
definition.(Mukherjee, 2002:27). Tara Bishwapriya Bhattacharjee states her
status of being loved by two partners, her ex-husband Bishwapriya and her
“live in” lover Hungarian retrofit carpenter Andy. She mirrors her American
status as ‘divorce’ a single mom, and her ex-husband Bish supporting her
by providing well for Tara and their son Rabi. She is at the same time being
loved by her live-in lover Andy the Zen Buddhist. For both of her partners:
“Love” meant something different. For one it is an ‘obligation’ and for the
other it is fun. Tara is now so much a part of her American surrounding that
she accepts such a position almost being something normal and agreeable.
To Bishwapriya love is something that remains after doing something for
the family, for the community and satisfying professional obligations
and that’s “Love “which is to be showered on the partner in love. Love is
different from status and duties-towards the family, society and professional
career, Love is residence after obligations are fulfilled.
iv. “I can’t imagine my carpenter, Andy, bringing anything more complicated to it, than, say, “fun”. Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than with anyone else, over a longer hauls.” (Mukherjee, 2002:27).

Andy the live in partner considers love to be fun. What is part of a duty for Bish is just a fun for Andy. These two attitudes reflect the two cultural perspectives. Tara accepts both as she has become a part of the American set up and is totally enveloped by it.

v. “They get furious and make fools of themselves and security guards have to be called …..They get in the papers for child abuse.”(Mukherjee 2002:40).

Tara tells that those parents who have a fascination for their sons and their careers sometimes get furious on account of the reports about the scores of their sons and daughters. Such parents eventually behave so foolishly on account of their expectations that any unexpected score makes them furious. Their fury leads them to react almost violently. The security guards are required to be called to pacify such parents; the charge of child abuse sometimes lands them in jail. Tara remarks that such violent reactions are never expressed by Indian mothers at least not against their sons. Tara will not violently react to any of the scores obtained by her son Rabi. She will not be violent in her reactions and therefore she cannot be charged of child abuse and will not express any violent feelings.

vi. “But he’s just sitting there smugly...Ma, got a grip. “How dare he?” (Mukherjee, 2002:40). Tara realizes that her son Rabi is looking at her as if she is a child. This expression indicates his reaction to his mother’s conduct towards the younger generation. The cultural peculiarity disseminated by the boys like Rabi leads the young boys to show how parents too need to be composed in such situations when they are dealing with their children and their careers.

vii. “Americans agonized and complained, they worked too hard far too little recognition, they got extensions, they slept through classes, they doped themselves for tests.” (Mukherjee, 2002:44). Tara brings out the agonies of
the American students in the universities. The American students worked hard, studied, labored extensively but the results were not what they desired. They have to take their courses again, to get extensions. They slept in the classes, they appeared for the tests with stimulants, even then their scores were below their expectations. They got less for what work they did. Their hard efforts did not bring them the desired results. This reflects the American setup in the educational institutes. On the other hand, Indian students worked on time and got better scores than their American counterparts. The difference between the two sets of students is shown here.

viii. “Our training, not only in the old classrooms with second-rate equipment and uninspiring teachers, but also our training at home, duty and honor, obedience and respect, the whole dharma of studentship, spared us doubts and second thoughts.” (Mukherjee 2002:44).The difference lies in the way the students carried themselves. The training at home and schools that the Indian students got made them follow the dharma of studentship. They conducted themselves with the code of duty, honour, and obedience and respect to their teachers. The American student did not follow such a set of behavioral platform. Their inquisitive tendencies make them raise doubts. That resulted in the obstacles in their studentship and that reflects in their scores. This shows the American way of conducting during the studentship.

ix. “It had been a cold gray afternoon, but I’d been in a brave, romantic mood…and in that mood I’d found the fog…enticing.” (Mukherjee, 2002:58). In the mood of becoming a happy woman in her mood of being brave and romantic, Tara was attracted by the sight of the fog. That made her decide purchasing the place. The mood and the fog decided her choice. Usually, convenience and utility factors make an individual choose a place. In her Americanization Tara an individual chooses a place. In her Americanization Tara was not fascinated by the fog that surrounded her neighbour that is a peculiar American landscape windy and foggy that Tara got for herself as a resident.
x. “Rabi’s cheeriness catching.” (Mukherjee, 2002:63). Rabi had been in Amsterdam with Brish. He was happy after the weekend. Both of them enjoyed the weekend and Rabi thought of his father as a real sport. This made the boy happy and his cheerful mood got reflected in the change in the weather. That happy mood caught others. Along with Rabi, his mother Tara and Andy too were caught by the change of weather and the change of mood to happy cheeriness.

xi. “We had a whole week of hot, dry weather, not enough for Andy to barbecue on the deck and for me to need to cool off in shorts and a halter top.” (Mukherjee, 2002:63). The change in weather in America brings with it the change in the various activities. The change of mood and the change of weather from cold to hot and dry weather made them change their outfits for Tara put herself in shorts and top. That was necessary for the cooling off effect she needed in the changed hot and dry weather. Andy roasted on the barbecue on the deck. The change in weather and the change in mood make them use the barbecue. This is particularly noticed in the cold weather countries of Europe and America. The change in weather brings the change in mood.

xii. “This is the life I could afford; it’s even the life I once expected.” (Mukherjee, 2002:75). Tara has come with Andy to Andy’s lifelong friend Peter’s winery-turned-country-inn. Tara thinks of the Jason life on the farm and she realizes that she could have afforded and even expected this kind of life full of leisure and pleasures- rides, tennis, tub-bath, wines and rich food. She would have enjoyed these comforts. She could have lived such a kind of life throughout. Tara would have come to the same place to enjoy rides, tennis, tub and the gracious pleasure. She could enjoy every minute of her stay at such a place but she could not imagine her ex-husband Bish enjoying the same. The rich luxuries Tara would enjoy but not Bish-being busy in his work, promoting CHATTY.
xiii. “I know I shouldn’t be thinking of him, who only wanted me to look like a princess and live like a queen, not on a perfect day arranged by a man who’s had to come so far to achieve these pleasures.” (Mukherjee, 2002:75). Tara is a divorcee, still, she thinks of Bish. She knows that Bish always intended her to be like a princess, a queen. He just wanted her to enjoy but his achieving these pleasures on his own was far from his domain of activities. The luxuries of America, Tara desires to enjoy but she feels she would be doing that alone but not with someone she loved.

xiv. “I expect bad news to come in phone calls. Email is different, I love e-mail. Thanks to Bish. I’ve got to thinking of e-mail as the most natural way to communicate. It is a lot easier than talking.” (Mukherjee, 2002:86). Other means of communication mentioned by Tara are telephone and e-mail. She expects bad news from the phone calls, she loves e-mail and considers it the most natural way to communicate, a lot easier than talking. The answering machine, the telephone and the e-mail are the way of communication-based on electronic technology. These have become a part of the American Lifestyle. She pressed for messages thinking that Rabi might have sent one, though the chance was slight. In American way of life, the place of answering machine and the messages stored on it is undoubtedly significant as a feature of its modernity and techno-savvy character.

xv. “A PIFL is a Previously Identified Fault Line”. You’re sitting on piffle, my friend. Here’s how we correct it, here’s what it will cost you, and here is what I can guarantee.” (Mukherjee, 2002:92). Andy explains that piffle is something that can be corrected. Repairing is possible in the case of the previously identified fault line –PIFL. That can be done by “retrofitting” the construction. That is repairing PIFL is essential to remove what is damaged, what is cracked and what is broken. It can be replaced, made whole and mended properly. A previously unidentified fault line PUFL is puffle. It is something that is not detected but causes damage which cannot just be repaired. When and how it will occur, is not known, Piffle and Puffle is
what can be found by one who knows what that means. American life is full of piffles and puffles.

xvi. “I understood better why Didi had condemned me for going through with my divorce. According to her, I had become “American”, meaning self engrossed.” (Mukherjee, 2002:134). Tara’s eldest sister Padma Mehta was not happy with Tara’s divorce. Padma considered that Tara had become too much of an American by getting herself divorced from Bishwapriya. To be American is to be engrossed in one. To be self engrossed is not to care for others, to neglect the obligations to something and to someone beyond oneself. Tara’s divorce as if signified that she was just thinking of herself and was neglecting everything and everybody except herself. Padma Mehta, Tara’s eldest sister, though herself a progressive American, took the line of her Indian aunts such as compromise is essential in marriage, a woman should accept and adjust and should follow the models like Sita and Savitri. Tara is considered more American, too much of an American. It is indeed the case that Tara with her “Live-in” lover Andy and divorce from Bishwapriya has proved to be the most progressive in action among the three desirable daughters.

xvii. “I had dismissed her…for acting too American.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 134). Tara dismissed her sister’s charge of being too American. She considered Padma’s attitude to be hypercritical. Padma’s husband, Harish Mehta, continued to claim family connection of being brother law of Bish Chatterjee Tara’s ex-husband. Tara’s American thinking and lifestyle “mirrors” the advances in American culture.

xviii. “It’s a small world, isn’t it? That was another of her jokes…… “It’s just another virus can handle it.” (Mukherjee 2002:256). Bish came to know from the office that Tara wanted to call him for something urgent. She told him to talk to Jack Sidhu. CHATTY has made the world smaller and it was getting smaller every day. It was assured by him that Bish would handle with the virus. Bish told her to punch a number. Tara was proud to feel that
there seemed to be no limit to what Bish’s little hand held Broadband miracle could perform, no end to the technical and human networks that her ex-husband Bish commanded. It is a peculiar American situation, the ex-wife and her ex-husband being concerned for the sake of their son and also for the safety of each one of the little family. American environment is perfectly mirrored.

xix. “We’re leaving tomorrow morning for San Francisco…I’ll tell Jack to send…you take care. Tara keeps in touch here’s Rabi.” (Mukherjee, 2002:256). Bish told Tara that they would be leaving for San Francisco. Bish asked Tara to take care of herself of her security. He told Tara to talk to Rabi. Tara was in New York, Jack Sidhu in San Francisco and Bish and Rabi in Australia. They contact one other and that is how the world became smaller and smaller for every one of them, American life style is noticed. The exchange between the son and the mother takes place. Life is good for Rabi but Tara warns him that life is dangerous. The threat of terrorism is ever hanging in America. The gangs of criminals and smugglers have taken the world to ransom. Individuals are not safe but are always in danger. This situation in America is unfolded here.

xx. “I was about to answer, Bish! What you eat, what language you speak, where you sleep- in our world they meant everything, but we’re not there anymore, here Dharma and duty, they don’t mean a domed thing”. (Mukherjee, 2002:266). In the context of Indian culture, the food, the language and the place of sleep and other matters were considered significant. In the context of the modern culture, the culture in America these matters do not matter at all. Individuals are free to do whatever they desire to do. They are free to wear, to eat, to speak and to sleep in whatever manner is preferable to them. Personal liberty is given full scope. America celebrates freedom in every walk of life. Tara desired to tell Bish that the matters considered a part of duty, of social conduct, of Dharma, the way of life in the Indian context have no contextual relevance in the American
environment. Even the old context has become irrelevant as she desires to illustrate through the careers of the three sisters, and what they ate, they dressed. They looked alike, their careers are different. Tara desired to tell Bish that the three different careers of Bhattacharjee sisters illustrate how it is an illusion to seek lifelong similarity in their speaking, looking, dressing alike. The American context emphasizes the personal uniqueness of every individual. The careers of three sisters illustrate the same.

6.4 The Phase of Alienation

When Tara starts experiencing cultural shocks, as a result, she begins in re-establishing new relations which led her sense of alienatination.

i. “For ten years I kept the graduation photo of Bishwapriya Chatterjee, my husband-, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur on our nightstand…….it earned my not unenthusiastic acceptance of him as husband.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 7). That was the image of the morning and the last icon of the night. She adored him from morning to night, the first act of worship to the last before going to sleep. There were changes of the houses even they changed the countries but the portrait remained the same during all these ten years of her worship of her husband. Now that has stopped She had obtained her divorce from him.

ii. “He had that eagerness and a confident smile that promised substantial earnings.” (Mukherjee, 2002:.07). Bishwapriya’s career was excellent. He was been educated in the prestigious IIT. His friendship with Chester Yee resulted in using the broadband in the computer system and Bish established his company. The smile promised substantial earnings. He was confident of his earning accumulating and amassing wealth through his devices and his multinational company his intelligence and his enterprise. Tara’s father negotiated and she accepted. It was a successful marriage negotiation. The stage of alienation makes Tara to get her divorce. The
marriage that was successful ended in this breakup. There developed an unidentified fault line due to the sense of alienation.

iii. “What do they know of the needs of a modern woman? The simple answer could never satisfy me. I wasn’t, perhaps I’ll never be a modern woman.” (Mukherjee, 2002:27). Now Tara was thirty six year old divorced kindergarten teacher. How could any woman submit to someone else’s choice, even loving parents? Obviously a recipe for disaster, she was thrown into the middle of a modern woman enigma-Tara’s enigma. The needs of a modern woman were different and Tara’s needs were totally different. She being a strong individualist, a progressive confident woman, Tara is now known to those who know her as she is also like them who have passed through at least one unarranged marriage and who are raising at least one child. These divorcee single moms do not know Tara opting for divorce and separation in spite of her successful marriage.

iv. “They have no idea of the wealth I came from…and the money I now control. To them, I am single mom raising a boy and halfway teaching school. “(Mukherjee 2002:27). They do not have any idea about how wealthy Tara is. For them, she is a single mom. She is single mother raising her son. They have no idea why Tara has obtained the divorce. Tara could have remained in Atherton but her independence of and her strong will confidence made her a free woman. The fact is that she has alienated herself from the domestic housewife.

v. “For Hindu girls, entry to an exclusive catholic convent school depended upon exhibiting flair without flash, class without pretension, a society name without notoriety.” (Mukherjee, 2002:28). Girls from the Hindu families from cities like Calcutta depended on a convent school. Their entry depended on society, name, class and flair. The girls educated in these schools would move in social circles and could fetch a good marriage partner. Learning of social etiquettes enabled them to move on even to the foreign countries. That would enable the girl to find a place in the group of
elites, intellectuals and become socially and financially well off. Covert educated girls like Tara in return had poise, proficiency in English and French and good social contacts. Their future became guaranteed. This alienated them from the culture in which they were born and brought up. This alienation from the culture made Tara decide on her own about dissolving her marriage and obtaining the divorce from Bish.

vi. “Bengali culture trains one to claim the father’s birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh, her home. Although she has never seen it…. Mishtigunj village even few…however seen.” (Mukherjee, 2002:33). Tara makes general observations about how the father’s birthplace is claimed as one’s own home by the son or the daughter trained in Bengali culture, they might have never seen the place of the father’s birthplace. Mishtigunj is Tara’s mother’s desh being her father’s birthplace. The place was never seen by Tara’s mother. She was already alienated from the place physically far, mentally she remained connected with the place. Tara mentions this to her American friends. They call her over determined, region, language; caste and sub caste are the identifying markers in the Indian culture, these details point to the “Identity marks” of the individual belonging to the Indian culture. This is over determination in view of Tara’s American friends; she considers their view to be right.

vii. “When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises and feelings of alienation, I of course am right.” (Mukherjee, 2002:33). Tara points to her American friends that because of the lack of information about such identity marks Americans have problem of identity crisis and feeling of alienation. One’s business in the Indian context is declared by one’s name, In old times, the costume, the headgear too marked the identity of an individual in India, The situation for Tara had changed because of her arrival in America. This had brought her to the stage of alienation.

viii. “Indians and most Europeans shudder at the breezy informality of American strangers, the dinner hour *Hi Tara* phone calls from telemarketers. It’s
obnoxious, but easily retracted and never frightening.” (Mukherjee 2002:37). The telemarketers use informal expressions in a set purpose. This breezy informality is not liked by most Europeans. This informality is not frightening as such. The sense of alienation or not belonging is not erased by such informality which is not liked by most Europeans. This informality is not frightening as such. The sense of alienation or not belonging is not erased by such informality which is prompted by congenial intentions. The use of “auntie” made as an intimate familial term was rather strange. The person addressing her so was meeting her for the first time. She had no knowledge of even the existence of the visitor. His addressing her as “auntie “was felt by her to be an assault on her. He claimed to be Padma’s son and that was a revelation to her. This brings out the sense of alienation that Tara has experienced in this encounter with Chris Dey.

ix. “In our first months in Palo Alto, Bish was the same. At East until he was told by a mean-monthed cashier at a supermarket to back off and asked by a waiter at a Pizza Hut to take his business elsewhere.” (Mukherjee, 2002:71). Tara remembered what her parents used to do. Tara remembered that the clothes for the laundry were counted and even checked. She remembered how her father did re-adding and rechecking the bills. In the first months stay in Palo Alto, Bish, her husband, continued the same practice of re-adding, checking, calculating the totals in the bills. This was not at all liked by workers in the establishments like the supermarket or the eatery like Pizza Hut. He was told by a cashier in a supermarket not to do it. A waiter at a Pizza Hut told him to take his business elsewhere. This shows that the practices that was routine in India and was not considered objectionable, was considered objectionable and out of the way in America. The sense of alienation is noticed.

x.“Bish never found a cheater, but I don’t think he has given up his checking and rechecking.” (Mukherjee, 2002:71). The practice of checking and rechecking is a matter of caution and vigilance in India, but in America it is
taken as a mark of distrust. That is how the practice causes a sense of alienation. Tara does not do this but Bish must still be doing that in his head. The sense of alienation from the situation around is noticed.

xi. “When Bish and I first arrived at Stanford as a young married couple, he wanted me to work in the library, then join him (thought like most Bengali women, I didn’t drink liquor, beer or wine) at the standard pub.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 81). Tara came to Stanford University campus with Bish, who was dazzling his teachers and colleagues with his brilliance. He expected her to work in the library and then to join him at the student pub. This excited Tara as that meant her coming out of India to the modern world on an American Campus. The stage of alienation had set on in this arrangement devised by the young couple. In her departure from India she was waiting for the experience of getting alienated from the native country. She desired to come to and join the wider world. She travelled to find a new kind of life, a new culture waiting for her, she felt liberated when she came to this world. She felt that was the premise her marriage held for her coming out of the Indian culture to experience wider and liberated life in the American culture.

xii. “Bless Daddy and Mummy they found me the only man in the world who could transport me from the enchanted garden of Bollygunge to Stanford University in the early 1980s, which was to count as one of the intellectual wonders of the modern world.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 81). Tara came to the campus of the American University from the gardens of Bollygunge. That meant her transport from the traditional Indian culture to the modern culture of America. That was the stage of alienation from her native culture and her getting into the new culture of the modern world. Tara got alienated from India on account of the marriage that her parents arranged.

xiii. “How could we have allowed the instinct bred within us over the centuries to draw lines…… ever sharper distinctions?” (Mukherjee, 2002: 133).
The instinct of drawing lines, distinctions was bred over the centuries. Those infinite lines were marked through the tradition built up through centuries in the cultured environment of her native country. It was imperative that such lines were never to be crossed. The generation of girls of good family gave priority to caste, duty and family reputation and followed their obligations. They put these matters before and above self. This caused Padma failing in her love. She has to abandon her love, her lover and her child. That alienated her from that environment which forced her to behave like that.

xiv. “Very well…. Tara. Let me give you a hardheaded answer…. as Indians agree these are cultural anomalies here, but under California law,….. they don’t rise to criminality.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 142). Jack Sidhu the police officer of SFPD was approached by Tara and she disclosed the details of Chris Dey affair. In his view, it did not appear to be a criminal case but a matter of domestic misunderstanding. There are of course cultural anomalies. That gives rise to the sense of alienation from the native culture. The differences in the two cultures become obvious here. Padma and Ron come together; their love flourished and was fruitful. Chris Dey was the intruder in Tara’s house. Tara suspected something fishy in his appearance at her place in San Francisco. That surprise visit marked the alienation of those involved from the culture of the native country. Atherton is the stage in the cross cultural encounters.

xv. “A teenage mother panics and covers up the fact she ever gave birth? ….. but it looks to me more like a matter for the courts than the police.” (Mukherjee, 2002:142).Jack Sidhu tells Tara that the case she has brought up is more or less a matter for the courts. The guilty father cannot describe his son’s apperance and the mother gets panicky over the birth of a child. These facts are sufficient to alienate persons and both Padma and Tara have become alienated from the native culture.
xvi. “Modern calamities, losses, and disappointments that seem inconsolable are minor indeed compared to the suffering of giants on battlefields in the immemorial past.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 150). In the mythological stories of the past the sufferings were great, the sufferings were those of the giants. Everything was on a grand scale. There were battles among the powers and the giants on the battlefields. The entire universe would be participating in the conflicts. These were so grand and great that the calamities losses and disappointments of modern times appear to be minor, small. The suffering of the past appears inconsolable while in comparison with those the modern tragedies appear to be insignificant. This is how there has been a great transition from the past to the present. That is the process of alienation.

xvii. “We took our comfort, or moral instruction, from the glory and folly of the gods.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 150). Consolation came from comparison. Every earthly tragedy is a shadow of something greater from the previous time. Moral instructions came from the glory and folly of the gods. That was how men got consoled in the past on account of the dependence on the myths of the past. Today, that prop has been removed. People have become alienated from the past. The tragic events of the modern times are a bad day in the office or bad scores in the tests. In the past such events were punished with the removal of the head and replacement with an elephant’s head. That belongs to the past now. We have moved further, we have moved all the way. We have become alienated from our past from the native culture.

xviii. “During our divorce, the lawyers have advised us that mutually assured destruction was built into the California statutes and should not be tampered with. They were appalled, or assumed, by our innocence.” (Mukherjee, 2002:260). Tara and Bish married when Tara was nineteen years old. She was now thirty six years old. Their marriage lasted for ten years. Then Tara demanded divorce and when the case was in the courts their lawyers advised them that there was provision in the California law for precautionary measures about the personal liability in the event of damage
or destruction of interests of either husband or wife if such an eventuality cropped up. Both Bish and Tara were not aware of these. They belonged to the Indian culture. They did not think of the eventuality of a possible break-up. They had not taken such precautions. They now realized that they were alienated from their own traditional culture.

xix. “American contingencies like divorce simply had not occurred to him. You married, you had a son, you provided for the family and if you provided very well, everyone was happy. Or at least unhappily bottled up”. (Mukherjee, 2002; 260). Bish did not think about a contingency like divorce. He continued with the traditional line of thinking in terms of marriage, birth of a son, provision for the family. At least these would keep everybody happy or at least happily bottled up. He never thought anything different from such traditional line of thinking and action. He did not realize the sense of alienation that has enveloped the married life with Tara. Tara too was engrossed with the traditional thinking. She got alienated after ten years of marriage. Apparently there appeared to be no ground. The sense of feeling alienated made her act in the way she acted.

xx. “The Tree Bride, the aged virgin who did leave her fathers house until the British dragged her off to jail, the least known martyrs to Indian freedom is the quiet centre of every story. Each generation of women in my family has discovered in her something new.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 289). Tara Lata Gangooly who lived in Mishtigunj in East Bengal (Bangladesh) was the bride who was married to a tree as before the scheduled wedding, prospective bridegroom died of snakebite. She was the Tree-Bride, the virgin Bride. She lived in her father’s house throughout her life. She never left it except when she was dragged to the prison by the British rulers. She spent her life in social service, great humanitarian work and in supporting the National Movement actively. The aged virgin died a Martyr’s death. In each generation, her sacrifice was interpreted in glorious terms by the women of Tara’s family. Tara too came to her after realizing that she had
become alienated from the quiet centre of her cultural roots. She has broken from the tradition in many ways but now that sense of alienation strongly impressed on her the need to find her identity through the search of her roots. Tara in California realized the need to search her identity through the re-discovery of the Tree-Bride and that is her mission for which she has come to India this time after that Chris Dey incident. Her sense of alienation has directed her on this quest for identity and the finding of the roots.

6.5 The Phase of Assimilation

Finally, the protagonist accepts American way of life and gets assimilated with that culture.

i. “Now I live in a part of San Francisco called Upper Height, or Cole Valley, with Rabi, and do volunteer work in a preschool two blocks away.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 24). Tara was born and brought up in Calcutta, India. She belonged to the family of the Tree-bride Tara Lata Gangooly from Mishtigunj. She married Bishwapiya Chatterjee when she was nineteen and came to California. Now she is a divorcee. Bish is her ex-husband, Rabi is her son and Andy is her live-in partner. She is now assimilated to the American way of life. At the age of thirty-six, this single mom lives in Upper Height or Cole Valley, which is a part of San Francisco. It is a beautiful landscape in the neighbourhood of Golden Gate Park and Twin Peaks. Tara’s place of residence and her neighbourhood bring out the fact that she has assimilated herself with American Culture.

ii. “The area is given to summer fogs that make conventional gardening impossible, but that reminds me, not unhappily, of mountain resorts in India.” (Mukherjee, 2002:24). The view is foggy and this view from her residence made Tara go in for this place. These fogs make gardening impossible but Tara is reminded of the mountain resorts in India. Tara has bought this place to settle with her son Rabi. She lives there with her son.
and Andy the balding red-bearded biker Hungarian Buddhist, re-fit carpenter, her “live-in” partner. That indicated her total American assimilation. The back porch and the park commanded a view of Berkeley, the Oakland Hills and the top spires of the Golden Gate Bridge. Tara has become Americanized. She has totally adjusted herself to the American way of life and culture. Tara is assimilated in her American neighbourhood.

iii. “We’re on a first name basis with all the grocers, the restaurant owners, the clerks at the hardware store, the art farmers, the wine merchants, the pharmacists, the hairstylists, the boys at the video rental. Their names inspire me. Selim, Moh. Safid Ali…” (Mukherjee, 2002: 25). Tara is a familiar person in the neighbourhood. She knows all the shopkeepers, Grocery-stores, Restaurants, Pharmacy store, hair-stylist and video-rental shos. She knows the owners and the boys with their first names. She has become a part of the block where she lived and now she has found that she was happy with her surroundings. She did not want to leave it. Tara found that the shops were owned and staffed by the Palestinians. They got up early and closed late in the night. They provided the needs and anticipating what they desired satisfied those. Tara was therefore at home in this area. She was completely assimilated in the American culture.

iv. “The rumour was on his last morning in Hungary old man Petcocz had taken clippings from the vines he cultivated.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 74).

In Hungary, old Petcocz cultivated vines, when he left Hungary and came to America on the last morning in Hungary; he clipped the vines and brought the clippings with him to America. He kept them alive. He planted them in the soil. Then the family pooled resources together and brought some land and raised the grapes there. The grape cultivation was successfully transplanted from Hungary to America. That was how the Petcocz family got themselves assimilated in America. The Hungarian old man Petcocz planted his vines and that made his family get established in California. His vines flourished, grew and became famous in the country. The product was
so much in excess that the family established a small winery. Their enterprise succeeds and the members of the family become assimilated in the American Culture as a well off family.

v. “We were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 77). Tara becomes intimate with Andy. She was rather worried about Andy’s size. They belonged to different ethnic and cultural groups. He was Hungarian-American and she was Indian-American. He belonged to that tradition with which Tara’s tradition did not match absolutely. She feared about his size. Both of them were exotics to each other, they did not have any familiar moves to depend on. Her fascination for him was not approved by any common bond. Yet she felt attracted towards him intimately. This was her alienation from the native culture and her urge to be assimilated into other culture.

vi. “He was twice the mass of any man I’d ever known, a bear-man, red-bearded, woolly armed, hairy-chested, gently spoken but, I was sure given to violence.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 77). For Tara, Andy was twice bigger than any man she knew. He was a bear-man to her. His arms were woolly. His beard was red and his chest hairy. Though these differences were there, Tara desired to be intimate with him. He was physically enormous but she desired to be close to this person. Her desire for assimilation prompted her to be close to Andy the Hungarian. Such were the incongruities between the two. The desire of assimilation overcomes these incongruities. Tara gets assimilated.

vii. “When I left Bish (let us be clear on this) after a decade of marriage, it was because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go?.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 82). Tara gives her grounds of obtaining her divorce from Bish. Bish was a successful technocrat and owned CHATTY. He worked hard, provided for his wife and son abundantly and considered himself to be a dutiful husband. She left Bish because her life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. As an
Indian wife she should and would have been satisfied with her lot. She wanted to drive. Where could she go to do that? She desired to be assimilated in American culture, desired to be an American.

viii. “I wanted to work, but people would think that Bish Chatterjee couldn’t support his wife?” (Mukherjee, 2002: 82). Tara left Bish because she was not satisfied in her married life as an American wife. Her assimilation with the American culture was complete. After ten years of marriage, she found that her life was stagnant. She could not satisfy her desires such as driving and working on her own. Her independence was thwarted. She felt as if caged. She felt as if bound to the domestic duties, her house. She wanted to be independent and self-reliant like every other American wife.

ix. “The gap between youngest daughter and eldest, the disparity of our marriage and the paths our immigration have taken, have made us strangers …. People confuse her with Zubin Mehta and all the other famous Mehtas in New York.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 94). Tara and Padma are the youngest and oldest of the three daughters. The disparity of their marriages and the paths of their immigration have made them strangers. Padam’s reaction to Tara’s divorce has hurt Tara. Padma repeatedly stated that Tara’s divorce brought shame to the Bhattacharjee family. People confused Padma Mehta with Zubin Mehta and other famous Mehtas. Such was the gap between the two. Both were assimilated in the American culture but in totally different ways.

x. “It’s a nuisance, she admitted to me but no one can pronounce Bhattacharjee” (Mukherjee, 2002: 94). Padma’s name appeared in newspapers and she sent occasionally the reviews to Tara. Her Americanization was complete. She got credits for her accomplishments. On the other hand, Tara is an American woman an ex-wife of Bishwapriya Chatterjee, the famous Indian technocrat. Both the sisters have made their status in America as American women. Padma is a Television celebrity. She’s on the invitation list when Indian dignitaries arrive for UN functions or Hindi film stars give a New York concert. Tara sometimes spotted her among the
glitterati on the Indo-American television channels that play in California on Saturday morning.

xi. “I was still a little ashamed of myself for having broken my word and gave to the police and worse, depressed from what I’d found.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 149). Andy was a “live in” partner, the Hungarian retrofit carpenter, Zen Buddhist biker. He was concerned for both Tara and Rabi. He has met Chris Dey and had given him a good dressing to keep away from both Tara and Rabi. According to him, Rabi was passing through a critical delicate phase of his personal development. Andy wanted Tara not to go to the police as that would complicate the matter. She promised him that she would not approach the police. She even then went to the police. Jack Sidhu took her case and assured her of making inquires in the matter. She was now depressed. She wanted to discuss these developments with Andy. Tara was obliged to both Rabi and Andy. She had to attend Rabi’s school. She therefore postponed the discussion with Andy till her return from school. Tara is independent in her actions and decisions. She is a tough American as a woman, as a mother, as a divorcee.

xii. “I’d raised the stakes, exerted new presence on that invisible tectonic plate, perhaps causing “Christoper” to do the same.” (Mukherjee, 1997: 149). She would deal with that much later, after coming back from Rabi’s school. She postponed the discussion of the matter with Andy till her return from school. That indicates her assimilation. Something of serious talk over spiced tea should always be left to the close of day, Rabi and I left at the automatic garage door. Tara’s decision to postpone the discussion with Andy would be over the spiced tea. Her American way of life is reflected here.

xiii. “I tracked Rabi down in the theatre and stood a few moments at the back entrance watching my son….. I hadn’t realized how tall he’d become….. He was shouting out instructions to two girls and a boy on stage. The girl was white. “(Mukherjee, 2002: 166). Tara went to Rabi’s school, The counselor
gave her Rabi’s letter. She came to the theatre where Rabi was giving instructions to the two girls and a boy on the stage. It was Rabi who was directing and producing the play. One of the girls was playing the role of Tara. The boy was enacting the character that was Rabi. One girl was white, another Chinese and the boy an Indo-American. It was a play on two sisters. Tara’s Americanization is portrayed through the dramatized version in the play that was Rabi’s. Both the mother and the son belonged to the American set-up. Both were a part and parcel of the American culture now.

xiv. “Outside, the hookers had reclaimed the street. We picked up a taxi that has just dropped a john, as they say. I called Andy, but there was no answer.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 166). Tara and Rabi returned from the school. There was no response from Andy to Tara’s call. The hookers had occupied the street. Tara and Rabi have become totally assimilated in the American set-up in their neighbourhood. Tara has accepted the counsel given to her by Rabi’s counselor. Tara tells Rabi that she liked Rabi’s letter in which he disclosed his sexual orientation of being a gay. Tara’s acceptance of her son’s being gay makes it clear that she has completely become assimilated in the American culture.

xv. “She was kind enough to take him around to parties and introduce him to some of her friends. She’d been in New York may be six months, and she knew everybody. She knew people at the UN, she knew people in the theatre and people on Madison Avenue, and she hung out with a lot of fashionable gay men with antique stores in the village.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 228). Padma Mehta, Tara’s eldest sister, was a celebrity and a woman of influence everywhere in New York. Danny Jagtiani was groomed by her. He has the bucks. He had the talent for making money. He did rise through his hard work and he needed someone to enable him to the circles of the elite and well-off. Padma took him to parties she has contacts everywhere at the UN in the theatre on Madison Avenue and in the village. She knew everyone who mattered in social and financial standing. She was a socialite,
a celebrity a person with power, influence, contacts and talent for the
aesthetic activities. Her total Americanization, her complete assimilation in
the American culture is noticed here.

xvi. “So Padma thought of these parties as a kind of home shopping service for
upscale Indians.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 231). Padma took Tara to the sari shop
and jewelry store and draped her in an attractive sari and made her wear a
nice necklace and quite attractive ear-rings. Padma herself put on these
attractions. The purpose of this was to enable the ladies attending the party
get interested in these items. The recommendations by Padma Mehta, the
celebrity and a fashion icon mattered much to these ladies. They came to
these parties as they got home shopping service of the highest rank. Their
husbands too approved of this practice. The Americanization of the parties
is noticed.

xvii. “There’s an economic benefit for participating merchants, but the social
values for outweigh it”. (Mukherjee, 2002: 231). Merchants participate on
account of economic benefit. The social values are enormous. The parties
help the community to know the latest fashionable stules in saries and
jewelry. It’s not only Bengalis, Tara, said Didi. Danny does the same for
Gujus and Punjabis and Maharashtrians. There’s something going on every
night. Such parties are arranged for other Indian community groups,
something goes on every right. Padma has become completely absorbed in
these activities as a through American.

xviii. “Back inside, Didi was all smiles; her arms open to embrace me.
Apparently, I’d been a stunning success….making a total of nearly
seventeen thousand dollars”. (Mukhjerjee, 2002: 256-57). Padma was
delighted because the party was a good business success. Padma has made
Tara wear the ear-rings and the necklace for displaying these items. Padma
used Tara for the display of the items on sale. Both the items were sold and
the items were sold at atmost the asking price. That was the commercial
success of using Tara as a model for display. She’d taken orders on eight
saries, making a total of nearly seventeen thousand dollars, with her twenty percent, minus some expenses.

xix. “On rainy December afternoon I confided to him a vision I’d had a vision of discipline and self-knowledge and of misfortune turn to new energy.” (Mukherjee, 2002: 280). Bishwapriya was hurt in the explosion in which all the three members of the family-Bish, Tara, Rabi-were made a target. He was recovering slowly, Tara attended him. One December afternoon, Tara conveyed her vision to Bish. He knew that Tara could go on. She was capable of doing something and that she would do it. Tara told him about the vision she had of discipline, self-knowledge and misfortune turned to new energy. Bish was rather worried about Rabi. The assimilation into the target culture was total but the culture of the past continued to haunt her.

xx. “I am not capable of anything so grand- who is? But there is any thing in this world. I might be capable of and that thing has been speaking to me and it is growing increasingly impatient… Bish, I have stories to tell”. (Mukherjee, 2002: 280). That was Tara’s vision. She might be capable of the achievements as grand as making CHATTY, the operating system of the world as Bish had done. Yet there is something of which she is capable and that is nagging her to be allowed to come out. Without that she would explode. She has stories to tell. The stories that have possessed her are-the story of the tree-bride and the story of the moments of intense recollection that she herself experienced. Tara desired to emerge as a writer in order to give relief to whatever is growing impatient in her. “What is the value of passing moments?” he asked… “Their beauty”, I answered without hesitation. To catch the beauty of the passing moment, to capture the moments of intense recollection, Tara would write stories. That was going to be her mission to complete the vision. She realized that she was capable of doing that. She was determined now to achieve that. Tara’s assimilation is completed with her emergence as a writer.
6. 6 summing up

*Desirable Daughters* relates the fortunes of the three sisters-Padma, Parvati and Tara. Padma and Tara have settled in America. Both of them have moved from the traditions and yet they are drawn towards the homeland. Their stories are interwoven with the story of the Tree-bride. Tara-Lata Gangooly. Tree-Bride has turned the tragedy of the bride groom’s death and a lifetime’s virginity into a model of selfless saintliness. These two stories have presented the canvas of life in Calcutta and life in America. These stories bring out the cross-cultural encounters. The reflection of the culture of the East of India is noticed. The other culture-the culture of the modern world of technology, individual liberty and equality of opportunities in America is mirrored. Padma and Tara both have become assimilated in the American culture. The stages of alienation from the native culture and the stages of getting assimilated in the other culture have been presented. The traditional bonds of the old culture are broken. There is a constant departure from the native culture and there is continuous moving into the modern culture. The physical and psychological transition from the past to the present is highlighted in *Desirable Daughters*. Padma in New York, Parvati in Bombay and Tara in San Francisco have become “desirable and though separated with the cross-cultural experiences, continue to emerge as charming Bhattacharjee girls.”