Chapter 4
Strangers in Strange Worlds

An important concern of postcolonial literature is related to locale, dislocation and relocation. Displacement or dislocation often leads to a sense of Nowhereness and identity crisis. The history of removal, either compulsory or voluntary, from the place of origin is as old as human history. The Bible begins with and narrates stories of exile. Abraham, the father of believers, is regarded as the prototype of the alienated man. John Keats has romanticised the agony of a culturally dislocated individual through the homesick Ruth in an alien soil. Psalm 137 pours out the nostalgia of Israelites for Zion. Global interaction and technological development have made immigration more universal and pertinent. In the contemporary literary scene “biculturalism has became more than a theme: it has become a mode of perception.”

The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences. The effect of the transfer will be harsh upon the people than the society they enter. It takes the people out of traditional environments and transplants into a strange ground where strange customs and climate prevail. The customary modes of behaviour becomes inadequate to confront the problems of the new atmosphere. They are compelled to readjust and redefine themselves. With the old ties snapped, man faces “the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives often under harsh and hostile circumstances.”

In transplantation, between the severance of the old roots and the establishment of new mooring, the immigrant exists in an extreme situation the shock of which sometimes reaches down to generations. The immigrant has the same chances of success as that of an uprooted plant. Some face an instant death in an uncongenial soil, some wither away or have a hollow or bare existence while the fittest survive and rejuvenate getting firmly rooted. The younger the plant, the greater are the chances of survival; the older the immigrant, the difficult are his chances of a re-rooting.

Uprooting and transplantation to a new locale place the person amidst shifting
images of the self, between a yesterday which is always alive within and a today in another country and culture which is now termed as the host society. Each immigrant, regardless of sex and nationality, passes through a traumatic transitional stage. Though millions move, the experience of migration is essentially individual. Loneliness, despair, estrangement from familial grounds and their own insignificance in the new realm haunt the migrants.

Exile, refugee, diasporic, expatriate and immigrant are related yet slightly different terms concerning the domicile of a person. They indicate the ideologies, choices, reasons and compulsions which govern the cause of migration. Kernel to all the terms is the basic idea and experience of home. The word home has more connotations than just a dwelling place: it is where one belongs to. It is his national, cultural and spiritual identity, the soil that nurtures him, his language, his security and part of his consciousness. Home is above all, “that ambience in which one’s childhood has flowered and matured into youth.”

Exile is loss of home. Exile from blissful home and its effect is deeply embedded in every human psyche right from the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden. In Afro-Asian countries colonialism and colonial education have resulted in alienating people from their culture and traditions and have made them exiles in their own lands. Industrialisation and consequent urbanisation have made many a villager an alien in his own soil. While disaster and failure drove the early immigrants, mostly peasants, to cross the Atlantic, for Indians the reasons vary. The more “endemic the experience of deracination the more magical the connotation of the word home.” It becomes the symbol of all that has been lost. Separation enforces the meaning of home on the exile.

Between those who stay and those who leave there is a difference. The sense of estrangement influences our notions of home. The land we leave lives in us as a memory, a dream, a nostalgia that to which we think we belong, but unfortunately no longer. According to Arnold Itawaru, “To be an exile is considerably more than being in another country. It is to live myself knowing my estrangement. It is to know that
I do not belong here.” It is literally an uprooting and often as withering in its effect on the mind and spirit which is deprived the sustenance that the native soil provides. The word exile evokes multiple meanings which cover a variety of relationships with the motherland—alienation, forced exit, self-imposed exile, political exile etc.

The experience of an exile or expatriate grants a special insight which is not available to an insider. Majority of exile writers nostalgically present their native land. Like their protagonists, the expatriate writers are cut off from home and accustom themselves to an alien culture. The central element in the expatriate experience is “the cultural space which the expatriate occupy and zealously guard against the onslaughters of the host culture.” The expatriate writer is the representative of the modern man, who according to Alvin Toffler, is “the new nomad disinterested in getting rooted.”

The notion of occupying a country is central to expatriate writing which establishes its own centrality while locating itself on the margins of two cultures. The creative focus of literary culture itself seems to have been shifting from the centre to the margin. The great writers of the early 20th century like W. B. Yeats, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Saul Bellow, V. S. Naipaul have all been marginal men living with varying degrees of unease in a noman’s land between conflicting cultures.

The word diaspora is literally “a scattering carrying with it the ambiguous status of being both an ambassador and a refugee.” While as an ambassador the migrant is required to project his culture and enhance its understanding, the latter seeks refuge and protection and relates more positively to the host culture. Diasporic writings are invariably concerned with the individual’s or community’s attachment to the homeland. But this attachment is countered by a yearning to belong to the current place of abode. Caught physically and psychologically between two worlds, diasporians remain as transitional beings moving from one cultural space to another. Some respond ambivalently, some attempt to assimilate, while for some others the transitional stage is too excruciating that they withdraw to their old identity. In international literature there are two bodies of writing designated as diasporic; the
descendants of people who uprooted from homelands in the 18th and 19th centuries to be transplanted to other parts of the globe and those from Afro-Asian countries who for economic, social and personal reasons left their homelands. The Indian diasporic community reflects the heterogeneous nature of the Indian culture with its variety and complexity governed by caste, religions and linguistic differences. Yet most of them share a common factor, a sense of rootlessness.

Diasporic has affinities with and differences from immigrant or expatriate writing. It diverges from immigrant writing in its preoccupation with attachment to the homeland. Immigrant writing focuses on the current experiences of the adapted country. While exile or expatriate writing is more immersed in the situation at home and the circumstances that prolong his exile or expatriation than his relationship with the host society, immigrant indicates forward looking attitude. Bharati Mukherjee, an exponent of immigrant sensibility, exemplifies the ambivalences caused by the sudden transplantation from the familiar to the exotic. Drawing a distinction between expatriate and immigrant, Mukherjee opines that an expatriate works hard to hang on to his past while immigration is a process of transformation and net gain. Her life itself is a transformation from the “aloofness of expatriation” as the coloured wife of Clark Blaise in Canada to “the exuberance of immigration” in America. In the Indian context all these terms of migration are valid for the migratory interest during different periods of history have been governed by different or a mixture of factors ranging from freedom from colonial state to economic and personal enhancement.

Migratory experience, though a common contemporary phenomenon, varies from individual to individual depending on his background, education and nationality. It is not a mere physical or geographical journey from one land to another shore, but a severing of the “spiritual and symbiotic ties with his mother country.” Moving from one culture to another he often finds it hard to relocate himself in relation to the centre. The quest to belong to a space to which one can relate emotionally is indeed a painful one. The transition from the familiar frame of reference and
relationship to an alien environment demands a break up with the past. But neither the uprooting nor the absorption can be complete. It is a continuing process passing through various stages of rootlessness, enchantment, bewilderment and nostalgia. One cannot shed his past completely nor can he be nurtured solely by it. Immigration is an involvement with the present.

Commenting on the theme of expatriation Viney Kirpal strikes a difference between Third World emigres and their western counterparts. Originating from societies where bonds with family, community and religion are strong, the Third World emigre carries his ethnic roots with him. Migration from a developed country to another is different from a colonised or once colonised country to the land of the colonised. The feeling of nostalgia is heightened in the coloured expatriate because of the absence of proper treatment in the host country. His marginality often stems from his colour, race and religion. The theme of identity atrophy in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nowhere Man* stems from transplantation of Srinivas from the colonised country to the land of the coloniser and his position as an outcast or unaccommodated alien.

The three factors that collectively determine expatriate adjustment in the host country, according to Kirpal, are the immigrant’s reason for migration, his own ability to adapt to the new environment and his experience in the host country. Reasons of migration vary from lucrative jobs to intellectually stimulating environments. After the initial stages of enchantment comes a period of disillusionment and alienation. Following the primary phase of attraction and superficial adaptation Adit of Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird* gets alienated from his acquired home identifying himself with those “eternal immigrants who can never accept their new home.”*"* The merger becomes difficult for the host often refuses to understand the problems of an expatriate. Yet the immigrant nurtures the hopes of assimilating with the host culture as in a melting pot. Maya of Mukherjee’s “A Woman’s Story” voices the awkwardness an Indian feels in his preassimilation period: “First you don’t exist. Then you’re invisible. Then you’re funny. Then you are disgusting. Insult, my
American friends tell me is a kind of acceptance. No instant dignity here” (The Middleman 26).

The usual thematic core of expatriate writing, the conflict between the native and the alien, the self and the other seems to have acquired a new richness and complexity in the novelistic vision of Mukherjee owing to her “singular dovetailing of the narrative line with diverse perspectives: Indian, feminine and immigrant.” The immigrant perspective may involve an increased awareness of the value of one’s mother country and culture besides a kind of critical distance which the experience of alienation may bring. Affiliation to the culture they have come to “alienates from that which they had left.” Through Tara Catright Banerjee, the protagonist of The Tiger’s Daughter (1971; New Delhi, Penguin, 1990) Mukherjee powerfully portrays a fascinating study of a displaced person in native as well as alien soil.

Cultural dislocation has tremendous impact on the immigrant’s psyche. Culture comprises a prescribed value system or behaviour pattern including rituals and customs. A person’s cultural base becomes virtually a second nature to him. It bestows on him an identity. Identity is defined as “a quality that is partly given to us by others, through their affection, respect and feedback concerning the behaviour in which we engage.” Culture is taken for granted until a confrontation with another social more. The compulsion to assimilate into an alien culture sharpens one’s hitherto dormant attitude to his own culture and it stands as a hindrance to his assimilation. When the new milieu fails to recognize him, an individual become deindividualized.

The immigrant sensibility is always torn between the two differing socio-cultural environments. Like every other immigrant Tara too finds it difficult to adapt to the new culture for confrontation with another society starts the process of destructuring and restructuring of the self. Faced with two heterogeneous environments which are conditioned by the intrinsic value systems of the East and West, Tara sent to Vassar at the age of fourteen for higher education experiences the initial restlessness. The third section of the novel is devoted to Tara’s early
experiences in America and the gradual acculturation leading to a ‘foreign’ marriage. She begins her alien life with doubts, homesickness and a sense of discrimination. The picture of young Tara clutching to the unopened suitcase as her only anchor conveys the bewilderment of the immigrant. Distanced from the familiar moorings the Tiger’s daughter “longed for Camac Street” (10). To her Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake. She thinks of her father’s decision to send his only daughter abroad as ruthlessness. Yet the status of a Banerjee and her training under the Belgian nuns to remain composed and lady like prevent her from a return home in shame. She finds no way to confide in her parents the new pains. Stretched beyond her limits Tara fails to relate to her dormmates. Homesick Tara senses discrimination in their reluctance to share her mango chutney. Little things pain her. She is forced to defend her country before the Americans. None of her prejourney examinations had prepared Tara for this. Alienated and withdrawn Tara seeks the help of Kali to provide her strength not to break down.

When external pressures become unbearable the immigrant, in order to overcome psychological crisis of his identity, often clings to his past, to his community. With no one to alleviate her tension Tara clings to her India when the extraordinary nature of New York drives her to despair: “On days when she had thought that she could not possibly survive, she had shaken out all her silk scarves, ironed them and hung them to make the apartment more Indian” (34). Her later metamorphosis to a pseudo bedside intellectual is only an offshoot of her attempt at overcoming the mounting sense of estrangement and inferiority. To prove her modernity she attempts at discussing population control methods though refrains from any discussion on the harsh realities of life.

America introduces her to novel experiences. The milk cartons and the food vending machines, instead of enchanting her, only create ripples of terror. Mukherjee skilfully compares Tara’s initial inexperience in America to the panic of the Australian visitors in India during Tara’s childhood who were asked to use water instead of toilet paper. The thought of beggars in the streets, which is contrary to her
expectation of a foreign country, makes her physically sick. Her sickness can be attributed to signs of depression indicating a sense of insecurity at Vassar alone during the vacation. A nervous breakdown is averted by the timely intervention of the counsellor. Life in New York intensifies her fears and drives her to despair. The xenophobia which an Asian feels abroad is experienced by Tara in her loneliness for she has heard of girls like her being knifed in elevators. With no wish to get acculturated Tara desperately seeks to preserve her ethnic identity.

In immigrant fiction the recurring motif of assimilation as an ideal is represented as the marriage of two cultures: the coloured immigrant and the white partner. The socially, emotionally and spatially disturbed psyche caught between the pulls of different polarities harbours all hopes on marriage. But the deliberate attempt of appropriation of a new space does not totally annihilate the cultural difference. Essential difference emanating from their inner territory cannot be soothed by a fluidity of texture. Despite a love marriage Tara fails to function as a bridge between the two worlds for she is incapable of communicating the finer nuances of her culture, family and life in Calcutta to David. Further, marriage does not mitigate her feeling of insecurity: “Madison Square was unbearable and her husband was after all a foreigner” (120). The ideal relationship does not endure because what begins as great passion dwindles to disaffection and estrangement.

With the passage of time, the memory of the mother country becomes increasingly romanticised and idealised. Oscar Handlin opines that as the passing years widen the distance, the land the immigrant leaves acquire charm and beauty. Tara too envies her more stable, more predictable pre-American life. Tara places all her hopes on her long preplanned trip back to India to ease all hesitations and shadowy fears of time abroad. But returning to the country after a gap of years only accentuates the feeling of rootlessness as the difference and distance between the westernised Tara and her people and country dawn on her. The immigrant remains rootless despite having experienced two cultures, two countries, two homes and two men.
Ideally though the expatriate should be able to write objectively and accurately about both countries, Mukherjee often becomes satiric in her portrayal of Tara. Juxtaposition is a technique that is adopted by the novelist to bring the two countries together. Tara’s response to the same sight both before and after her exposure to the West shows the change that has come over her. Seven years ago she was full of admiration for everything Indian. The very houses on the Marine Drive which seemed fashionable on her way to the airport now appall her with their shabbiness. The journey home is an occasion for experiencing the sliding of identities experienced by the expatriate. The drabness of the city which she never noticed before affronts now because her outlook has altered. The sickness she feels at the overcrowded railway station which seems to her “more like a hospital” (19) reminds her of David and thereby America. After years of acquaintance with planes, now contrary to her expectation, the train ride depresses her. According to F. A. Inamdar, “Tara’s efforts to adapt to American society are measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life.” Her supercilious attitude in the air-conditioned compartment to Calcutta makes her critically and ironically observe the companions as ruiners of her journey. She is frightened by their capacity for anger on trivial matters. Her refusal to take any food or even coke on the train suggests her fear of getting polluted. The thought of her husband at such moments reflects the alien culture which has become almost a second self to her. The alien land has become more of a home to her that she does not know which is her real home.

Westernisation has made her a critic of India. Her first stepping on the native land fills her with disappointment. The deteriorating social changes coupled with her own attitude to poverty and filth aggravate her discomfort. The corrosive hours on the Marine drive and the inexorable train journey make her “an embittered woman she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offence” (25). Even the scenery outside becomes alien and hostile. Tara’s experience in Calcutta is no less discomforting. The squalour and confusion of the Howrah station outrages her. Surrounded by the army of relatives who profess to love her, vendors ringing bells,
beggars pulling at sleeves and children coughing on tracks Tara feels completely disoriented.

Mukherjee analyses the anatomy of change in the city of Calcutta to comment on Tara's "search of an Indian dream."¹⁸ Seven years have changed Calcutta from an oasis of peace to the centre of political turmoil. Her earlier experience with strikes which definitely lacked the melodrama of the present does not equip Tara in any way to get in tune with the violent demonstrations. Instead of the much longed for Satyajit Ray film like Bengal she confronts a drab, dirty, disturbed city. The romanticised notions of the emigre about his native land gradually wanes when confronted with reality.

In the process of assimilation and recreation of a new personality demanded by the new culture, the immigrant often becomes alien to his native culture. The institution, rituals and even language seem to Tara as strange, meaningless and obscure. Her sense of alienation is deepened by her inability to participate in the religious ceremonies at home. The fact that she cannot remember the next step of the ritual is considered as her severance from the cultural heritage: the inherited racial, religious and cultural practices. Caught in the void between two contrastive worlds Tara feels a spiritual death: "It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of the prescribed action, it was like a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center" (51). The inability to sing the bhajans of the past has far reverberations on her psyche than mere oblivion. An invisible spirit or darkness has altered her. Yet the term darkness for American culture hints a deep yearning to be an Indian despite the restructured self. Marriage has made her an intruder into the puja-room for she sees herself as the unwelcomed Australian who had been successfully prevented entry into that room during her precontaminated stage.

The culture shock that Tara experiences as a westernised Indian woman is influenced by her gradual disillusionment with the Calcutta of her early youth. Mukherjee leads her protagonist, with the precision of a newspaper reporter, "through a series of adventures and misadventures"¹⁹ in her homeland. Her sudden
resolve to leave Calcutta is determined by four interlinked incidents: the visit to the burning Ghats with Joyonto Roy Chowdhari, the picnic to the factory, the unpleasant experience at the summer resort in Darjeeling and finally seduction by Tuntunwala. The trip to the funeral ghats which introduces her to the wild man in loincloth reading palms, shows her inability to adjust with the unfamiliar. The depression which fails to be immersed in the delicacies of the Kapur’s restaurant is only amplified by the trip to the factory. It brings in an awareness of her segregation. Even her tongue has got conditioned to the taste of the West. While the others relish their food Tara can only wonder at the speed with which their plates become clean. Because of her hypersensitivity the picnic arranged to boost her spirit turns to be disastrous when she makes a fool of herself through over imagination at the sight of a snake in the pool.

The visit to a real bustee in the company of Joyonto reiterates how dangerous Calcutta has become than she remembered. The exposure to ugliness and danger makes her regret her acceptance of the invitation. The encounter with the leper girl who almost touches her takes away all her carefully trained discipline of mind and body. The summer journey to Darjeeling further augments her misery because of the rude and impudent attack on her by some Bengali tourists who make advances to her with obscene remarks. Unaccustomed to such violence, the incident marks her holiday dismal inspite of the magnificence of the mountains. What is begun by them gets culminated by the seduction at the hands of Tuntunwala at the Nayapur Guest House.

That “Tara’s mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities - one of an Indian and the other of an American”,20 is witnessed by her constant comparison between the native and the host country. At home she finds herself harbouring mutually contradictory emotions of love, sympathy and hatred seeing people like Aunt Jhana who attempts miracle-healing for her child. The ambivalent attitude to the city of Calcutta itself signals her double attitude. Calcutta offers a solidity and consolation that she has never been able to receive anywhere. In the light of her old
city New York is seen as a gruesome nightmare. While it is hard after the warm reception by parents and friends to think of the 120th street apartment as home, witnessing the riot-driven Calcutta she wishes she had not come without her husband.

The double-mindedness gets precipitated in her attitude to religion also. While she complained in New York she could not pray, she clung to Kali for protection. The same Tara who feels a heathen at the ancestral house is able to share piety with her mother at Darjeeling. Among the crowd of vulgar worshippers of Kanabala Mata she finds it easy to love anyone. The pious atmosphere removes all her instinctive suspicions, fears of misunderstanding, her guardedness and atrophy. The growing antipathy towards Antonio Whitehead and her congeniality towards the Indians imply the gradual ascendancy of the old repressed self. The rising tension between Antonio and her mother helps Tara to objectively analyse her own behaviour. To her friends at Catelli she must have been so naive, dangerous and provocative as a foreigner. Yet the effort to strike roots remains unsuccessful for the violence of Tuntunwala. It instills only a bitterness which determines her decision to leave India, the India of rioters and molesters.

Shyam M. Asnami states that the strength of the modern literary imagination "lies in its evocation of the individual's predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and his quest for identity." Homecoming aids Tara for self-assessment. She realises that it is "impossible to be as bridge for anyone" (144). Her attempt to pose as a link between the Afro-American visitor Washington McDowell and Camac Street fail because the visitor fails to relate to her. To the foreigner she is just another Indian. The facts of an apartment on the fringes of Harlem, an American passport and an American husband do not assist in equating her to the young American. While it is easier for a casual visitor like McDowell to gain acceptance to an Indian family Tara finds herself a misfit in both the communities. The visit to the Belgian nuns at the St. Blaises where she was "taught to inject the right degree of venom into words like 'common' and 'vulgar'" (57) establishes the fact that while she has become less Indian, they have become more Indian in colour and accent.
Tara shares the predicament of Maya the protagonist of the short story “The Tenant.” Maya is portrayed as one who has slept with married men, nameless men, with adolescent boys but never with an Indian. Even her Brahminness loses its significance in the alien soil. “She has broken with the past. But” (102). The but is a loaded one for the past has not completely broken away from her. She has decentred herself, but has not found (herself) another centre. The strain of high-rope walking tells on her psyche. She wants to escape the confused world of the immigrant. Her changed citizenship and antitraditional ways have not made her accomplish anything. Through Maya and Tara, Mukherjee shows different phases of restlessness, repression of the earlier self and overt acceptance of the present. The compartmentalisation of life into ‘now’ and ‘then’ results only a fractured self.

It is her nostalgic quest for roots that takes Tara back to India. But the gap between the years of exit and re-entry has created too wide a gulf to bridge. Tara is a victim of biculturalism. She has not matured to respond to the demands of the two countries: one of origin and the other of habitation. Hence she remains a hyphenated identity, an Indian-American “suspended between two worlds and rooted in neither.”

Torn between the newly adorned American spirit and the old unsalvageable Indian self the immigrant remains a split psyche. Always troubled by the life she left behind Tara remains a permanent alien.

Mukherjee depicts the psychological traumas of a frustrated, immature housewife who fails to adapt to the cross-cultural world of the American situation in Wife also (1975; New Delhi: Penguin, 1990). While Tara reacts mentally and physically to the changed Indian scenario, Dimple feels disoriented when confronted with an exotic culture. When one returns to Calcutta from New York, the other shifts from Calcutta to New York. The dislocation leads to an act that cannot be envisaged by her Indian environment. The narrative minutely examines the enclosed domestic space and charts the gradual disintegration of her personality.

Displacement in Mukherjee often leads to alienation and search for the self. Instead of focussing on nostalgia she stresses on the changing identities and the need
for refashioning oneself. Dislodgement in the native and the alien environment leads to problems of adjustment. For an Indian woman marriage marks her first cleavage from the familiar. She experiences the pain of separation and her future depends on the attitude of her husband, her in-laws and the congeniality of the environment to herself. Married to an engineer Amit Basu, Dimple Dasgupta transplants herself from Rash Baheri Avenue to Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road. Issue of adjustment starts with the imposition of the ‘Nandini’ identity which demands a repudiation of the past. Not only the inhabitants, but the apartment as a whole fail to satisfy her romantic dreams. To Dimple her second home becomes only a transit where she sojourns with no sense of belonging.

Immigrated to America Dimple fails to strike a balance again between the two juxtaposed worlds—the world she left behind and the adopted world. Part II of the novel concentrates on her experiences in the novel world. Infact her acquaintance with the western world and its uncertainty begins on the last memorable day in India with her introduction to the glamorous world of Calcutta: “Just as she was being introduced to happy people, she was being taken away to become a resident alien” (47). The panic that grips her at the mention of the unfamiliar term hovers over her stay in America. Like a child coming out of the security and warmth of the mother’s womb, the immigrant too needs a reassurance and security once separated from the accustomed base. Coming out of the shelter of their homeland, though the Basus are well received by the Sens at the Kennedy airport, Dimple’s first exposure to the world of America fills her with a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. The size of the buildings and the luxury of the cars thrill her, but the physical appearance of Jyoti with his long hair and sideburns does not project the familiar image of an Indian, a Punjabi. The western environment “with its accelerated pace of life gives thrills, sensations and excitement, but it can not provide happiness or peace.”23

The very first encounter with the reality of the alien world discourages the fragile spirit of Dimple. Her attempt to buy cheese with her inadequate exposure and limited English suggests her momentary feeling of adventure. The unpleasant
experience with the Jewish merchant thoroughly unsettles her. The incident takes her immediately back to Calcutta where she could buy from anyone: Muslims, Christians or Nepalees. She was used to many races and as far as she had money no one would demand her community. The incident makes her aware of the displacement from the stability and security of her home-culture. Failure to relate breeds tendency to withdraw from the unfamiliar. Caught in the crosswire of an American system she cannot understand, the rebuff discourages her from trying similar forays in future. “This encounter with an alien system is enough to cause a rupture in the consciousness which is prone to incur strong response to minor incidents."^^

The party in Manhattan furthers her sense of incompetency. Among the apparently happy crowd Dimple is afflicted by nervousness. Further, the thrill of being offered a job vanishes with the disapproval of Amit. She finds herself trapped in a dilemma of tension between the American culture and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife: between a feminist desire to be assertive and the Indian demand to be submissive. The colourful dreams of American apartments also clash with reality. She had expected American apartments to resemble sets in a Raj Kapoor movie. But the Khanna apartment is hardly bigger than that of the Basus in Calcutta. The nature of the parties they attend strengthens the feeling of the sectarian nature of life in America.

Acquaintance with the West results a change in the attitude of the immigrant. Like Tara who finds herself disgusted with everything native, Dimple reacts negatively to everything associated with home. She who had been confident of first-rate jobs for her honest and intelligent husband now feels less assured amidst the glamorous world of America. With her introduction to Ina Mullick who is “more American than most Americans” (68) Dimple starts measuring herself against the scale of Ina and feels ashamed of her sari-swathed body. Ina familiarises her with new thoughts and styles of living. The dream of the body of Ina in Dimple’s sari at the beach suggests her hidden impulses and fears. Encounter with Marsha Glasser Mookerjee, Associate Professor of Semtic Studies at Bernard and the American
wife of Pranab Mookerjee, forces her to reconstruct a new image of the bold, beautiful and brainy female in the place of the Indian concept of woman only as beautiful or motherly, never intelligent and friendly. A magazine article exhorting people to express themselves to the surroundings inject hatred in her attitude to the Sen's apartment which she had found so lovely on arrival and which symbolized a surrogate India for the immigrant.

The dissatisfaction with everything native diffuses to Amit too who collapses inwardly in comparison with the T. V heroes. Mukherjee charts her “movement from a mute resentment to an escalating disgust and intolerance which finally culminates in disaster.”

Uprooted from the solidity of her Bengal home and planked down in the hectic, liberal yet impersonal world of America, Dimple travails psychological fragmentation resulting from the clash of cultures and the disparity between aspiration and reality. In the first stage of migration, the immediate concern of an immigrant is shelter and a job. Without an occupation for her husband and an address for themselves Dimple experiences the pangs of rootlessness and identity crisis. She feels less confident of her English and loses all confidence in the ambitious dreams of Amit in the “competitive economic jungle of New York.” A feeling of interred defines the contours of her existence in the new country.

The loneliness of an immigrant has the breadth of unfamiliarity and the painful depth of isolation. With no affinity established with Meena Sen and her daughter Anjali, Dimple rots in her isolation. Worst affected by insomnia and suffering the pressures of a jobless husband, she starts brooding over “seven ways to commit suicide in Queens” (102). The security of a job does not guarantee peace. She becomes hard to please. The search for a place to live suggests her unconscious desire to have a sense of belonging. Despite a job and a house the third section of the novel begins on pessimistic notes. The image of the star collapsing inwardly is now transferred to her. Removal from the homely, by-now familiar atmosphere of the Sens at Queens to the Mookerjees only increases her fits of insomnia.

The fact that she has stopped dreaming about Calcutta is misinterpreted by Amit
as part of her Americanisation. When he introduces her to beer to celebrate her false acculturation, she feels more like Marsha Mookerjee. But while at the Sens she suffered from insomnia at the Mookerjees she suffers from boredom and inactivity. The old Calcutta habits of eating warmed food and bathing during the middle of the day give way to new habits: “instead she showered at night, which made her feel different and modern” (113). The rejection of communication with old Calcutta also suggests the distance she has traversed. Further, in her world of inertia in the restless world there is nothing for her to communicate. She does not miss Calcutta, yet finds it hard to live with people who do not understand Durga Puja. In her gradual attempt at acculturation there is an unconscious longing for the traditional rituals. The predicament of Dimple is well-expressed in her own statement: “How could she live in a country where she could not predict these basic patterns where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator” (112). She had expected pain and had warned herself that pain was part of new beginning and had allotted it a special place in the sweet structures of new life. Yet she had not envisaged her mind to be strained beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia, exhaustion and endless indecisiveness. The female proclivity for passivity inertia and mental fatigue is emphasized in Dimple’s lonely existence in Manhattan. The frustration of lonely and dull existence depresses her. She conjures up methods of self-annihilation. A feeling of neglect creeps in. Like the cacti of Marsha that develop brown spots and moulds around the roots, Dimple gradually transgresses to a decay of spirit and will in the unhealthy soil. Mukherjee’s comment on Indian immigrant females is apt about Dimple: “The Indian women walking around in the malls with nothing to do all day, while men are out busily marketing money. These men have a sense of accomplishment. But they do not realise the women have transformed.”

Dimple suffers partly because of her own vague sense of freedom and partly from her hatred towards other immigrant Indians. For the Sens and the Vadheras later in Jasmine America poses no problems for they confine themselves to the expatriate
Indian community and hold on to traditional culture. They harp on the dream of converting dollars to Indian currency and settle in India as millionaires. With no desire to be part of the melting pot, they shelter themselves behind the citadel of their cultural heritage. Writers like Homi Bhabha transforms diasporic scattering to gathering: “Gatherings on the edge of foreign cultures, gathering at the frontiers, gathering in the ghettos of the city centers” and thus shifts the focus from nationhood to culture. But Dimple, inspite of her linguistic and cultural differences, likes to converse with white America.

The attempt to merge with America leaves her traumatized because of her fragile sense of identity and the nature of the people she associates with. Carefully maintained distance from Meena Sen and gravitation towards Ina Mullick highlight the growing need for acculturation. The borrowed clothes only help Dimple in estranging from herself. She assumes that even her shopping carts and its contents are part of her disguise. With no cabbages or egg plants or orange lentils it seems an American cart. In Marsha’s attire she feels she can risk anything and get away with it. Her borrowed identity and sexual adventure with Milt Glasser make her only “much more worse, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indian, left only borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow, without feelings” (200). Like Mr. Bowchick of Mukherjee’s short story “A Father” Dimple allows herself to be outwardly assimilated, but remains a cultural schizophrenic.

Desperate attempt at enhousement leaves Dimple homeless. With the introduction to the two new Bengali couples from Calcutta she finds herself unfashionable according to the Calcutta standards. Thus unrelated to her husband, to the Indian community and the American society she ends up as a “pitiful immigrant among demanding appliances” (86). Traumatized beyond the point of endurance she murders her husband in what she thinks of as an act of assertion, another proof of her “slow and misguided Americanization.”

Jasmine (New Delhi: Penguin, 1990) also charts the route of an immigrant from the Third World to the West, pushed from one disaster to another. Jasmine shares
the culture shock and a feeling of novelty that all immigrants face. For her culture shock in its mildest degree begins at ‘home’ itself when Prakash introduces her to a pattern of life dissimilar to that of her traditional, unsophisticated village. The first shift in space, from the village to the city, consequent on her marriage demands a change in her deeply ingrained attitude of the patriarchal role assigned to woman as the procreator. The “no-dowry, no guests Registry Office wedding” (75) plucks her from the feudal values and transplants on the soil of democracy and new thinking. In an age where the Prime Minister herself has been destroying ancient prejudices with her controversial programme of vasectomy and free uterine loops Prakash Vijh moves out of the joint family abode to an independent flat. While to the old generation love meant control and respect, for Prakash love has been letting go; independence and self-reliance become his litany.

The passage from India to America through enigmatic routes renders many a shocking experience to the young widow of Prakash. The fact that even her widowhood does not shield her from lecherous men like Half-Face shocks her. Yet the admiration of the novel objects, initiated by her dead husband, does not leave Jasmine even in the hour of ignomy at the Flemingo Court. While she purifies herself under the shower, she is marvelled by the luxury of the bathroom that evokes memories of the open-air squatting system of Hasnapur. The sight of a revolving door generates childish wonder: “How could something be always open and at the same time always closed?” (133). America has both marvels and disillusions in store for Jasmine. Just as the sight of beggars in New York shocks the Tiger’s daughter, Jasmine too has her unpleasant experiences. On the streets she sees more greed and more refugees like her. New York seems to her the archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens. Like Dimple she feels cheated by America and feels she has come to America so late. Though familiar with Indian beggars, the encounter with American beggar clawing, grabbing and yelling abuses at her unnerves Jasmine.

While incidents abroad bewilder her the queer nature of the typical Indian house in America too does not fail to shock. Despite the all-Indian, pious atmosphere of
the Vadhera house, Jasmine experiences and witnesses only alienation. Through the inset story of the elder Vadheras Mukherjee highlights another case of disillusionment. In India the groom’s mother most often is an absolute tyrant of the household. But in New York, with a working daughter-in-law, the mother is denied her long-cherished, venomous authority. Long-harboured hatred for her own mother-in-law which she hopes to compensate by ruling over the next generation is not possible for in the Vadheras the wife is never available. Further the parents feel that the country has turned their son to a dumb and the daughter-in-law to barren.

Flushing is not the downtown of the dreams Jasmine had conjured from the aerogrammes back in Jhulundar with the “Celebrate America” stamp. The revelation that the renowned Professorji of Prakash, who implanted American dreams in him, is not a professor but only an importer and sorter of human hair shocks Jasmine who has not liberated herself from the Indian ethos that bestows much respect to gurus. That the hair from some peasant’s head in Hasnapur can travel across the oceans and save an American meteorologist’s reputation is news to her. It establishes for her the phenomenon of rootlessness and motion for humans and their hair: “nothing was rooted anymore” (152). Hence she too becomes a willing partner of the shame by selling her hair for a green card.

Fleeing from the limbo of Flushing her next location seems to Jasmine a paradise. As the experience with America grows the exposure to exotic ideas and patterns of life also becomes greater. At the Hayes, her next station, the fact that Duff is an adopted child cannot be comprehended by a still novice Jasmine: “I could not imagine a non-genetic child. A child that was not my own, or my husband’s struck me as a monstrous idea” (170). Adoption is as foreign to her as the idea of widow-remarriage once upon a time in India. The nakedness of men and women in the hostel rooms of Claremont Avenue make her wonder whether there is any shame in that country. The Hayes in fact has been a wonder house for Jasmine. It introduces her to alien lifestyles. Hailing from a culture of close family relationships her response to Duff’s sleeping alone in a room points to her own trouble of never
having slept in a room alone until she got to America. While her first American hostess Lillian Gordon has been proud to offer her single room and Wylie is ashamed of having no available free rooms, Jasmine fails to make them understand that it is not necessary. Duff becomes the only American at that time she is capable of totally understanding and Jasmine becomes a wise adult without an accent for the child.

Nurtured by and still lingering in an atmosphere of matrimonial fidelity Jasmine is shocked to hear the parting of Wylie and Taylor. She learns another difficult lesson: “In America nothing lasts. . . . Nothing is forever, nothing is so terrible or so wonderful that it won’t disintegrate” (181). Yet Jasmine’s response to the exotic environment and culture is of a positive nature, perhaps, because she is not curtailed by persons, institutions or obligations. Culture collision does not cause a breakdown of the immigrant psyche of Jasmine. It adjusts to America for she wants to emerge as a success. Life in America often seems like a whirlpool to her: “I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphenous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to hold myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I’m on!” (133). Unlike Dimple, she does not let dilemmas discourage her for she is willing to face the fact that life in America is quite dissimilar to her past. Exhibiting remarkable resilience that enables her to adapt to every changed situation, Jasmine sees her past as a net, the kind of safety net travelling trapeze artists of her childhood fell into when they were inattentive or clumsy. Quite contrary to the driver turned Kabul doctor, she is determined not to immure herself for the hope instilled by ‘Vijh and Wife’ transmutes throughout her life.

However accommodating he is, “the link with their cultural past can hamper the acculturation process of the immigrants even though they may realize that they have to shed all their inherited social, religious and cultural prejudices.” There is always an unconscious cultural hangover though she does not allow it to obstruct her future. Even after imbibing American culture traits of Indian culture breaks through again and again. Since she is still shackled to Indian ethos the stories she tells Dulf as the Day Mummy are full of demons and mortals. She admits that Bud has courted her because she is alien, darkness, “mystery and inscrutability” (200). As the partner of
Bud she waits supper for him as Indian wives never eat before their husbands. Like a dutiful Indian wife she takes care of the invalid Bud. Jasmine keeps herself uncontaminated by association with Indians at Iowa except for the two doctors at the infertility clinic. Yet unpleasantness of her foreignness confronts her for the first time when another woman at the clinic repeatedly hints at her unAmericaness by the comment, “you probably don’t know what a Ricky Roll is” (33). In Baden the farmers are afraid to suggest her difference. Yet the dichotomy is that an Indian woman will not let one man impregnate her before marriage and run away with another man, the father of an adopted child. Cohabiting with Bud, the prospect of unwed motherhood does not disturb the already altered attitude.

Jasmine does not allow the tug of cultures to supersede the urge for assimilation. The traditional images of the Indian wife and widow are cast off in spite of the occasional memory of the astrologer’s prophecy that surfaces with every dislocation. The sanctity associated with marriage and motherhood does not hinder Jasmine as she slides easily into the lives of Bud and Taylor. Breaking down all limiting aspects of the past she graduates from vulnerability to power. The expatriate writer combines the past with the present to recreate a future. All writings conceive a ‘living present’ and a past which was ‘present before.’ There can be two relational configurations in such narratives: the assimilatory and the disintegratory. While the former follows “a characteristic paradigm of beginning with rootlessness, repression of the past and an overt acceptance of the present, the latter begins with a feeling of loss, passing through various shades of nostalgia and culminating into schizophrenia.” The assimilatory process fails for Tara, and Dimple transgresses to a schizophrenic whereas a synthesis of tradition and modernity, the past and the present, the East and the West equips Jasmine to carve enough space for her even in an adverse environment.

Man-woman relationship in Mukherjee’s novels “is the outcome of cultural alienation that is a world phenomenon now.” That marriage to a foreigner does not necessarily broaden the prospects of an immigrant is witnessed by the life of Tara.
Cultural disparity hinders a proper understanding of each other. In a land of uncertain relationships, himself a product of a misalliance, "the security of a traditional Bengali marriage could not be explained, not to David Cartwright, not by Tara Banerjee" (The Tiger's 126). The two names suggest the cultural difference and the distance they have to cover to reach a union. Hence Tara finds it hard to explain many aspects of her self and family to David despite her professions of love. As Mukherjee does not explore on their life together, except for some occasional reminiscences of Tara mostly provoked by some unpleasant Indian experiences, one fails to gauge the depth of the inter-caste, inter-continental relationship. The David of the letters seems even to his wife like a figure standing in shadows or a foreigner with an accent who appears on the screen. Back in India she can get him only in bits and pieces and there is no clue whether she has ever known him completely. Each aerogramme creates a momentary panic of trust betrayed or unadmitted mistakes. With fifteen thousand miles in between it becomes hard for her to visualize him. Surrounded by the Bengal Tiger's luxury it is difficult for her to tell a foreigner that she loves him very much. The feeling that David is levelled to a mere stranger adds to the misery. Though Tara never seems to regret her choice the foreign nature of the marriage troubles her smooth homecoming.

Communication gap arising from their differing roots is evident when she deftly manages to hide her feelings, failings and fears from him. Since one belongs to a single parent family and the other to a family rooted and spread like a banyan tree, the husband misunderstands her affection to the family as over dependence. His hostility to geneologies also springs from the same root. Since she has failed to communicate about Calcutta, Camac Street, the rows of gods and the power and goodness of the Bengal Tiger she cannot voice her genuine attitude to the bewildering experiences at home through letters. To Tara a husband is a creature from whom one hides one's most precious secrets. Hence she "had been dutifully devious in her marriage. She had not divulged her fears of mlecha men" (125). The Indian's fears about western habits of physical cleanliness and beef-eating remain undiscussed despite sharing the same house and bed.
While the Indian is rooted in tradition the Westerner is grounded on reason and practicality. Tara is forced to hide a part of her personality from her husband who expects everything to be meaningful. Seeing India as an intellectual outsider David finds many Indian customs and habits foolish: "why three baths a day for God's sake?" he asks (48). Outraged by the class and caste differences in India he objectively analyses her class as steeped in stupid inanities and callousness. While David's analysis of India, coloured by the attitude of the colonizer, concentrates on the squalour and poverty of India, accustomed to the opulence of her class and family Tara has seen only the glamorous side of it. Hence on her return, for the first time, Tara looks at the familiar through the eyes of an outsider.

Marriage saves Tara from the unromantic Indian alliance arranged after much bargaining and discontent "where the groom takes his bride, a total stranger, and rapes her on a brand new flower-decked bed" (125). Yet her attitude to David suggests that she has not discarded the traditional concept of an Indian marriage. The unwritten and rewritten letters to David bear eloquent witness to her eagerness to be moulded in the image of David. She refashions herself to the likes and dislikes of her husband. After the initial experiments with Indian spices she finds herself stepping into the tastes of David. She has often praised herself in New York for cleaning the toilet or bathtubs, a task which was handled by servants at the Tigers. But all her heroic efforts to transform to an ideal wife go unrecognized by a powerfully western husband who has only complaints about her placidity and Indianness. Back at home whatever is perceived by Tara is geared in her mind by the probable oddity of how her husband may assess it. As a wife she is the Dimple of the preAmerican phase.

David's letters, inspite of the concern expressed for her safety in Calcutta, intensifies her depression. The disclosure that he has bought books to understand India exposes her own failure as an ambassador. She is convinced that if he has not understood India through her, then probably he has not understood her either. Her suspicions about Susie Golding and the fear that he no longer wants to mould him in his image issue from the inability to reach out. The final decision to return to England
is not a positive realization of her deep rooted love for him, "instead an escape from the present." Her marriage itself can be understood as an adaptive strategy. It can be seen as a gesture of emancipation, rebellion against traditional arranged-marrriages or her own necessity to get moored. But marriage instead of instilling security and solidity only augments the feelings of alienation. Hence what begins as an act of assertion "peters out to a life of darkness and ordinariness" (28). The alliance does not lead to an assimilation since the East and the West fail to meet.

While Tara considers herself a victim of a love-match, a traditional marriage blessed by parents does not guarantee bliss for Dimple. Though Dimple’s dreams are closely linked with the traditional images of Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends who had walked through fire at her husband’s request, she considers marriage as the harbinger of freedom, love and glamour: “Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinner for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love” (Wife 3). Instead of conferring the long awaited freedom, matrimony becomes only another kind of bondage though there are one hundred and five photographs to prove that it has been perfect. Part I of the novel concentrates on the clash between aspiration and reality. All the premarital fantasies associated with the happiness-love-freedom triad gain significance by its contradiction in marital life. Mukherjee skilfully evokes Dimple’s maidenhood as dress rehearsal. But the play from the beginning itself echoes with discordant notes. Even before the marriage the Basus makes it a point that Dimple Dasgupta has not been their first choice. There were two early hitches: Mrs. Basu objected to the too-frivolous and unBengali name while Mrs. Ghose, her daughter, felt that Dimple was darker than the photograph suggested.

Marriage demands a remoulding of Dimple’s personality. “She learns the necessity of obliterating herself at different levels.” The renaming demanded by Mrs. Basu is a symbolic attempt to wipe out her past and to make her submissive to the will of her husband. When he christens her ‘Nandini’ Amit refuses to see the act as a violation on her individuality. While he in Shakespearean mode asks what is in
a name, for Dimple it is everything, the stamp that has given her an identity all these years. Despite protesting, she finds herself being straight-jacketed into the role of Nandini. She tries to conform to the icon of a conventional wife who transforms to the tastes of her pati. She wears bright colours that please her husband, tries to imitate Mrs. Ghoses’ laughter and manner of articulation, wears her hair up like Mrs. Ghose and even gives up eating her favourite hot green chillies.

Indian women have interiorized certain patriarchal concepts regarding their roles in the family and society. Despite western education and marriage to a foreigner Tara finds herself casting into the mould of self-abnegation and absolute submission. Dimple, an Indian wife married to an Indian man, has no choice but to garb the new identity that is thrust on her. Her romantic dreams of a happy marital life lose their charm as the horrid nature of the Basu flat and surroundings are contrary to her expectations. The gray cotton curtains selected by her mother-in-law indicate the divergent nature of their attitudes to life for she had dreams of choosing their bedroom colours: “That was supposed to be the best part of getting married: being free and express yourself” (20). Throughout her marital life, whether in India or abroad, Dimple is forced to suppress herself.

The romantic, sensitive Dimple and the matter-of-fact, practical Amit belong to two different realms. While she clamours for verbal expressions of his feelings for her, he is not good at articulation. Yet after three months of matrimony when Amit unexpectedly discloses that he wanted a tall, slim, convent educated girl fluent in English Dimple is forced to hold back her pain and inferiority complex. It shocks her that one could be intimate with a person for so many weeks and yet not realize what kind of a person he had really wanted to marry. Yet Dimple strives to rise up to his expectations by walking straight, dressing wisely and attempting to learn English through books for his disapproval means torture and “all her life she had been trained to please” (28).

While on one hand she frantically attempts to be a fitting partner to Amit, it is no secret that he is far from the man of her dreams. Amit does not feed her fantasy
life and remains a mere provider of small material comforts. When the husband belatedly expresses his dissatisfaction with the partner, the wife suppresses her discontent that he does not correspond to the glamorous, virile, ‘collaged’ husband she has constructed out of different magazine ads. Problems of incompatibility with the Basus, suggested from the onset, is further augmented by the success and glamour of her friend Pixie. Amit’s resignation adds to the anxiety of living. Marriage has not provided all the glittering things she had imagined. The cumulative effect of all these frustrations renders her incapable of love. The craving for “the possibility of unattainable happiness ruins her attainable happiness with Amit within marital relationship.”

Hence life with him, both at home and abroad, naturally becomes a big disaster and disappointment.

Pregnancy, the harbinger of meaning to an otherwise insipid life, only complicates the life of Dimple. Continuous suppression of self colours her attitude to pregnancy as an act of violation of her body for “no one had consulted her before depositing it in her body” (31). Imminent immigration exacerbates her hatred since pregnancy seems an impediment to her desire of beginning new in America. Symbolically speaking “in her rejection of the pregnancy she rejects Amit.” Unconsciously she takes it as the only opportunity to rebel against patriarchy for only a woman can deliver a child. It is her first attempt at establishing her own individuality though it is quite an unIndian attitude. The identity that had been rammed on her with marriage arouses only disillusionment and rebellion. Hence immigration seems to fulfil her quest for an identity.

The hiatus between the fantastical wife and the mundane husband widens across the ocean. Even in the liberal attitude of America that respects the individuality of woman Dimple finds herself chained by Amit’s subscription to the conservatory ideology of woman’s confinement and seclusion. The long-cherished dream of becoming a career woman (she had often envied Pixie and ‘new women’) is thwarted by Amit’s comment: “One bread winner in the family is quite enough” (61). Paradoxically the same Amit reminds his wife of what ‘he’ considers as her good
fortune that while he toils she just stays at home looking after a husband. He obstructs her quest for becoming a self other than that of Mrs. Basu, an attempt at making her life meaningful. While he is panicking for an identity in America, she is reduced to find meaning out of the various recipes.

Mutual emotional support and encouragement are necessary ingredients for a successful life in a land away from home. While Dimple heartens the spirit of Amit, her attempt to assuage her fears and forebodings in the company of her husband does not become fruitful. Engrossed in his own job-hunting Amit does not realise her psychological problems and nightmares in the alien land. Communication between them is limited to the level of curt informalities. Inspite of an Indian husband and immigration to the U.S “the essential problem remains the same: the problem of communication, the inability to face up to one’s emotional crack-up.” Amit fails to gauge her deterioration; neither does she reveal about her immoderate day time sleeping for they are “unspeakable failings” (115). In her moods of depression Dimple starts wondering how, living in the same apartment, Amit gets fatter and she thinner instead of levelling out their differences and look like siblings. By the time Amit is conscious of the change he cannot act as a crutches for she has reached the fag end of her grip over life.

Superficially the story of Dimple can be considered as the predicament of an Indian wife on the alien shores. But essentially it is the agony of a soul stifled in its attempt to get the identity established. Her experience transcends that of the individual caught in the vortex of culture shock as Amit seems to believe. While Amit demands his wife to be constructive he overlooks the fact that he is hardly supportive. The attempt to preserve her sanity by assimilating to the American culture with the help of Ina Mullick is thwarted by Amit: “You’re becoming American, but not too American I hope. I don’t want you to be like Mrs. Mullick and wear pants in the house!”(112). Amit’s constraints become a burden on her. Whenever she attempts to assure herself of her ability to reorient herself to the American demands Amit will be beside her in his ill-fitting suits acting as her
conscience and commonsense. While he traces her faults, especially her hints of obstinacy which he contributes to her association with Ina, Amit's criticism invests Ina with the glamour of martyrdom in the rebellious Dimple.

Dislocation has disturbed the image of Amit from that of an intelligent competent to a vulnerable incompetent. America seems to have emasculated Amit. Her hatred for Amit continues with unabated intensity. She wants Amit to be infallible, intractable and godlike. But the pillar of the house back in Calcutta lacks self-assurance in America. Forced to bear the brunt of the anger and frustration of a jobless husband she is only glad about his absence from home. The security of a job too does not dispel the gloom from their lives. Estranged emotionally and physically from a husband who strides out of the building every morning at 9.30 and comes back after 6.15 Dimple prefers the company of the screen.

The reason of immigration usually provides an urge to survive inspite of the adverse condition. If Amit comes to America for purely economic reasons, Dimple does not follow him like Sita following Rama to the forest, but chasing a dream of liberation and fulfilment. Mukherjee brings out the difference between Amit's goal and Dimple's life in an interview: "When an Asian comes to America he comes for economic transformation, and he brings a wife who winds up being psychologically changed." Significantly a major theme in Mukherjee is the psychological transformation wrought out in immigrant women. Though no instrument is able to diagnose her disease, Dimple feels moody and light. It is as if some monster has overtaken her body leaving her splattered like a bug on the living room wall. Mukherjee, with the brilliance of a master craftsman, evokes the pathetic situation of Dimple with the single image of an old toy. Not even her husband realises how hard it has been for her to continue the guise of living "though she was falling apart like a very old toy that had been played with, sometimes quite roughly, by children who claimed to love her" (212). He laughs away her questions regarding suicide. Thoughts of self-destruction are now replaced with those of a homicide for she feels cheated by the unfairness of life. Amit who does not feed her fantasies seems to her
a chimera and decides to do away with it. "The metaphorical and literal converge when Dimple kills Amit by stabbing him seven times signifying the dissolution of her marriage." 

Marriage and consequent cultural transplantation leads Jasmine also to a crisis of identity. In fact for Jasmine it is not a question of identity but multiple identities. As the narrative shifts between the past represented by India and the present represented by America, one journeys through the different ‘life times’ in the protagonist’s unique life. When Jane Ripplemeyer reflects on her life from the eventual location in Iowa she sees it as a series of separate life times. The very first words of the novel are suggestive of the multi-faced, multi-named protagonist: “Life times ago” (Jasmine 3). These are constructed out of identity shifts the protagonist experiences as she journeys through large and widespread geographical locale like the Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally towards California. As Diane Moon Sauter comments, “Mukherjee’s book explores the post-colonial experience of a woman in transit.”

For Jasmine each of her identities is inevitably linked to a man, a space and a time. Past, present and future coalesce with magnificent incoherence in the narrative pattern. As Jyoti she remains an intelligent village girl of Hasnapur bound by native culture, as Jasmine she spreads her wings as a young wife of an upwardly mobile man in the city of Jullundhar, as Jase she becomes a cultural refugee in the US with a developing sense of self and as Jane she is determined to be successful in the alien land. She has a man for each of these identities: “Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Base, Bud for Jane, Half-Face for Kali” (197). By giving the protagonist more than one name Mukherjee “subverts the notion of a fixed uniform subject. Simultaneously the narrator’s plurality of names helps to mask her ethnic difference and enables her to survive in a hostile alien land.”

Directly or indirectly historical conflicts in the Indian subcontinent determine the problematic constitution of the shifting individuality of Jasmine. Relocation for her family started even before the birth of the protagonist. Christened Jyoti as the
unenviable fifth daughter, the seventh of the nine children of a post-partition-riots-affected farmer in an inconsequential village of Punjab, her first shift occurs at fifteen with marriage to an ambitions, budding engineer who has dreams of migration to the U. S. But contrary to Dimple who finds marriage as a constricting force, alliance with Prakash offers Jyoti much more than her expectation. The change is manifested in the name Jasmine. It is not an identity that is thrust on her as a necessary attribute of traditional marriage, but a reflowering. Comparing her husband to Higgins, the benevolent professor of Pygmalion, the narrator recollects the transformatory nature of her marriage. In fact her new identity encourages her to break with the unsophisticated past, to transcend the doomed prophecy of widowhood and exile.

"Suspended between identities" (77) and corresponding to two different worlds Jasmine exhibits the grip of the past and the lure of the future. While Prakash transforms her to a new kind of city woman Jasmine feels eclipsed by the maid’s eleven year daughter who had been married off later than her and already had had a miscarriage. While marriage makes city-born, educated Tara and Dimple suppressed and dependent, the not-so-educated vassal turns to be a jasmine. Not only temperamentally and physically but economically also she has been becoming self-reliant. The traditionally brought up mother’s warning that “a husband has layers like an onion and you’ll still find things to surprise even after years of marriage” (82) forces her to keep her part-time job as a secret. Yet despite a traditional upbringing Jasmine does not vehemently resist to the modern ideas of her husband.

Marriage opens new vistas of life and experience to Jasmine. It is marriage that introduces her to the dreamland of America. The “Celebrate America” stamps unburden the suppressed fear of the prophecy of widowhood. But before the seventeen year old bride can embark on a new life of new fate and new stars, the dream of ‘Vijh and Wife’ is shattered by a bomb-blast that widows her. Jasmine blames herself for the tragedy because the terrorists shouted “Prostitutes, whores” (93). The gender role as a wife comes to a sudden, cruel end. The author skilfully parallels
the Khalistan Movement that widows her to the Hindu-Muslim riot that displaced her father.

Widowhood, a curse for Indian women, fails to impede the amelioration programme initiated by her husband. Dead Prakash seems to be equally forceful in exhorting her from every corner of the grief-stricken room to think of their dream. The realisation that there is no dying but only ascending or a descending, a mooring to other planes, propels her to liberate from Hasnapur and its feudalism. Jasmine carves out a new life for herself as the widow who is determined to undertake the aborted plan of her dead husband. Jyoti would have crawled back to the widow’s hut to be alienated by others, but Jasmine is bound for the West.

The marvellous dexterity with which Mukherjee launches an inexperienced, widowed, village girl as an illegal alien in America is commendable though it goes beyond the comprehension of the readers. Her illegal status can be seen as an extension of an existence that began in the shadow of a political refuge back in Hasnapur. Tara and Dimple have never gone through the traumatic experiences of Jasmine. With money, education and men they land safely as immigrants. Without these Jasmine evokes the pathetic world of the exile in one of the most poignant passages of the novel. Dressed in shreds of out of season, national costumes, sleeping in the airport lounges clutching to the photograph of happier times they are as Jasmine recalls, “the outcasts and deporters... landing at the end of tarmacs, ferried in old army trucks where we are roughly handled and taken to roped-off corners of waiting rooms where surly, barely wakened customs guards await their bribe” (101). They can only sneak in for the zigzag route is the safest for them. Even in the boat she feels limited by the coarse peasant identity. Yet she phantoms her way through three continents and feels renewed as a recipient of an organ transplant. Sitting in Iowa Jane wonders whether Bud, an American citizen, has ever seen the America introduced to her by Half-Face, the captain of the contraband trawler that landed her up in Florida.

With the tragic encounter with Half-Face, who takes away her chastity as cost
for the illegal transportation, Jasmine is on the threshold of the death of one more identity and the birth of another. For the first time, she recalls, she understands the true nature of evil. The act of the ritual cleaning of the body reciting prayers that she recollects from the cremation of Prakash and her father stands for the symbolic death of the Indian wife. The rape by Half-Face contaminates not only her body, but her mission as well. But the sense of the unacted mission prevents Jasmine from balancing her defilement with her own death. With the firm determination not to let personal dishonour disrupt her mission, she transforms herself to the destructive Kali who demon-like drives the knife into the rapist. Witnessing two deaths in three months Jasmine feels herself as death incarnate. “The transformation from a helpless victim to a blood-devouring goddess Durga is instant.”

The second murder parallels the first self-protective murder of another beast in Hasnapur as a young girl. With this homicide she becomes the avenging goddess Kali. With the murder she enacts another death, the death of the old self through the symbolic burning of her dishonoured clothes, and out of the ashes a new self emerges. Stuffing her suitcase with the old clothes she lits pyre to her failed mission for Half-Face has defiled it. With the destruction of her only mission to conduct suttee at the very place that Prakash wanted to stand in the campus, Jasmine enters her first full American day and begins her journey travelling light. The traumatic rape and the subsequent murder further alienate her from the Indian image of a wife. It destructs her mental constructs that she has been carefully carrying from the old culture and she steps into the new world unburdened by cultural imperatives as a missionless drifter.

With little English and less formal education Jasmine floats in the challenging world of America though at times memory takes her to the past she left behind. The past does not fill her with nostalgia, but it equips her to encounter future boldly. As a young girl Jyoti had witnessed her father’s emotional entanglement with the Lahore past. Even in his domicile in India he refused to speak Hindi considering it the language of Gandhi who approved the partition of Punjab. Holding fast to Lahore
ghazals and longing for news from Pakistan he lived in a bunker. But Jasmine has learnt from the mistake of her father and realises that nostalgic attachment to the past is destructive to the present.

Spatial dislocation implants a new identity on Jasmine. The Jasmine who emerges out of the ashes of the patni is a survivor. The hospitality and advice offered by Lillian Gordon, her protector, nourisher, propeller and facilitator, equip Jasmine to recoup physically and emotionally. With a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness and nostalgia Gordon guides her by her principle “let the past make you vary, but do not let it deform you” (131). Trained by her to walk and talk American, Jasmine feels slightly better than the Kanjobal women who found Gordon’s a safe garrison in the hostile territory. With Hasnapur sidle she abandons her Hasnapur modesty also. The march towards self-actualisation that has begun with the death of the old self accelerates by acculturation to American thinking.

The trip to the Vadheras can be equated to an immigrant’s voyage back to the mother country. Just as Tara feels her estrangement from the moorings by her seven years Western sojourn, during the five months stay at the artificial Julundhar in Flemmings Jasmine realises the distance she has travelled from the land of her birth. The Indian ghetto is actually a survival strategy by recreating the lost culture. But exposed to the lure of the West, with no plans to return, Jasmine spirals into depression behind the fortress of Punjabiness. Though it provides her security, it reminds her of her status as an illegal alien and an Indian widow. Constrained by the dependent status she feels her chances of survival blocked out. She cannot adapt her American deport in the artificially maintained Indianness. Unlike Tara or Dimple, Jasmine does not lament over her past: “I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyotilike” (145). With no desire to continue like a ghost hanging on Jasmine decides to leave the professor. The movement from the Vadheras to the Hayes suggests her determination to succeed.

Through “the narative technique of alternately highlighting one or the other of the ‘mutations’ in the heroines identity” Mukherjee details the different stages of
her life in the meandering course through the terrains of India and America. The early phase shows her experience of the agony of the uprooted people through the experience of her displaced father. In America she no longer identifies with the artificially maintained Indianness. Jyoti first disconnects her from her family. Jasmine distances her from India. Thus the familiar gets decentred and becomes uncongenial to her aspirations. The exuberance of the new world is emphasised by juxtaposing the claustrophobic Indian life of Jasmine with the Vadheras and the unrestrained life at the Hayes. At the Vadheras she feels deteriorated like an Indian wife who cooks, shops, cleans and tends the old people. Though older and more complex than the Jasmine of the Middleman story this Jasmine too succeeds for both believe that “to bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward” (185). Hence she alters her identity from a dependent, illegal-alien widow to that of an independent care-giver.

The garb of au pair instills a sense of dignity and self-reliance which influences her attitude more positively to American life and culture. The willing adaptation to Sam the iguano is highly suggestive of Jasmine’s readiness to forge an identity of her own. The act distances her from Indian girls who never hold large reptiles on their laps and affiliates more to Sam for both are away from home. The job at the Taylors makes her more American for she considers them as her teachers and family. The liberal attitude of the Taylors who serve biscuits to a servant elevates her sense of self. The urge to mould a new personality springs involuntarily: “I wanted to become the person they thought they saw; humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful” (171). In Flushing she lived defensively amidst documented rectitude. But at the Hayes she becomes a flowing river that takes in everything in its stride—the language on the street, on the T.V, at the dinners. In the march towards assimilation, the squatting fields of Hasnapur recedes fast.

The designation ‘care-giver’ makes her feel like a professional. The new phase gives a new name too: “I like the name he gave me: Jase. Jase was a woman who bought
herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pants” (176). With every change in identity there is a marked progress in the assertion of the self too. While Jyoti would have saved and Jasmine lived for the future, Jase lives for today. Profligate squandering becomes her way of breaking from the passimious ghettos of Flushing. For every Jase the reliable caregiver, there is a prowling adventurer Jase. The tug of opposing forces only thrills her. Though she is just an aupair, the status of an oriental expert further brightens the future of Jasmine to a level unimaginable for a school drop-out. For the American professors interested in the East it is not her formal education, but her experience that counts. With Wylie away her life has a new fullness and chargedness to it. In her exploration of the city in the company of Duff, Jasmine rises to the level Wylie wanted her to achieve. “The graduation from a care-giver to the beloved of Taylor distinctly shows her novel, uninhibitive approach towards life.” While her future is brightened by the love of Taylor, just as the bomb-blast back in India killed her one identity and started her exile, the accidental encounter with the same Sukhi who shattered her dream world sets Jasmine once again on the move which inevitably demands a change of place and identity. The repressed fear of the astrologer’s prophecy follows her with greater force as she leaves for Iowa in fear. It is not a fear of death, but a fear of endangering the people whom she loves. The confrontation with the Indian past and the American present goes beyond her control.

From a sense of liberation the narrator heroine is compelled to go in hiding. But once again beauty and brain enable her to change her identity as well as that of the banker Bud Ripplemeyer. In retelling the past Jane Ripplemeyer is cohering the different fragmented ‘I’s to the ‘we.’ She is reconstructing her self out of the segmented identities. The space where Jasmine “achieves her identity is not geographical: she builds her identity in narrative spaces as she pieces together her story.” Mukherjee dexterously makes Jane reflect on her own identity as a giant long-playing record with millions of tracks, each of them a complete circle, with only one diamond-sharp microscopic link to the next life and only God to hear it all.
Jasmine believes that extraordinary events can jar the needle-arm and jump tracks and deposit a life into a grove that has not been prepared to receive it. Everything in the protagonist's life follows this unpredictable scheme.

The needle that jumped the track of New York fits into that of a teller in Ripplemayer's bank in less than a month from New York and into the life of the banker. She assesses herself not as the cause but the catalyst that separated Karin and Bud. Yet Jasmine even while cohabiting with Bud is afraid of too much attachment for she feels it unwise. Life in Iowa too fails to shelter her from the astrologer. When Bud is shot and permanently crippled by a farmer whom he denied a loan Jane feels herself responsible as Jasmine felt at the death of Prakash. Further the incident makes her diffident for she thinks that Karin, the American ex-wife of Bud, would have been able to avoid the tragedy. Assessing the past and present Jane finds herself fitting into the identity bestowed on her by Karin: “I feel responsible. For Prakash’s death. Bud’s maiming. I’m a tornado, blowing through Baden” (206).

Carrying Bud’s child, remembering Prakash and refusing to settle down, the narrator heroine is seen looking nostalgically to the past waiting for the mail though she left New York without a forwarding address. Her present life as a live-in-companion to the small town banker who never questions about her past is another step on the road to self-discovery. With Taylor and Duff back to her life she is not inhibited by the present as she is not leaving behind but feels going ahead: “I’m going somewhere” (214). The disclosure that she had rehearsed the scene so many nights signals her attachment to Taylor. She has already stopped thinking of herself as Jane. As she repositions her star she is not sure which identity she will stick on to. But with Taylor she will no more be a nomad in hiding.

Jasmine blooms from a diffident alien to an adventurous Jase and an American spirit. The Jasmine scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless from hope, is far removed from the illegal alien who launched on the shores of America surviving many a tribulation, many a rape. Identity is not something that is given to her by her culture, but something she discovers as she journeys. It is not restricted
Journey is an ever-continuing motif in the novel. Jasmine reconstructs her identity as she moves from one culture to another, one disaster to another. Identity for Jasmine is made on the stuff of memory, despair and desire. She makes her own identity by creating a world by grasping personal history through reconstruction. “Faced with a loss of identity at each stage, Jasmine manages to evolve a new identity at each stage.”

Caught between the promise of America and the old-world dutifulness, Jasmine chooses the former without guilt. Her true identity emerges at last: “Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked doors” (240).

When marriage transports Jyoti of Hasnapur to Jullundhar, widowhood moves Jasmine from Jullundhar to America. Each of these transfers demands a price too. Unconventional marriage alienates Jyoti from her single friend of Hasnapur, Vimala, who has been holding her marriage off because of their horoscopes. Widowhood completes the separation for Vimala does not want her happiness to be marred by the mother and daughter widowed by a bull and a bomb. Dida, the old relative of Pitaji, blames Jasmine’s marriage at the government office and the consequent modern life for the terrible tragedy. Yet Jasmine “emerges not as a tragic character but as one who is determined to change her history and explore infinite possibilities.” This determination enables her to build up supportive relationships with Gordon, Wylie and later with Du and Karin.

Unlike Jasmine, cultural alienation breeds a nagging sense of loneliness in Dimple. Survival in an exotic environment is aided by the establishment of supportive interpersonal relationships. “Insanity springs from the failure to attain any kind of union with the outside world.” Uprooted from the soil of origin Dimple does not receive a healthy shoulder to lean on. In the initial phase of immigration though the Sens form like a home away from home Dimple, who successfully manipulated an abortion just before departure, fails to establish any long standing rapport with Meena Sen, already a mother and heavily pregnant. Just as Tara was saved from a nervous breakdown by her counsellor, the Sens with their congeniality gives
a sense of belonging to Dimple. Yet away from them at the Mooherjees, left alone for long hours in the flat without Amit, she feels cut off from the world and clings to the “television set as her only friend” (Wife 157). The novel is vibrant with the persistent feeling of her inability to communicate the turmoil she goes through. Lack of companionship chokes her voice and disintegrates the personality. The terrible inkling of the impending disaster devastates her for premonition acts cruelly on a person whose instincts have been worn down by over use. She wishes for Ina’s company but soon realises that Ina cannot pacify for “she promised happiness, independence, love, but no consolation” (156). Mukherjee skilfully weaves Ina Mullick’s predicament also to Dimple’s story stressing marital alienation and frustration. Ina’s unexpected self-revelation projects the disappointment and frustration of an intelligent girl who wanted to use words like ‘thermodynamics’ and ‘superconductivity’ in parties, married to a sauvè rupee-millionaire husband who does not understand her. But the news that Ina, twenty eight years old, M. Sc. in Physics from Calcutta is unhappy behind the facade of nonchalance only aggravates Dimple’s misery. She fears whether unhappiness is contagious. As the probable image of Dimple in a few years time wearing a T-shirt and blue jeans and telling immigrant wives her pitiful story looms large before her, fear starts gripping her. The failure to console Ina arises equally out of her fear of joining Ina’s fate and that of the disapproval of Amit. Neither can she accept Ina’s suggestions of skipping or vitamin B-12 for easing nerves as one is poisonous and the other has cost her a foetus and two pints of blood back in India. When all outlets of escape fail she retreats to the old habit of writing to problem wallas. When no affirmative reply arrives Dimple decides not to confide in anyone. According to R. D. Laing “the problem with schizophrenic is that they can not trust anyone.”

In Calcutta Dimple used to ease her brain, at times of trouble, by chatting to Pixie. The communication gap that she experiences abroad is directly proportional to the geographical distance between them. With no contact with the world left behind, excepting the monotonous letters of the mother, Dimple becomes a nowhere
woman. Further the comparison with the successful Pixie and her glamorous husband only highlights the hiatus between what she wanted to attain but what remains unattainable.

While Dimple is haunted by loneliness in an alien land Tara on her return home finds herself a misfit in every way. Immigration has altered her attitude to friends and relatives. Her alienation is deepened by the address ‘American Wali’ and the rude reference to David as a mlecha. Her relatives at Bombay attribute her improprieties to westernisation. In Calcutta her genuine concern for the invalid child of Aunt Jhana is misinterpreted as the hunk of American money. Similar “antithetical feelings beset her in the company of her friends.” Tara is dismayed that she does not fit into the old life of Calcutta. Her old group of friends now irritates her with their lack of seriousness. In the first stage of homecoming they seemed to offer a peaceful oasis amidst Calcutta’s commotion. But after the initial excitement over the parties thrown in honour of Tara wears off, the celebrations start frightening. She is startled by their tremendous capacities for surfaces. Eager to know only of the paraphernalia about her life abroad they avoid listening to the adjustments she had to make which she badly wants to communicate. Married to a foreigner and exposed to Western life, though not unpatriotic, Tara fails to share their passion. They want to share only the glamour of Calcutta and not the reality of the ghettos. Hence the communication becomes void. Seven years ago she had played with them, but now she fears their tone, omissions and their aristocratic oneness. Hotel Catelli Continental, described as the navel of the universal, now symbolises a rootlessness, a symbol of Tara’s expatriate sensibility.

David and the American experience isolate Tara from Indian life and culture. Her friends blame her marriage and life abroad for the erosion of all the finesse and sensitivity of Bengali culture. Their snubs about her depression brings out minor viciousness in Tara too. She retaliates by correcting their grammatical errors and joking about their manners. She has forgotten many of the Indian English words of the pre-American phase. The fact that the ‘racial purists’ approve foreign manners
and fashions but not foreign marriage thrusts a wedge in their relationship. Contrary to her expectation of admiration from friends, marriage only forfeits her the confidence of unmarried friends like Nilima. At Darjeeling Tara is hurt to sense that she is an eccentric and impudent creature whose marriage has barred her from sharing the full credence of the St. Blaise friends. Though Tara is always in the midst of company, none of them is able to extend a rapport to the atrophied mind of Tara as they never probe deep. Without any crutches Tara hops to her uncertain future all alone.

Tara’s friends fail to detect the fears and uncertainties which she successfully hides from her parents as well. Marriage has alienated Taramoni from her dear parents though they never admit it. Her return is flawed from the beginning for the difficulty of communication becomes evident in the familial context itself. Despite the absence of any hint from him, the sense of guilt issuing from untraditional love marriage makes her feel that the Bengal Tiger is slightly disappointed in her. Disturbed by the authentic religious spirit of the mother she feels like amlecha. The mother’s request to share piety with her is evaded by flippant remarks dragging in half-forgotten invitations to parties. Both “mother and daughter grew nervous, their nervousness visible like monsoon mildew” (The Tiger’s 54). Tara realises sadly that her marriage has done her parents little good except to increase their fortitude in defence of the foreign son-in-law. After seven years of separation they don’t hope to see her again. Neither the loving parents who want to retain their Taramoni with them nor the friends with all their clamour and concern are supportive enough to instill encouragement to enable her to cope with alien status in her two worlds.

Tara’s return to Calcutta fails to accomplish its aim because of the atmosphere of pervasive violence. Her sensitivity to the poverty, squalour and violence of Calcutta shows clearly how the sheltered Banerjee life has alienated her from the real world. All through childhood she had been unexposed to the darker side of Calcutta. It is this upperclass drawback that repulses her from similar sights during her stay abroad. But far from violence afar it is that at home which takes the
verge of a breakdown. Apart from the violent incidents at Joyonto's bustee it is what she witnesses from the Catelli Continental that affects her badly. In the early part of the summer when she sees rioters only from the roof of the Catelli-Continental she could see it as a succession of exciting confrontations. But now after the bomb at the pavilion of the club she realises the magnitude of it. The day of Washington Mc Dowell's visit to Calcutta also coincides with a minor citywide riot from which they are saved by the stature of Mc Dowel. It is violence in the city that throws Tara to the protection of the doubtful Tuntunwala which culminates in her seduction at his hands. The last section of the novel which concentrates on Tara's determination to go back reeks with violence. As the mob outside the Catelli loses all control the friends take the refuge of Sanjay's car. Witnessing the violent attack on Joyonto and Pronobs Tara sits locked in the car, wondering whether she will ever get out of Calcutta, whether David will ever know of her fierce love.

Violence is inseparable from the variegated life times of Jasmine. Every dislocation in her life is centred round violent incidents. The postpartition riots permanently scarred Pitaji whose death incidentally is caused by the violent attack of a bull. Violent historical upheavals in the country have its reverberations in the remote village of Hasnapur as well. The Khalistan movement does not spare the life of Jyoti's Masterji who introduced the children of the village to the world outside. The same group of fanatics removes her vermilion mark and makes her an exile. Jasmine to her dismay finds that cruelty and associated death trails after her to the distant lands as well. At the Flemingo Inn Jasmine has her encounter with evil in the form of Half-Face. Though rape, the worst form of violence on woman, momentarily disrupts her mission, Jasmine does not allow it to supersede her determination to survive. Encounter with the unpleasant only emboldens the timid, inexperienced village girl to emerge as Kali. Her transformation elevates Jasmine from an illegal alien to the coveted position of an oriental specialist-cum-aupair. But once again the memory of the tragic past surfaced by the sight of the fanatic Sukhinder removes her from the haven of security to the uncertainty of Iowa till her encounter with the
banker Bud. In Iowa it is not her Indian past that haunts Jane Ripplemeyer but the frustrated farmer who shoots Bud and transforms him to a permanent invalid. Yet the spirit that is hardened by adversity refuses to be cowed down by any action or friction. It is this resilient spirit, coupled with her will to survive, that rejuvenates the life of Jasmine.

While violence at home and abroad disturbs the peace of Tara and changes the course of Jasmine’s life. Dimple is the worst affected by it though she has no personal experience with it. Yet for Dimple violence becomes the fundamental experience in America. Newspapers, T.V and casual conversations announce murder in alleys and pubs. When the initial euphoria of the parties wears off she finds herself stranded in a fully furnished, fully applianced apartment terrified of the city outside. Bound to her lonely apartment the sounds of the city with its violent stories and sirens become “reminders of a dangerous world” (Wife 120). The horror of America affects her so much that even in silence fears of her security creeps in. Even when she fails to detect any intruder Dimple panics because in America anything is possible. Crammed with news of muggings and murders and suffering from insomnia she even happens to injure Amit who tries to surprise her. She has a gallery of imminent monsters ranging from old alcoholics to Puerto Rico girls. Tedium, anxiety of living and apprehension of split-self breed a morbid fear of the milieu. Everything scares her: the sputtering of the radiators or the turning of a key. Mukherjee deftly marks the transition of the protagonist from self-hate and self-destruction to the surrealistic proclivity of murder. Gradually she begins to feel that violence is right or even decent. The interplay of the real, the unreal and the televised generates a vision that is destructive. Denied of selfhood her only act of assertion becomes murder. But Mukherjee makes it clear that T.V does not make a vulture out of a dove, but Dimple has a subterranean streak of violence. Her Indian past too resonates with stories of violence and murder. The violent attack of the pregnant mouse and the murder of the foetus through skipping only herald more gruesome incidents in future.
It is the same nagging sense of isolation and the violent environment that drives Dimple to the company of Milt Glasser who first repels her and later destroys her evening by planting a kiss on her. Her illicit relationship with Glasser, Ragini Ramachandra opines, “entails for her changes on both mental and physical planes.”

To her he becomes America. He is the only one she can talk to. With others she talks in silences, with Milt she can talk of all sorts of things. Though he is not brilliant or dependable like Amit and seem more like a nomad he is easier to talk to though he is a foreigner. Withal her doubts about his career she trusts him completely. Despite her ignorance of the kind of relationship that exists between Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser when Milt takes her to the pizzeria in her borrowed attire “she felt it was not Dimple Basu who was singing and giggling with Milt Glasser” (194). Her sexual adventure with him is part of her defence mechanism, a part of her concept of assimilation. Yet the Indian wife in her is torn between the truth and lie and of reporting the event to Amit. Her doubts about the trip actually surface the pricks of her conscience. To cover up her sense of guilt Dimple thinks of murdering Amit and keeping him in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme makes her feel very American, almost like a T.V character. According to M. Rajeshwar it is her “sado-masochistic drives that compel her to inflict the same kind of punishment upon Amit which she wishes him to do her.”

While the willing surrender of the body and the consequent guilty conscience transform Dimple to a murderess, not of her accomplice but of her own husband, it is rape at the hands of the monster Half-Face that changes Jasmine to an avengeress. The two murders are different in the fact that while one is self-protective, the other is a neurotic act. While the act of rape kills the widow of Prakash, girdled by the power of the archetypal Kali Jasmine avenges the death. Jasmine’s relationship with other men in her life cannot be equated with extramarital though it is quite a subversion of the Indian image of a pativratha.

Tara is not tormented by any sense of guilt or regret for her seduction by Tuntunwala. It only fills her with bitterness. Her first confrontation with him occurs
on her train journey to Calcutta which has been bound to be a disaster from the beginning. The Marwari reminds her of a circus animal and later an impassive and calculating spider. With all her St. Blaise training she fails to save herself from the forceful companionship of the corporate giant later at the fair. The commotion at the club and the violence of the city once again take her to the dubious Marwari. Slow learners like her fall as victims to bulldozers like the Tuntunwala. Alone at the Guest House, excepting her maid, Tara unsuspiciously walks into his trap. The incident remains only one of the superficial factors that hardens her determination to return to England. She realises that she cannot share the knowledge of Tuntunwala with anyone in a land where “a friendly smile, an accidental brush of the fingers can ignite rumours - even lawsuits.” (The Tiger’s 194).

Culture conflicts, according to Robert Park “are likely to manifest themselves in family, disorganization, in delinquency and functional derangement of the individual psyche.” Dimple experiences an intense loneliness that differs qualitatively from that of an expatriate. By naming her protagonist as Dimple, which means any slight surface depression, Mukherjee offers ample room for a study in neurosis. The name is symbolic of the depression within her psyche that is manifested by her irritable responses to things around her. The novelist skilfully traces the consciousness of Dimple from the slight disorders of the premarital stage to the gruesome finale of homicide. Seen in the light of later actions, Dimple’s previous preference for a neurosurgeon husband has other latent reasons than its opulence and glamour. It leads us to the interior landscape of her conscience.

Indira Nityanandam argues that Dimple’s “rootlessness is caused by an inherent psychological trait - she is incapable of accepting her surroundings or adapting herself to them.” The first part of the novel clearly suggests a certain abnormality in Dimple, the daughter of a ‘high-tension’ man—a reference Dasgupta uses for his profession as an electrical engineer. She strikes a discordant note right in India with her curious concepts of marriage as that which introduces her to a different life with an apartment in Chowringheee, her hair done by Chinese girls and trips to New Market.
for nylon saris. The craving for affluence and the obsession with one's own inadequacies which are the normal psychic reactions of an adolescent become problematic when they become the dominant traits of personality.

With the adroitness of a master craftsman Mukherjee charts the progressive cracking up of an essentially neurotic sensibility. Years of waiting for a suitable life partner makes Dimple nervous and hypochondriac. The twenty wasted years lay like a chill weight in her body giving her eyes a watchful squint and her spine a slight curve. Part of the psychic obsessions are about the inadequacies of her body. Mukherjee cleverly intrudes by suggesting “the psychological and emotional pressure exerted by the traditional Indian model of ideal femininity upon the protagonist.” Dimple considers herself inferior because she does not conform to the ideal image of a fair and busty woman. Anxiety about her physical appearance transforms her to a steadfast follower of beauty tips and a regular correspondent of 'problem wallas.'

The despair over the ever-postponed examination, which to her is an impediment for the prospect of suitable engineer bridegrooms lands the hopeless, bustless girl in the hospital.

The erotic fantasies that Dimple indulges in during her period of intense waiting indicate the disturbed state of mind. At night she hallucinates: “sometimes when she enter the bathroom in the dark, the toilet seat twitched like a coiled snake. Tight, twisted shapes lunged at her from behind cupboards or tried to restle her into bed” (Wife 12-13). She hopes that marriage will free her and fill her with passion.

The lacuna between expectation and actuality is projected right from the time of the proposal. Her life with Amit in the choking milieu of the narrow flat propels her to fantasies. Marriage offers "only mute bickerings of the self." She has to remind herself that happy people do not talk to themselves or pretend to talk to themselves. The fact that she has not been the first choice by the Basus also depresses her. Marriage does not cater to her dreams of freedom and self-expression. The prospect of motherhood creates in her unnatural response. She considers it as something vile and tyrannical. When all the others are exultant over the news, Dimple alone
harbours macabre plans of freeing herself of the burden. Though pregnancy infuriates her, she is fascinated by vomiting. “Anger coupled with frustration at her own helplessness result in frequent outbursts and a further degeneration of her personality as she fantasizes about sinister abortionists.” The hatred for the swollen body radiates to all the Basus: she picks quarrels with Amit for silly nothings, makes fun of his dress, spills curry on his shirt and considers his gifts hopeless. Conflation of the psyche and the hysterical fits of passion aggravate when an invisible mice disturbs her day dreams. In killing the strangely swollen body of the mouse she gets a vicious joy. The deracination of the rat forewarns the murder of the foetus.

Dimple finds pregnancy a hindrance to her dreams of immigration. Without it, she may flourish as a more exciting person attending evening classes which eventually will fulfil her dream of becoming a professional. She longs for a complete break with the past: “she did not want to carry any relics from her old life” (42). In the desire to have everything brand new in America, Dimple finds the baby as unfinished business cluttering up the preparation for going abroad. As F. A. Inamdar rightly observes Dimple is a psychic study of an abnormal person: “Her abnormality reaches the climax when she skips her way to abortion.” Though Dimple unemotionally rationalizes her act as not murder, the murder of the baby haunts her across the ocean. She is reluctant to relate to children in her American life. Further Dimple is never able to nurture anything, not even Marsha’s cacti which usually survive in adverse conditions. She becomes conscious of this destructive tendency when she manages to twist the plastic flowers at the Sens. Later she admits that there is a thrill in killing things. Hence she is glad that Ina’s aquarium is not given to her for she can “imagine those dozens of darting, delicate fish floating belly-up” (188).

In the first phase of immigration when the pristine excitement is over Dimple’s dissatisfaction with the surroundings extends to her husband too. Constantly dwelling in a world of unreality she fails to relate emotionally to a husband who compared to the T. V heroes lack glamour and affluence. In Manhattan T. V becomes the voice of today. The frustration of the lonely, dull existence in the land distant
from home aggravates her unknown feelings of unusualness. The fascination for the
glittering things suggest the gradual erosion of the sense of values. The T. V with its
falsified, concocted vision of reality provides sustenance for her transgressing soul.
Despair steps in as she perilously estranges from her own self. There is a
"progressive and total estrangement from the environment, from herself and from
existence itself." Confined to the world of fantasy she is hardly aware of her own
person. While the mind desires freedom the thoughts revolve in a claustrophobic
manner withdrawing from outside. The neurotic self establishes ascendancy as she
suffers from insomnia and hallucinations. In the early morning hours of
sleeplessness she imagines intruders in the apartment: "In these waking nightmares,
the men had baby faces and hooded eyes". Sometimes she thinks of her own bed
as a coffin. Suicidal tendencies emerge. Propensity for violence intensifies in the
darkness.

M. Rajeshwar observes that "Dimple's life is a long tryst with death." The
morbid consciousness becomes transparent as the novel progresses. In New York
life appears to prove fatally destructive to Dimple. The dream about Ina Mullick's
dead body in Dimple's sari is a displaced dream. The effect of constant proximity
to death tells upon her psyche. Premonitions and apprehensions of imaginary
dangers remove her further from reality. The fact that she is unaware of the psychic
state becomes evident when she tries to reason the miserable predicament. The
problems become too anonymous to be tackled by ordinary defence mechanisms.
The incident of Dimple pouring tea to the cup of Ina's friend, even after her removal
of the cup, till the pregnant bellied pot is emptied suggests her losing grip over the
environment.

Dimple not only thinks about suicide but even begins to experience herself as
already dead. Not only in her dreams but in the state of wakefulness also she is able
to experience death and post-mortem. She even wonders about Amit's response over
her death. Mentally deranged she begins to develop a nausea towards everything
around her. The novel is full of morbid thoughts suggesting Dimple's mental
make-up. The stages of her mental derangement are developed meticulously. Estrangement from her self breeds a terrible ennui that prompts her to violence. Her own body “seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost air borne” (117). Sexual betrayal of Amit is the last act that completes the series of traumatic experiences. It drives her to reject India and the Indian standard of morality. At such crucial moments no philosophy can help her. “Having nothing and nobody to fall back upon, she has to tackle her problems by herself.” Mukherjee ultimately makes her the murderess. With one antiIndian act, she does not hesitate to do another. The pervasive atmosphere of violence dulls the edge of her guilt in a country where talking about murder is like talking about weather. The mutilation of the dead body does not jolt her for her responses are still tuned to the T.V.

Mukherjee skilfully “employs images of corrosion, decomposition, disease and death to highlight the extent of Dimple’s psychosis.” The apartment itself reeks with images of corrosion and symbolizes the morbidity of her psyche: “there were too many images of corrosion within the apartment” (127). A woman who refuses to make meaningful life is like the mouldy bread she notices one day. She identifies herself as one of the many images of corrosion. In Manhattan she is inexorably sucked into the horrifying vortex of neurosis. Shocked by her own capacity for violence, she rationalizes it as unnatural desire. Tormented by phobias she insanely craves for glamorous diseases like leukemia. From thoughts of self-annihilation she drifts to thoughts of murder. In a horrifying dream prior to the murder she visualizes her own head sliced just below the chin. Even in her rendezvous with Milt Glasser she plans to murder Amit and hide his body in the refrigerator. In an “intensely surrealistic language - blurring the boundaries between the fictive and the actual - particularly suited to the depiction of a splintered sensibility Mukherjee shows how Dimple murders Amit.”

While *Wife* traces the psychic breakdown of an Indian wife in America and the concomitant deep culture-shock leading to neurosis,” *Jasmine* is Mukherjee’s
magnum opus of assimilation. Tara and Dimple are unable to strike roots with the alien culture, whereas Jasmine is determined to strike roots even as she floats across continents. Having experienced hideous times in her arduous journey for survival Jasmine has accomplished the rare mission of transcending the boundaries of class, culture and gender. When the liberally brought-up, westernised Tara still harbours traditional norms of wifehood Mukherjee familiarises the college educated Dimple with feminists like Ina Mullick. But it is through the village girl Jasmine that she asserts the resiliating power of woman. A peep into the life of Jasmine reveals that she has been marked for success. Jyoti’s yearning for independence, respect and success as a lady doctor with own clinic in the gender discriminated society of early childhood marks the beginning of the struggle for “self-actualization or the realization or concretization of ardently cherished ideals.” English education under the masterji, however rudimentary it is, too signals her future. The Hasnapur Jyoti who told the astrologer “you don’t know what my future holds” (Jasmine 3) is all set to make her own future as the novel ends. The heroic encounter with a dog, the rejection of a marriage fixed by her father and the fascination for the electric switch in a friend’s house reflect the protagonist’s confidence to progress towards the realization of her potentials. She stands as an antithesis to the other girls with no individuality: “Village girls are like cattle: whichever way you lead them, that is the way they will go” (46). Trained by Prakash to look beyond the traditional horizon, introduced to the American way of life by Gordon and confronting the fluidity of American life Jasmine realises the inevitability of attitudinal change corresponding to outer change in cultural habits. Not only her roles and names change, but her values and personality too undergo a similar transformation as she comes to terms with the new environment. But the rebirth, like birth itself, becomes painful.

To Mukherjee “assimilation is a cultural looting, cultural exchange or a wilful and sometimes costly negotiation: an eye for an eye, a self for a self.” Uprooting and rerooting are as painful, difficult and exhilarating as death and rebirth. The entire life of the protagonist can be seen as a series of deaths and rebirths. Her birth itself
marks a rebirth. Wishing to spare the fifth daughter the pain of dowryless bride or the status of a dependent spinster her mother had attempted to strangle her to death. Jane recalls: “My grandmother may have named me Jyoti of light, but in surviving I was already Jane, a fighter and adapter” (40). With her widowhood that mandated her to a lonely miserable life the young bride also dies. But she is reborn as a young illegal refugee in America with the extraordinary decision to immolate herself in suttee in America. With the rape and murder in self-defence the desire to fulfil her mission that had dragged through all the difficulties is abandoned and with that the Indian self too dies. She is reborn as Jase for survival. Just as a cat has several lives in the traditional Indian belief Jyoti has several lives, each a development on the earlier. Mukherjee brings in the image of the broken pitcher again to emphasize the rebirths of Jyoti.

Jasmine deconstructs binaries about race and resists categorization. The novel actually describes the contours of multiculturalism. Jasmine fulfils Mukherjee’s claim that “immigration is a two-way process and both the whites and the immigrants were growing into a third thing by this interchange and experience.” The helping hand of Gordon and the democratic attitude of the Taylors imprint in Jasmine an image of America as a wonderland. While America teaches her to live with ease and confidence despite her colour and the undocumented status, Jasmine gives back care, love and concern for those who rely on her. Duff, Du and Mother Ripplemeyer are witnesses to the unconditional love exhibited by her. She is not a gold digger but a giver. The stay in Iowa provides emotional crutches to the crippled Bud who rejuvenates to life. Her constructive tendencies can be seen in the effect her presence has on the small town of Baden. It begins to change from a monocultural enclave to a multicultural wideness. While the older Americans are forced to accommodate Jane’s difference she tries to become a part of their way of life. Seized by a need to belong she closely identifies with the adopted Du, a Vietnamese, from whom she learns the lesson of survival. Infact Du provides her the emotional courage to leave Bud without any guilt.
Using different assumed identities as milestones marking personality growth Mukherjee establishe

s naive Jyotis metempsychosis into a culturally homogenised Jasmine. Hailing from a self-effacing culture, she becomes a self-asserting personality. She has the indomitable will to escape the constrictive stereotyped roles. The annihilation of personality is replaced by the triumph of fulfilment of personality. Forgetting the nightmares of the refugee both Jasmine and Du think of assimilation as their means of survival. For both of them ‘in here’ is safety while out ‘there’ means danger. But salvation for them lies in the fact of coming to terms with the monsters and mastering the demons out there which are in fact projections of the mind. The process of taming internal demons is constant and demanding. Jasmine is reminded of her own demons of Sukhinder, to confront her future with confidence. The card that she receives from Taylor with an extraordinary address evokes a sense of liberation from the fears out there: “It is the face of a poet or a philosopher, the face of a woman who has come to terms with all the Sukhis and Half-Faces out there and is no longer afraid” (208). Hence she marches forward determined to reposition her stars.

Separation from home, culture-shock, problems of alienation and assimilation form the matrix of immigrant writing. The degree of estrangement, essentially individualistic, depends on various factors like the education, background, nation and culture of the immigrant as well as the receptive capacity of the host country. Failure to forge new ties instead of the severed ones leads cultural transplants to remain as eternal aliens. After The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife where Mukherjee recreates the pain and the hurt of the exile, “the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a desh” she moves to focus on changing identities and establishment of emotional affinity with the host culture in Jasmine. A clear line of development can be discerned in the attitude of the three protagonists. Despite western education, upper-class living and a western husband Tara fails to assimilate to the exposed culture because her sheltered background has not provided her the necessary maturity. Hence she remains rootless both at home and abroad. In fact there is no
home for her. Dimple Basu with all her dreams of a liberated wife in America fails as a cultural transplant due to various reasons. The gulf between expectation and reality, both in the limited domestic space and in the larger cultural space, lack of emotional support and loneliness coupled with a neurotic sensibility obstruct her attempts at assimilation. Trapped by the worlds they have left behind Tara becomes a nowhere woman and Dimple transgresses into the extremity of alienation culminating as a murderess. But endowed with an undaunted spirit and determination Jasmine marches towards Mukherjee's dream of assimilation. The journey towards this goal is as jerky and tumultous as her voyage across the continents. Yet, like a phoenix she survives many mutilations and deaths because she wants to succeed. While the other protagonists are curtailed by their past, Jasmine uses it as a constructive force to build up a new identity. Her essential Indianness with its exuberance of love and care and an adaptive mentality equip her to create enough space for her. It is by following a path of "inner liberation that she succeeds in integrating herself to American way of life." Transcending the constraints of gender, class and culture Jasmine fulfils Mukherjee's dream of an American family which no longer consists of whites alone but where "no one is related to another by blood. They are all orphans in some way."
Notes

2 Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little Brown, 1952) 5.
4 Joshi 4.
13 Handlin 288.
15 Kirpal 55.
16 Handlin 222.
18 Shobha Shinde, “Cross-Cultural Crisis in Bharati Mukherjee’s Jasmine and

Shinde 50.


22 Padma, Issues 142.


28 Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994) 139-40.

29 Carb 33.


34 Indira Nityanandam, Three Great Indian Women Novelists (New Delhi: Creative, 2000) 70.


Carb 33.

Agrawal 68.


Dimri 74.

Sautter 43.

Nityanandam 76.


Wandrekar 4.


Inamdar 41.

Shinde 55.
54 Rajeshwar 42.
56 Nityanandam 70.
57 Agrawal 61.
58 Swain 85.
59 Agrawal 64.
60 Inamdar 43.
62 Rajeshwar 38.
63 Pandit 40.
64 Agrawal 66.
65 Agrawal 68.
66 Padma, “From Acculturation to Self-Actualization” 163.