CHAPTER — 7

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The formation of identity for diasporic South Asian women is contingent upon many factors, both individual and social, personal as well as collective. As these women live in between the push and pull of opposing cultural forces, the result is the creation of identity crisis. This new identity does not require the relinquishing of one culture for the appropriation of another, but instead, it allows for the possibility of possessing modified aspects of both cultures at one time. The life of Indian immigrant women is not monochromatic stories of bewildered traditional women adrift in the United States. Neither are their experiences simple linear transitions from Indian to modern western society. Indian women's experiences and viewpoints vary widely, running along class and traditional lines. Significantly, a few women are inclined to reject wholesale their cultural traditions for American social patterns and values. Instead the sense prevailed that they faced the challenge of redefining their traditions and roles in the migration context. Identity is not so much the act of choosing between cultures, but rather it has the power to redefine the terms of cultural practices and customs to fit ones own experience. Thus the diasporic Indian identity
becomes ambiguous with self-perception changing as one’s perspectives on
the surrounding environment and evolving culture.

In Bharati Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters*, the creation of identity emerges as a continuous process, forever transforming and never truly complete. Tara, the female protagonist, was born and raised in Calcutta but moved to San Francisco at the age of nineteen when her parents arranged a marriage with Bishwapriya Chatterjee, an Indian young man studying computer science at Stanford University. Tara immediately embraces American culture, taking advantage of the opportunities it affords to her and assimilating as best as she can to the new society around her. Tara and Bish have one son, Rabindranath, before they eventually divorce, maintaining a close friendship. Tara also preserves close relationships with her two elder sisters, Padma (referred to as “Didi”) and Parvati (the former married and living in Montclair New Jersey and the latter residing in Bombay with her husband and two children). Despite the distance between them, the sisters (all born on the same date but separated by three years) communicate often and Didi and Parvati remain Tara’s links to a past that she has begun to forget.

The mystery begins when a young man by the name of Christopher Dey, a literal manifestation of the past, visits Tara at her home in San
Francisco, claiming to be the illegitimate son of her sister Didi by her former lover a Bengali Christian named Ronald Dey. Tara is shocked at this assertion, for she cannot believe that her sister would have even had a child during her teenage years in India. Christopher is insistent, however, and provides Tara with information that only a real son of Didi’s would in fact know. When Tara confronts both of her sisters with her suspicions, she is met with denial from Padma and discomfort from Didi. Eventually, Tara’s concern prompts her to go to the police to ascertain the true identity of Christopher Dey. At first, both Tara and her boyfriend Andy are concerned about the consequences of investigating the past, for it often has the power to dominate one’s entire present. Andy worries that he would only hurt himself trying to lift every rock and throw open every door. It’s good to rediscover his roots, but not if they rise up and strangle him. But Tara nevertheless proceeds with her quest, and as the mystery unfolds, Tara is forced to face her family, her past and a culture that she has distanced herself from, resulting in a conflict between old modes of thinking and new forms of consciousness that have been created. She learns that she is comprised of multiple selves, each with its own consciousness and instincts. Tara views herself through the ever-shifting lens of culture, her identity and consciousness contingent upon whether she chooses to accept or reject
certain aspects of both Indian and American culture. As she continues to develop new selves throughout her life, Tara comes to accept that she will never be simply American or Indian, but rather dispersed between these categories of identity.

Of the characters in other texts that are examined, Tara is the most celebratory of her multiplicity. Tara does not fight her multiplicity but rather embraces it as a part of her progressing identity. In *The Mistress of Spices*, by Chitra Devakaruani, Tilo viewed herself through the eyes of those around her and struggled with the contradictory perceptions she possessed, but Tara does not express this same sense of struggle; rather, she accepts her multiplicity from the outset as a consequence of the development of her identity. *Jasmine* tries to completely reinvent herself in the *Jasmine* where her different selves clash with one another as they emerge, causing Jasmine to run constantly from her past and reinvent herself yet again, and thereby contribute to the sense that the fragmented self is replete with conflict and strife. In contrast, Tara’s identity evolves, it is a neither continued progression that she does not run nor fight, but instead welcomes it. As Tara changes throughout her time in America, she realizes that identity is both multiplicity and movement; it is being many at once and always traveling forward to be more.
Mukherjee opens the text with a Sanskrit epigraph adapted by Octaviu Paz, its symbolism indicative of the ambiguity of the diasporic experience. “No one behind and no one ahead. The path the ancients cleared has closed. And the other path, easy and wide, goes nowhere. I am alone and find my way” [1]. Mukherjee is setting the novel in the familiar interstitial space of immigration, where time and space lose their linear and geographic meanings. The epigraph suggests a space of liminality, with “no one behind” and “no one ahead” and it also portrays identity as a continuous journey rather than a fixed construction. The notion of going nowhere yet somewhere and having to choose among multiple paths contributes to the sense of contradiction that epitomizes the diasporic consciousness.

Tara is the narrator of the story, she is writing the history of her family and herself as it unfolds and in that process, she gains insight into the creation of her own consciousness as it is influenced by the culturally defined consciousnesses of others. She had the time, the motivation, and even the passion to undertake this history. In documenting her family’s history, Tara is recording the creation of her identity, the influence of the


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past events and background culture are peeping into the present construction of consciousness. Tara must delve into her past and understand its intricacies in order to understand herself. The past is not to be forgotten. The traditional archetypes reinforce the past into the present.

Tara begins her narration with the story of her ancestral namesake. Tara Lata, also known as the “Tree Bride”, and this introduction, set in India over eighty-five years ago, chronicles the arranged marriage of the child-bride Tara Lata who is rejected by her groom’s family when the young groom is bitten by a snake before the wedding ceremony. The story serves to locate the reader in the past, entrenched in the earliest roots of Tara’s familial history. Yet, in a stylistic move typical of Mukherjee, the reader is suddenly brought to the present in California, a jarring temporal and spatial jump that suggests the unorthodox behavior of time and space that will permeate the text. The structure of Tara’s story moves from past to present with such fluidity that it is difficult to distinguish between what has happened and what is happening, while the boundaries between India and America and California and New York disappear. It is within this chaotic world that Tara writes both her history and herself into being, uncovering her multiple consciousnesses as she unearths the secrets of her past.
When Tara first arrives in America, she is steeped in Indian culture and exhibits the behavior of the paradigmatic Indian wife, including having had an arranged marriage. She is subservient to her husband and well versed in domestic duties, such as serving pakoras and freshening drinks while Bish and his friends watch a Sunday football game. Bish takes great pride in showing his parents how well-trained the upper class girl had become, she was a good cook and an attentive wife and daughter-in-law, that a bright and obedient boy she was nourishing. Tara wanted to study at the community college, but instead stayed at home to take care of her son, just like all of the other young Indian wives in Atherton, California. Believing in the “liberalising promise of marriage”, Tara devotes her entire life to supporting Bish and serving their family, for the importance of fulfilling the domestic responsibilities has been ingrained in her since birth.

Yet as Tara assimilates herself to life in California, she begins to dispense with certain age-old traditions and finds adapting to a Western environment an increasingly easier process.

*The ‘Boy’ (they are always ‘boys’ when fathers choose them for their daughters) who was selected to jumpstart my life, to be worshipped as a god according to scripture was (and is) Bishwapiya Chatlerjee... His American friends call him Bish.*
of course, as a good Hindu wife-to-be, could not utter any of his names to his face. But we're progressive people; after crossing the dark waters to California I called him Bishu, then Bish [2].

The crossing of the “dark waters” refers to the kalipani, and for Tara it represents the beginning of the transition into her new identity, a more progressive and liberated self.

Tara comes to California expecting to fulfill the role of the traditional Indian wife, but instead realizes that she does not desire to play the typical part, in the Indian family drama. When she left Bish (let us be clear on this) after a decade of marriage, it was because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. She wanted to drive, but where would she go? She wanted to work, but people would think that Bish Chatterjee couldn’t support his wife. In his Atherton years, as he became better known on the American scene, he also became, at home, more of a traditional Indian. Tara’s frustration at her assimilation and Bish’s attitude thereof leads her to make the most drastic of personal moves in Indian culture, and determines to divorce Bish. The step that she takes is drastic as marriages are considered permanent and should not be altered by either partners, free choice and

divorces are considered a sure sign of Americanization. Tara's decision to divorce Bish represents a definitive step toward a new consciousness in which the traditions of Indian culture no longer dominate Tara's actions and where the opinions and judgments of others do not pose a constant threat.

As Tara becomes more familiar with American culture, she moves from seeing herself as a good Hindu wife. She is now an independent, progressive Californian. One of the most clear manifestations of this transformation of identity is the manner in which Tara's perception of her sexuality changes over the years. During her first few years of marriage with Bish Tara and her friends (other Indian wives and mothers living in Atherton) often perused American magazines, intrigued by how different the media's expectations of sexuality were from their own.

Tara views American culture as something distant from her own personal experience; it is an entity that she has been warned against for its "selfishness and self involvement". Thus, American conceptions of sexuality are also distant for Tara, for she simply cannot understand the portrayal of sexuality of the distant culture when she does not believe that she in fact belongs to the culture. Tara is viewing sexuality through the lens of traditional Indian culture, and while female sexual freedom is a hallmark of
American society, it nevertheless remains a symbol of disgrace in Indian society.

When Tara leaves Bish, however, she soon learns that her sexuality is an aspect of her identity that she can possess and embrace, but without succumbing to the Indian stereotype of sexually liberal women as shameful. As she is propositioned by many of Bish's old friends, Tara begins to see that Indian males living in America do not have to hide their sexuality, in fact they appear to flaunt it. Kandelwal recognizes this sexual double standard as historical and based on a culture of shame for women. "Men's deviations from expectations seldom brought penalties and were easily forgiven, whereas women who strayed from prescribed gender behaviour risked ruining the reputations of their natal and marital families" [3]. The unfair distinction between male and female sexuality in Indian culture prompts Tara to leave Atherton to completely escape the patriarchal cultural restraints placed upon her.

*In the months after I left Bish, one by one, nearly all of his oldest friends, those boys who had sat in the Stanford student pub with us while I sipped my Coca-Cola, found my new address in Palo Alto. I gratefully opened the door of my new*  

apartment to them, thinking that divorce did not necessarily spell the end of my old social life, and I’d ask about their wives and children-and where, by the way, were they, still in the car?-and within minutes they were breathing hard and fumbling with my clothes. Your life is already shattered, they said, what more damage can this do... I left the peninsula because of them and moved to the city [4].

Tara’s view of both Indian culture and American culture is slowly changing, thereby influencing her perception of her sexuality and her coming to view herself as a more sexually liberated woman.

Yet as Tara moves toward this new sexual consciousness, she does not completely escape from the sexual expectations of women in Indian culture, for this culture surrounds her, its views on female sexuality manifesting them through the manner in which women are perceived by those around them. Specifically, Tara is still subject to the traditional cultural perceptions that other men have of her sexuality. One evening at a party amongst many upper class South Asians, an Indian man approaches Tara and attempts to seduce her by characterizing, in his opinion, the sexuality of divorced women. “You divorced ladies have not yet lost your charm. You have only grown more desirable. Divorced ladies must be oversexed, isn’t it? For some

ladies, one man is not enough. Always looking for adventure isn’t it...? The divorced Indian lady combines every fantasy about the liberated, wicked Western woman with, the safety net of basic submissive familiarity” [5]. While Tara is slowly becoming more comfortable and open with her own sexuality, she realizes that she is still vulnerable to assumptions of both exoticism and domesticity in the sexual realm. While she is at this party, surrounded by upper-class male-dominated Indian culture, Tara sees her sexuality as it is perceived by those around her-as the Indian male’s “ideal” amalgamation of the stereotypical conceptions of the subservient Eastern woman and the sexually free Western woman.

Tara’s perception of her sexuality again changes when she meets and begins to date Andy, whom she describes as her “balding, red-bearded, former biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor live-in boyfriend” [6]. With Andy, Tara’s sexuality is completely altered, and begins to resemble the sexuality that was portrayed in the American magazines she used to read with her friend Meena.

When intimacy first struck her as inevitable between Andy and she (long before it occurred to him, he said), she was intrigued, it was a selfish

[5] Ibid., p.188.
act. They were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on. While Tara used to believe that American expectations of a woman’s sexuality were all “selfishness and self-involvement,” she herself is now embracing the “selfish act” of beginning an intimate relationship with Andy.

The fear instilled in her by a culture of shame in sexual matters has dissipated as Tara has assimilated to American culture, and since there are “no hundreds of generations looking on in approval”, she is now free to behave as she pleases. As she describes this transformation, “Yesterday, practiced daughter of Calcutta that I was comfortable within a filtered gaze... One door had closed, another opened” [7]. Tara no longer perceives her sexuality as the blending of Eastern and Western stereotypes as she did before, but rather she and Andy are now simply “exotics to each other”, with no cultural expectations or restraints upon them. In describing this new sexual consciousness, Tara clearly delineates the separation between it and the sexual consciousness of Indian culture: “It’s one of those San Francisco things I can’t begin to explain in India, just like I can’t explain my Indian life to the women I know in California” [8]. Tara has moved to another stage in the creation of her sexual identity, in which her various self-perceptions

do not conflict with one another but rather are replaced by new and different perceptions. Tara has now taken on a new sexual identity, and while she cannot explain the other sexual identities that she has had ten others, she nevertheless retains a sense of these cultural identities of her past, but does not voice them, as they are culturally untranslatable.

As Tara continues to assimilate to American culture, her perceptions of her race and ethnicity begin to change as well. Raised in an upper class Bengali Brahmin family, Tara’s conception of race was limited to the hierarchical class system of Indian familial lineage, in which she was at the top. “Any community whose roots were not in Bengal, preferably in the eastern half of Bengal; anything like the Marwari, Parsi or Sindhi community was seen as alien and money-grubbing, worthy of our disrespect, if not outright contempt” [9]. Tara perceives race as she was brought up to see it - in a manner that makes racial distinctions based on a cultural class system in discussing the impact of the Indian caste system upon the racial consciousness of diasporic South Asians.

[9] Ibid., p.214.
Nazli Kibria writes,

*Like other minority groups in the United States, South Asian Americans view issues of racial identity in ways that are influenced by conceptions of race that originated in their home countries. Because South Asian American communities are transnational in character-maintaining active relations among multiple countries of origin and settlement, the influence of these ‘native’ conceptions of race may be particularly sharp for them. For South Asian Americans, these ‘native’ conceptions of race may provide a frame of reference by which to resist the dominant society’s racial thinking. At the same time, these concepts contribute the group’s racial ambiguity...*[10].

Tara’s native conception of race distinguishes between subcultures of India; it recognizes race as differentiations in class and caste. Thus when Tara comes to America with this specific notion of race, she is shocked to see such distinctions disappear and Indian culture categorized as a singular entity rather than a multiplicity of groups. “We’re a billion people, but divided into so many thousands or millions of classifications that we have trouble behaving as a monolith. Yet each Indian is so densely packed with

family that he or she seems to contain hundreds of competing personalities” [11]. Tara’s friends do not appear to understand the reasons for the cultural subdivisions, for they only serve to further isolate a minority community that needs unification in order to survive culturally in America. Slowly, Tara comes to understand that the distinctions between Indians she was raised with do not hold the same significance in America as they did in India, and she begins to reject the hierarchical scheme through which she once perceived race. “When I speak of this to my friends—the ironclad identifiers of region, language, caste, and sub-caste they call me ‘over determined’ and of course they are right” [12]. As Tara Increasingly incorporates American culture into her life, she recognizes that the characteristics that she was brought up to consider as permanent markers of identity, “region, language, caste, and subcaste”, are neither as eternal nor as important as she once believed them to be. 

Tara also comes to appreciate the anonymity that comes with the loss of specific sub-ethnic group distinctions. No one can recognize Tara as the wealthy Brahmin girl from good family, but rather she can be apparently whatever she desires to be. “The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes

[12] Ibid., p.33-34
me invisible. I am not ‘Asian’, which is reserved for what in outdated textbooks used to be called ‘Oriental’. I am all things... I thrive on this invisibility. It frees me to make myself over, by the hour...” [13]. Tara finds freedom in the possibility of blending in with her surroundings, of living in a society in which identity is not constructed solely on the basis of last names or skin color. The power to create her own racial consciousness and to be “ethnically ambiguous”, appeals to the part of Tara that has constantly struggled with a culture in which categorizations are of utmost social importance. “When everyone knows your business and every name declares your identity, where no landscape fails to contain a plethora of human figures, even a damaged consciousness, even loneliness, become privileged commodities” [14]. The freedom to exist outside of a culture in which everything is public knowledge, in which identity is a fixed entity, appeals to Tara. Such freedom presents the opportunity to feel a certain angst that comes with searching for identity rather than having that identity already established from birth, it offers Tara the chance to fully explore the makings of a consciousness instead of simply accepting her consciousness as given.

[13] Ibid., p.78
[14] Ibid., p.31-34
Critics of Mukherjee’s writing often assert that her characters are simply too “Americanized” that they choose one identity over another as the only solution to the battle of living in between cultures. Rangaswamy is one such critic claiming, “the only way for many of Mukherjee’s heroines is to discard the past, totally and irrevocably, and embrace total Americanization” [15]. Tara could easily fit into this controversial categorization of Mukherjee’s heroine, for she appears to distance herself from all that is Indian, including her past. Also, Mukherjee provides a stark comparison of methods of assimilation through the contrasting character of Didi, who makes Tara seem all the more “Americanized”. Didi has essentially transplanted India to America, living as though her Calcutta days never ended when she immigrated. “In the nearly twenty-five years that Didi has been in the United States, she has become more Indian than when she left Calcutta” [16]. Tara does not approve of her sister’s lifestyle, and her feelings of condemnation only increase when her sister Parvati accuses her of becoming too American. In an attempt to persuade Tara to come home, Parvati writes a letter to her, firmly stating, “your child isn’t American or Indian and if you stay there any longer, you won’t be either” [17].

[16] op.cit., p.94.
[17] Ibid., p.66.
But Tara does not fall prey to these attacks on her identity, for she has desired a change of lifestyle for too long to give up all that she has created in California, however “American” it may be.

In her attempt to preserve her culture, Didi has rejected all that is American, associating only with people of Indian descent, working for an Indian television channel and living in an area highly populated by other South Asians. But for Tara, her sister’s behaviour is not a symbol of her desire to retain Indian traditions, but rather a craven response to the difficulties of cultural transition. Her sister clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and to Indian friends, Indian clothes and food and a ‘charming’ accent had seemed to her a cowardly way of coping with a new country. Change is corruption. We should accept what America can give, but we should allow it to tarnish us in any way. In juxtaposing Tara and Didi, Mukherjee presents the essential crisis of the assimilation process; can one assimilate too much? Where is the line between adaptation and total loss of culture? Is change truly a form of corruption?

Mukherjee does not directly answer these questions, but in doing so suggests that distinctions among different levels of assimilation are too ambiguous and subjective to measure or define, for what might be seen as a loss of culture to some diasporic folk may be viewed as a necessary
adaptation to a new culture by others. Tara admits that she has somewhat
distanced herself from Indian culture: "...I loved my family and culture but
had walked away from the struggle to preserve them. In San Francisco, I
barely knew any Indians" [18]. Yet this dissociation does not necessarily
imply her rejection of all that is Indian, nor preclude her from claiming
Indian identity. Tara still possesses the memories of her family and culture,
so much so that they often at times overwhelm her. "As far as I’ve drifted
from the path of piety, or even of family, their names suddenly swell by
dozens, the hundreds, filling my heart, brain, memory, soul" [19]. Tara’s
distance from other Indians and the culture stems not from her denial of her
"Indianness" but rather from her desire not to feel alien as well as her fear of
living in the past.

The first decade of Tara’s marriage was spent adjusting to American
culture. Tara was “sick of feeling alien” in this new environment, tired of
not-belonging, in the midst of such welcoming comfort. Instead of trying to
preserve the India of her past, Tara moved forward toward what she believed
was the possibility of change and progression. While Didi recreates the India
of her childhood, Tara works to create a world in which she does not have to
live in the past. “I don’t want to be a perfectly preserved bug trapped in

[19] Ibid., p.246.
amber, Didi and I don’t want to live in a half-India kept on life-support. You
think I’m ridiculous, or somehow a disgrace to Indian womankind, a
divorced walking around in my American clothes” [20]. To live in a world
of “Indianness” is to live a life locked in the past, which Tara believes is the
downfall of many South Asian diasporic women. When Tara is preparing to
begin investigating the secrets of her familial history, Andy cautions her;
“The past is nice this place is nice. It’s nice to visit the past every now and
then. Just don’t live there” [21]. Tara takes this advice quite seriously, for
she recognizes that living in the past, whether temporally, spatially or both,
is dangerous to the development of one’s identity.

Yet Tara does not completely discard her former Indian identity, for
it remains a part of her consciousness and it always will. “Yet I’m still too
timid to feed my Ballygunge Park Road identity into the kitchen Garburetor.
That dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist’s glass
case…” [22]. Though Tara’s identity is constantly changing and evolving,
she does not want to lose the identities she has possessed nor her connection
to Indian culture. When Didi brings Tara to Jackson Heights (an area in
Queens, New York with a high number of South Asian residents and

[21] Ibid., p.76.
[22] Ibid., p.78-79.
businesses) to shop for saris and jewelry for a party one evening, Tara is attracted to the “Indianness” of the area, for it appeals to her through its familiarity. “The attraction of Jackson Heights, for me, has always been people pleasures, sidewalks full of Indians, every face is Indian, every shop and storefront features Indian jewelry, Indian clothing, Indian travel, Indian food and spices, Indian sweets and restaurants. The smells and the noises are familiar...it’s intoxicating” [23]. The pull that Tara feels toward all that is Indian in Jackson Heights suggests that she has not abandoned her Indian identity, but rather still views it as a part of her.

Tara possesses many identities at one time, yet she seems comfortable with her multiplicity, which allows her the freedom to assimilate while at the same time retaining the aspects of Indian culture that she wishes to preserve. While some critics may view this multiplicity as “Americanization” it is more aptly described as the new form of assimilation for this generation of South Asian diasporic immigrants. Rather than transplanting Indian culture or disposing of it altogether, the current pattern appears to be reinventing the very notion of one’s culture as it bears on one’s identity. Amidst this new American scene, Indian women became aware of their own traditions in new ways. American and Indian cultures are both appreciated in different ways in

[23] Ibid., p.199.
Tara’s life, but nevertheless they each hold equal importance for her, as evidenced by her frequent thought, “May be I really (am) between two lives...” [24]. As she develops her identity, Tara describes the sensation as a sort of recreation of the self: “I felt as though I were lost in a Salman Rushdie novel, a one-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and reemerging as something wondrous or grotesque” [25]. Identity is no longer an established set of characteristics given away by family name, ethnicity and gender roles, but rather it can be “smashed,” “melted down” and rebuilt. It is fluid and ever changing, subject to the experiences that will forever be molding it into something new.

As Tara tries to solve the mystery of Christopher Dey, she comes to understand that, as much as she does not want to live in the past, it is nevertheless an important factor in the development of her multiple consciousnesses and identities.

As Tara delves into the scandalous and secretive history of her family, she also explores the making of her own consciousness, for in the narrative that emerges from her search is also the consciousness that she has created over the years. In essence, Tara’s uncovering of her memories and familial history parallels the revelation of her own identity; as she chronicles the

story of her family from Ballygunge Road to the streets of Upper Haight, she also records the development of her very self from Indian immigrant to assimilated American. Tara began her story with the singular and set identity of the devoted Indian wife and (later) mother, but soon discovered that these roles and a life of such expected order were not the only aspects of her identity. Thus, she moves toward embracing the multiple aspects that comprise who she is, accepting and even celebrating the chaos of multiplicity. Tara muses to herself, "Out of order, I created chaos. Out of chaos, one... will create something resembling a new American consciousness." [26].

The uncertainty of time, space, culture and identity are representative of Tara's chaotic experience in formulating her identity, but they are also the harbingers of what will become the "new American consciousness," a consciousness comprised of many and with many more to come.

At the end of the novel, Tara finds that the past that she has uncovered is very much a part of her present, a situation that she has always feared. Yet, in keeping with Tara's unorthodox identity, the past that is with her is different from that of her sister Didi. Instead, Tara finds that through her story, she has created an inversion of history, for she is living her present life

[26] Ibid., p.155.
through the structure of an older story from the past: "I'd been writing at night on a rented typewriter, and the story that had begun to emerge was of the Tree-Bride and of the class of Calcutta girls born a century later, both of them witness to dying traditions. Tara Lata Gangooly had turned the tragedy of her husband's death and a lifetime's virginity into a model of selfless saintliness. My story was different, perhaps even an inversion" [27]. Tara epitomizes the diasporic immigrant's relationship to culture, for she retains aspects of her tradition but changes them, inverts them to fit into the current cultural climate in which she lives. While struggle, pain, and compromise, are an integral part of the immigrant experience, many (South Asian) women do not necessarily see total Americanization or rejection of India as the path to wholeness. They may have accepted America as their home, but their yearning for India and sense of loss is also accepted as an inevitable corollary of immigration. The experience of the South Asian Diasporic woman is one in which the psyche is always "in between" worlds, where time and space have created a sense of psychological uncertainty.

[27] Ibid., p.280.
While this state of uncertainty often disorients the individual, making one subject to an indeterminate identity, it also allows her to exist as many, expressing the voices of the multitudes that lie within her, and promising to sound the voices of those selves that have yet to be discovered.