CHAPTER - III

SELF IN THE LATER NOVELS
OF
BHARATI MUKHERJEE
In the later novels, it is Bharati Mukherjee’s first love ‘history’ that she links up to her favourite theme of diaspora. It has always been her purpose to become an American mainstream writer. So the origin of America and Americans, their history has always been a pre-occupation with Mukherjee. She connected American history with Indian history, by forging links between Seventeenth Century Massachusetts and Pre-colonial Mughal India. The narrator of the story is Beigh Masters. The theme is the quest for a lost diamond. The treasure hunt leads her to Hannah Easton, a New England Puritan, Women who has a Hindu prince as her lover in India’s Coromandel Coast. On the level of literary device, she takes analogies from the American masterpiece, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and the Indian mythology *Ramayana-* in her fusion of history and mythological narrative. In an interview with Jerry Pinto, Bharati Mukherjee admits:

I love history and I am fascinated by the handling of data, what is called information management. As the novel grew draft by draft, I saw a way to bring these together. Many authors see science as adversial. I don’t. To me this was an experiment in virtual reality, a way of revising, reliving history, instead of rewriting it. I wanted to set up for American and Indian audience how much Asia contributed to the notion of an American or European identity. Contact with the other, changes the way you see for yourself (*The Sunday Review, Times of India: 02*).

*The Holder of the World* traces the diaspora on the reverse order. It is migration from west to east, in order to show new dimensions of cross-cultural confrontation. In the earlier novels, *Wife* and *Jasmine* the migration is from India to America. Further, she takes up the historical tool to trace how American and European identity is also shaped in the Indian milieu. It starts during colonial times in Mughal India. The novel acts as a bridge between the past and the present. One would say the novel is a form of ‘Computerized history’. And the search for the precious diamond ‘Emperor Tear’ seems to be the search for the glorious past and the search for the mysterious life of Hannah.
From the feminist perspective it shows the power, resilience and courage of women like Hannah, in the male dominated world. "Like any other feminist writer", says Sushila Singh, "Bharati Mukherjee characters offer a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought social organization and control mechanism" (Indian Woman Novelists ed. Amarnath Prasad, 1991, 651). In The Holder of the World, she suggests two advantages of Women’s Liberation. Firstly, it allows them to realize their potentials as individuals in the wider society. Secondly, it is the only way by which they could achieve personal recognition and identity. Her characters Dimple in Wife, Jasmine in Jasmine and Rebecca, Hannah and Bhagmati in The Holder of the World reiteratedly defy estrangement in the society by rejecting cultural stereotypes. In other words, their growth or the development of self is centrifugal.

In the article entitled “Giving Up The Perfect Diamond”, K Anthony Appiah observes, “Mukherjee draws with vigour and scrupulous attention to detail across time and space into the footsteps of not one but two extraordinary women” (The New York Times Book Review, 07). In fact, it is a feminist study of two women, one contemporary and the other dating 300 years ago in history. Both the writer and the narrator being women, it is a feminist point of view to American history. The writer’s perspective is to show the power and strength, resilience of women’s cultural association in a patriarchal world. The first women is the contemporary voice of Beigh Masters who does assets research. She has impeccable Puritan antecedents, descendant from Charles Jonathan Samuel Master born in Morpeth, Northumber land. The second woman is Hannah Easton. In the remotest of ways Beigh tells us “Hannah is a relative of mine” (22). After that scandalous disappearance of her widowed mother Rebecca, Hannah becomes an orphan. She is brought up by Flitch family who taught her needlework. This raised a scandal in the Puritan world, and she later went to England, widowed and remarried. She also travelled through Mughal India to hold for a moment the Emperor’s Tears, the World’s perfect diamond.
Beigh recreates the life of Hannah in the process of researching for his lost treasure. Thus, it becomes a study of cross cultural consciousness. Laxmi Parasuram maintains: “The Holder of the World is an attempt to turn the tables on the familiar situation of an Indian in America to one of an American in India so that we may discover an approach to cross-cultural consciousness that has a universal relevance” (A Critical Symposium, ed. Dhawan, 1996: 197). This book is an attempt to release consciousness from the shackles of Time and Space and bring about a sense of global connectedness. Further the book gathers momentum and originates from a hunger for connectedness; a belief that with sufficient passion and intelligence we could deconstruct the barriers of time and geography.

The world that comes alive between the pages of the book revolves around the three time zones simultaneously in the stream of consciousness mode. In between the three time zones past, present and future stretches vast spaces of colonial America of the Seventeenth century, Moghul India and the Twentieth century. Beigh Master’s husband creates the greatest data plasma programme X 2929. This has the capacity to animate information and translate all input into virtual reality. It recreates the Universe of Europe, America and India to become the true index of global consciousness. It is Bharati Mukherjee’s remarkable ability of visualizing such a technology to make it possible for one to insert oneself anywhere anytime on the Spatio-temporal continuum and experience history at any chosen moment and location. Thereby, it brings about a dimension of futuristic possibilities into this cross-cultural vision. Beigh Masters has come to realize as a result of her lost response, that no gesture is ever futile. Her central pre-occupation is to discover all she could about Salem Bibi, a Boston woman of colonial times who lived several years in India. She has an Indian lover, Maharaja Yadav Singh of Devgad. She has left behind several memorabilia that remains scattered in various museums and collections. Beigh had consulted five hundred books, endless number of
paintings, engravings, trade records, journals, picture, artifacts, in order to unravel the mysterious life of Salem Bibi and her secret heart. Datas about her life are encoded in multiple evidences and Venn's programme X 2989 had ingested all this information to reanimate and recreate the sensory and immediate world of virtual reality. Beighs could enter this World and be virtually identified with Hannah. Laxmi Parasuram, calls it the "Colliding Worlds" (A Critical Symposium, 196) of Hannah's life sharing the interconnectedness of life in Puritan American, Colonial England and Mughal India.

In the Museum of Maritime Trade in Boston, Beigh came across old items from Mughal India as well as Puritan New England. There seems to exist a thriving trade between Colonial America and Mughal India. The exchange of items between the two worlds displayed the Mughal's love for extravaganza and opulence versus puritan practicability. Mughals traded for rubies, pearls and jade wine cups, while the Puritans traded for pots, pans, pitches, axes and other practical tools. Hannah must have witnessed the colliding worlds of the gaudiness of Allah's culture and contrasted it with the utilitarian world of Puritan pragmatists. She has travelled with her seafaring husband from the shores of Salem to the Coromandel coast. "Every time traveller will create a different reality -- just as we all do now. No two travellers will be able to retrieve the same reality, or even a fraction of the available realities" (06). The difference between Mughal opulence and trade of Puritan America can be deciphered in the following opinion of Puritan American:

We beat those Asians because our pots are heavy and black and our pothooks contain no jewels. No paintings, no in lays of rubies and pearls. Our men wore animal skins or jerkins of crude muslin and our women's virtue was guarded by bonnets and capes and full skirts. Those Indian guys wore earrings and dresses and necklaces (12).
This was the response of the early Puritan Americans towards Mughal opulence. Bharati Mukherjee deliberately turned the table to show the rich heritage of India and contrast it to the present poverty of the postcolonial days. Manju Kak observes: “Moreover, the tide is reversed, the so called American dream lies in the orient and America seeks it” (Indian Review of Books, Volume III: No. 5, Feb16–Mar15 1994, 24-25). The Westerners were drawn towards this oriental affluence and riches but their sense of snobbery does not permit them to stoop to Eastern culture. They failed to acclimatize themselves with the Oriental way of life but they just revel in their own sense of pseudo-pride and superiority. This is an instance of the alien’s unaccommodated self, striving to strike roots, and attain a static identity.

The idea behind this novel comes from Bharati Mukherjee’s love for a miniature painting titled “A European Women in Aurangzeb’s Court”. A Caucasian woman stood resplendent in full Mughal dress and Mukherjee realized that the woman three hundred years back had taken lots of risks and transformed herself. She did a lot of research in order to materialize this idea. Mukherjee created her alibi, the narrator, Beigh Masters. She discovered in maritime trade museum in Massachusetts, a painting bearing a catalogue named “The Unravished Bride”. In this painting Salem Bibi stood on the cannon-breached rampart, of a Hindu fort. With the life of Hannah, Mukherjee unfolds an intriguing tale of dislocation, and meeting of two worlds, the Puritan Seventeenth and Eighteenth century American world trying to come to terms with the Mughal view of Indian life. In a rare comingling of history and imagination, Mukherjee lights up the making and the very nature of American consciousness.

Central to Bharati Mukherjee’s works, are issues related to women. Feminism in her works exists in what Carol Smith Rosenberg argues as, “the emotional segregation of women and man, which brought about and led to the
development of a specifically female world" (*A Heritage of Her Own*, 137). Bharati Mukherjee is aware that identity of women is segregated from men, even three hundred years back, during the times of Hannah. Further, *The Holder of the World* like *Jasmine* and *Wife* captures the metamorphosis of women protagonist especially in the post-immigration phase. According to Lavina Shankar Dhingra: "Among critics, Mukherjee is considered one of the few ethnic artists, who looks beyond the immigrants' sense of alienation and dislocation to trace psychological transformation, especially among women" (*A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism*, Winter, 1995, 15).

The historical documentation of Hannah's life dates back to 1670, born in Brookfield, America. One year old Hannah was left in the lurch when she lost her father and her mother ran away with Nimphuc lover. She is brought up by Robert and Susannah Fitch and is brought to Salem. She grows up with a skill and obsession for needlework and nursing. She suppresses her fancy and wantonness of spirit which is only expressed in needle work. Even the narrator, reading the records of her life has a cynical and feminist idea of her step parents. Hannah remained indoors and served her invalid step brother. They were possessive of her: "The step father and step brother wanted her to themselves. They needed the money she brought in...They hid her wild embroidery and monitored every visitor. Only the oldest friends the Mannings, were allowed access" (60-61). She remained a maid till she was twenty as she was dowryless till the arrival of Gabriel in the ship "Shallow". Hannah's mother Rebecca was related to the Twentieth century narrator Beigh Master. Rebecca's grandmother was the cousin of Charles Jonathan Muster. Narrator Beigh Masters had family ancestral origin to the Muster. So the connection between Hannah was established through family ties. "I am a part of this story, the Salem Bibi is part of the tissue of my life" (21).
In 1675 Rebecca rebels against puritan widowhood and elopes with her lover, and the child is the silent witness to this feminist rebellion in the ancient Puritan world of orthodoxy. The Puritan preoccupation with sin and repentance is envisioned in a women’s world which Nathaniel Hawthorne has depicted it in *Scarlet Letter*. Later Hannah becomes burdened with mother’s sin.

Has any child been so burdened? She has witnessed the Fall, not Adam’s Fall, Rebecca’s fall. Her mother’s Fall, infinitely more sinful than the Fall of a man. She is the witness not merely of the occasion of sin, but the birth of sin itself”(30).

She has studied the life of Hannah Easton as closely as her own life and realized that she loved her mother as her own. However Hannah ahead of her time had chosen her life perhaps through rebellion of social ethics, breaking stringent laws of Puritan World. Similarly Beigh Master chooses the oriental, poetry loving physicist, music loving chemist MIT in the twentieth century. The dynamics of social class and the change in attitude to the concept of sin and guilt is suggested with the protagonists’ rebellion of orthodox laws.

Hannah grew up to be a silent girl especially talented and obedient but of a secretive disposition whose origins could only be traced to the night in the woods when she saw her mother murdered before her eye. She is mysteriously disposed off, so that not a trace remained. There was always a fear that the memory of the night would someday return. It did return, when she suffered from a mysterious ailment in 1865. The ailment kept her in bed, doleful insomnia for six weeks. “Rebecca was initiating her daughter into a whispered, subversive alphabet: “A” is for, Act my daughter!”... “B” is for Boldness,... “C” for Character,... “D” is for Dissent, “E” is for Ecstasy... “F” is for Forage... and “I” is for Independence”, said Hannah (54). The next morning, Hannah recovers miraculously. She silently rebels against destiny and God given fate. She learnt her lesson of action, rebellion and freedom from her.
At fifteen, she had a friend, Hester. She spent her eight years in the Fitch household as an exile. She wanted to escape from the suffocating atmosphere of the Fitch household. A proposal of marriage comes from Innkeeper William Pynchon's on June 15 1686. The narrator comments, that, "If Solomen Pynchons marital overtures had been accepted, the history of United States would have been profoundly altered" (57). The stepfather and stepbrother monopolized her and wanted to possess the money she earned. They kept her isolated from society, until she met Gabriel Legge. He possessed the ownership of the ship, "Shallow". He was tall and dashing with a dark patch covering his eyes. He charmed men and women with fascinating tales from the orient. No one in Salem is a match for Gabriel. His tales cast a spell over men and women alike.

The narrator questions the motives of Hannah’s marriage to Legge:

Why would self-possessed, intelligent, desirable women like Hannah Easton suddenly marry a man she recognized as inappropriate and untrustworthy? Why would she accept Hester Manning’s castoff, or betrayer? Guilt, perhaps, or the need to punish herself for the secret she was forced to carry? (69).

The answer to the motive analysis is in the following lines: "Unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by running off with a treacherous alien. The Puritan concept of sin and guilt is explained by Bharati Mukherjee in Psychological terms. The marginalization of women and their silent repression could be explained by sin and guilt. Gabriel Legge with his tales of exotic adventure was close to the Nipmuc lover as any man in Salem; she sought to neutralize her shame by emulating her mother's behaviour". Gabriel Legge was a compulsive seafarer and an artful salesman. He brought her pouchful of diamonds, in the size of corns. He got his pleasure from haggling and not from hoarding. He wanted Hannah to overcome her Puritan habit of frugality. Bharati Mukherjee shows the wealth of India loaded with jewels, gold, spices, wealth, silk, muslin- showing that the dream lay in the Orient World. Bharati Mukherjee deliberately shows the Western seeker in search of Oriental wealth.
In 1963, Gabriel Legge is reported dead in one of his seafaring voyages. He had left enough money for her to lead a life of her choice. She befriends Hebert, a doctor who has met with an accident. Hannah treated the boy with leeches and skull wavelets. She assisted Dr. Hubert with her experience in herbs and barks and certain surgical practices. He was educated in Physics and Mathematics and held a position as a researcher with Royal society. So both of them exchanged knowledge, to follow a new pattern of healing. Hannah assumed a new identity. She was not just a sailor’s widow, she was in some way a woman blessed with healing powers.

The memoirs written by Hannah in 1745, forms the basis of much of her early life. Gabriel Legge reappeared after escaping death in April 1694. As a Puritan orphan, she was strictly raised, and consequently appreciated the value of money. The widow’s subsistence and her freedom vanished with Gabriel’s reappearance. Hannah was in love with new lands. She decided to move on with him without looking back.

Hannah’s arrival in India in 1695 is set against a period of tumultuous political activity. The readers confront the sordid realities of British administrators in India: They had not come to India in order to breed and colonize, or even to convert. They had come to plunder, and to enrich themselves. But Hannah’s primary concern in the new world appeared to be to peel the superficialities in quest of a meaningful life. In fact as soon as she steps on the Coromandel Coast, she feels an instinctive sense of belongingness and she decides that she does not aspire to return to England upon the completion of Gabriel’s tour: “She knew she had been transported to the other side of the world, but the transportation was more than mere “conveyancing”, as it was for Gabriel and others. Many years later she called the trip and her residence in India her “translation” (104). Hannah is alive to the life around her. She was not afraid of the ‘exotica’ instead she is thrilled. It is this curiosity and
enthusiasm towards life which made her a contemporary of the narrator who could withhold her sense of admiration: “Of all the qualities I admire in Hannah Easton that make her entirely our contemporary in mood and sensibility, none is more touching to me than the sheer pleasure she took in the world’s variety” (104). She knew that she has come half-way round the globe and the life in the Indian sub-continent is entirely different. She could not use her own western parameters for measuring this world: “She was alert to novelty but her voyage was mental, interior. Getting there was important, but savouring the comparison with London or Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure. She did not hold India up to inspection by the lamp of England, or of Christianity, nor did she aspire to return to England upon the completion of Gabriel’s tour” (104).

Hannah’s discomfort in the new land was similar to Jasmine and Dimple in America. She had not seen so many people crowded together ever. The deck in Salem seemed empty, bleached, muffled in comparison. Hannah had not seen so much display of colour, rich silks, brocades, cottons, and combinations of colours that only a garden in high blossom could rival. This was India for her, crowded, colourful, peopled with local people in turbans. She met the chief Factor Cephus Higginbotham, St. Forts’ doctor’s wife Martha Ruxton and the doctor John Ruxton. She collected all the gossip from Sarah and Martha but never trusted them as confidents. She became aware of Englishmen’s life in India. Every English husband strayed into infidelity. She is advised by Sarah and Martha about the bibi culture. Her encounter with English women, especially the wives of other factors of East India Company, furthers her impatience with their pretentions to nobility and their self-conscious superiority among the local community. Martha Ruxton and Sarah Higginbotham are both examples of English snobbery and disdain, characteristic of women in the colonies.
Hannah was provided accommodation in a two storied house which was earlier occupied by ex-factor Henry Hedges special servant. English women had a condescending attitude to local men and women. “Martha boasted that she had never scrutinized a young Indian man or women’s face” (133). Hannah was shocked that her English companions accepted tea and biscuits from Bhagmati without looking at her. Bhagmati was invisible to the women of White Town. Hannah became aware of the Bibi culture. The Englishmen kept bibi’s wherever they went. To Shakuntala Bharvani, “It is a very much a colonial novel at one level, with several details of colonial life woven in.” (A Critical Symposium 189). While fusing history with fiction, Mukherjee never shrank from reflecting postcolonial anxiety. The lucretious life style, cruelty, lechery the Britisher’s feeling of disdain towards the natives is contradicted with the deplorable plight of the Indian masses. The factors of East India Company believe that their life in India is extraordinary and they were the very angels sent by the British gods, the British crown. They felt that they have a license to commit whatever atrocities they liked in view of their White superiority. India was not for the senses. It was a permanent plague, and the possibility of death loomed large. Sarah’s realistic lesson was the unpleasant inescapability of death in the tropics.

This was the land, Hannah had to adopt and adapt. She found her English companions vain, hypocritical and shocking. She was more at rest with Bhagmati with whom she develops a companionship of life. “...the tinkle of Baghmati’s bangles alerted Hannah to one of her servant’s silent communication. She seemed to understand English, but did not speak it, nor did Hannah speak more than a word or two of the local languages. But through her eyes, and her body, Bhagmati communicated” (136). The white woman’s adaptability and the subversive silence of the black woman seemed to speak of the reverse diaspora from a feministic perspective. It appeared white woman’s complacency marginalized the brown woman, silencing them. Bharati
Mukherjee has also highlighted this aspect of feminism where women marginalize women.

By 1696, in the course of cut-throat competition for profit, Gabriel Legge had fallen out of trust of the Chief Factor. He was humiliated by Chief Factor when the company stamp was misused. Gabriel had an independent spirit. He was violent, impulsive and generous. He joined Marquis as a Pirate and sailed on the Esperance. England became Captain of Esperance for seventeen voyages, survived shipwrecks, cyclones, duels and whipping. He had left behind his class of Legges, in Madagascar and Mauritius. He had become the Robinhood of Coromandel coast plundering rich and wealthy in Paris, Amsterdam and London.

Hannah never wanted to be taken back to England like other expatriates. She didn’t feel rootless and nostalgic like the other English expatriates, Martha or Sarah. Hannah is more like Jasmine in Bharati Mukherjee’s earlier novel. Tara and Dimple of the first two novels are expatriates with nostalgia and a longing to go home. But Hannah is reluctant to sink into rootlessness. “She was not ready to entomb herself in Morpeth or London. She didn’t feel bereft — of roots, of traditions- as Martha and Sarah professed to feel. Instead she felt unfinished, unformed. She was, she is, of course, a goddess in the making” (163). So, she allowed Gabriel to leave India by Esperance with Marquis and Cutlass da Silva.

By 1700, she gave her life a new dimension and a new identity. Therefore the narrator thought of her forming into a Goddess. Earlier in the novel Jasmine, Mukherjee had likened Jasmine with Goddess Kali when she killed Half-Face. In the new universe of the Coromandel, Hannah felt an urge to expand and reform into a new self. “The Coromandel had started something as immense as a cyclone deep inside her body and mind. To let Gabriel go was also to let herself expand” (163).
The new oriental life begins for Hannah in the companionship of Bhagmati. In the absence of Gabriel, and in her isolation from the Company wives, Bhagmati was the only link to the outside world. This companionship helped Hannah to identify with the Indian milieu. The Company women had warned her not to speak the language of the primitive Indians. But she imbibed the language without inhibitions and spoke the language. She easily accommodated herself in the world of Bhagmati. The English snobbery reflected their unwillingness to learn the local language and adapt to it. However, Hannah never adhered to these colonial rules, of ruling the savages. She merged with the new culture:

They now spoke a common language, she and her servant, which the Company had warned about... all the accommodations you’ve made are suddenly manifest, your blood has thinned your brain and your palate have made some sort of infernal adjustment. You can eat their food, endure their weather, and tolerate their heathen ways. You find yourself getting ideas across to them, and comprehending their responses (171).

In the Indian milieu, Hannah was transformed into a new self. She accepted Bhagmati as her guide and listened to her oral recitations of the Great Epic, Ramayana. With the simplicity of a child, Hannah translated the Indian epics, the story of Hanuman and captivity of Sita. She identified her mother Rebecca to Sita in Lanka. “But more than the story of Hanuman, it is the story of Sita’s captivity that consumes Hannah” (173). Hannah’s interpretation of Sita was a kind of assimilation and identification with the ideal Hindu wife. For Hannah, Sita was that figure of women who can subject herself to test and explore herself and even survive in an alien world. Bharati Mukherjee makes use of the myth of Sita, as a Gorgein woman like Hannah learns to survive. For Bhagmati, Sita was the self sacrificing ideal Hindu wife. But for Hannah, Sita was that figure of a woman impatient to test herself, to explore and survive in an alien world.
Hannah, the agile disputer to the oral recitation, makes an analogy between herself and Sita. She was a foundling like Sita, adopted by the Fitch household. She adjusts to Salem World and forsakes Royal life to live in the pastoral woods. Hannah comes to India with Gabriel and allows her to be transformed. Bharati Mukherjee demands from Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher Venn, Sita’s version of her captivity in Lanka. The feminist questions how Sita resists or accommodates in Lanka? Did Sita survive in belief of divine Providence? The novelist was fascinated by Sita’s survival in Lanka, her resistance, accommodation and transformation in Lanka. “Did Sita survive because of the blind or easy faith in Providence? Or did she genuinely believe that deprived of Rama’s protection, she’d transformed herself into a swan whom a crow wouldn’t dare touch” (177).

Bharati Mukherjee makes an affirmative suggestion that in order to survive in an alien land, transformation is vital and necessary. She prepared the ground for Hannah’s transformation into Salem Bibi. So she concludes Sita’s version of captivity as she understands Hannah’s nature of exile. “I may not have Sita’s words, but I have the Salem Bibi’s: I know from her own captivity narrative what Sita would have written.”(Ibid 177).

Bharati Mukherjee’s application of Sita’s myth to the life of Hannah is in the perspective of exile, expatriation and survival in the alien land. The answer to survival is transformation. So we have Hannah transformed into Indian Salem Bibi. If fate had not intervened Hannah Legge would have lived her life in India with her bones resting in St Mary’s of Fort St. George. But the narrator is sure that women like Hannah would create history wherever they went. The narrator observes:“Wherever she stayed, I am convinced she would have changed history for she was one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway” (189).
Therefore Twentieth Century narrator chose to trace history via the four-lane highway of Hannah Legge’s life. Again a new turn of events would change the destiny of her life. Gabriel Legge earned the hate and jealousy of Chief Factor Higginbothen and he sent a fort of explosives to destroy him. His bibi Zeb-un-nissa’s hovel was badly charred with Higginbotham’s loathing while the lovers were making love in a convent tank filled with star-chilled water and floating lotuses. They were spared. But outbreak of fire shattered the marriage of Hannah. “But the certain knowledge of his unfaithfulness, his preference of a bibi to her, was a matter that her pride would not permit forgiveness. ... a very loud wake up call, a sign to Hannah that tolerance and patience and even a pragmatic trade off between luxury and uncertainty were no longer sufficient, no longer bearable” (198).

This time she decided to sail to London. Bhagmati could not cross the sea and leave the shrine of Henry Hedges. She still walked the parapets dressed in her white silks. So until the passage was arranged, she stayed with Martha Ruxton at Fort St. Sebastian. She was at that time childless and thirty years of age.

In December 1700, Hannah became husbandless. History was already rewriting her fate. Her passage to England was nearly complete. Gabriel agreed to send her alimony at regular intervals. She was shocked, depressed under rejection. She felt a fatigue in her bones, as she slept in the ship to overcome moral collapse. It was an uprising of a cyclone that prevented her to board the ship to London. She was destined to write more history in India. In the cyclone the bridge broke. She was saved by Bhagmati from drowning. She found herself rescued and held as guests by Raja Jadav Singh, the Lion of Devgad.

Hannah was in a truly Hindu world. She held no Christian skepticism to this new religion. “They worshipped the male sex organ; an elephant-headed fat-boy god. They had more gods than people” (219). Her knowledge of Hindu
religion was from Bhagmati. She was no longer a servant to her. Perhaps she, and Hannah were about to become one. She realized a new life was opening up as she was coming closer not only to the Rajput Raja but also in close proximity to Emperor Aurangzeb. Nawab Haider Beg was marching towards Roopconda fort. And Nawab’s man was also Emperor’s man. She felt a shudder of wonder, that the life of Emperor Aurangzeb, the seizure of the world was crossing the life of Brookfield orphan. She transformed herself. “She put on a clean sari, the same as Bhagmati... A new name for a new incarnation. Rebecca Easton was dead. Hannah Easton Fitch Legge was dying.” (222).

The change of name is symbolic of the transformation into a new identity. The Indian and Oriental identity of Hannah was being born. She was the Goddess, the peacemaker in the making. By putting the same sari as Bhagmati and by changing into Indian costume she was assuming an Indian identity. Bhagmati had come close to Hennery Hedges and she remained faithful to his memory. She compared Raja Jadav Singh to King David, who was an old shepherd king, cruel, kindly and a musician. It was fate that Bhagmati and she were rescued by the Raja. He showed hospitality and talked with a voice that belied a warrior. In the memoirs, it was stated that she was suffering from post-traumatic shock.

She felt a weakness for the man who had saved her life. He invited her to his musical evening, he played the flute. He sent gift of a small blue bird to Hannah. She wanted the Raja and nothing else. She would sacrifice anything for his touch. She became transformed. “She was no longer the woman she’d been in Salem or London... Everything was in flux on the Coromandel coastline. The survivor is the one who improvises, not follows the rules”(234). She transformed herself into a bibi. Hannah becomes so possessive of her privacy that she isolated the King from the pleas and sorrows of his subject. No Bharati Mukherjee heroine was capable of so much passion or love as Hannah. “Hannah
and Jadav Singh wooed each other in a cupola roofed balcony overlooking the distant bay" (234). While the lovers embraced in passion, drought arrived in Panpur. People wept in poverty and hunger. The Nawab Haider Beg sent his ruthless commander Morad Farah, to surrender the fort of Panpur.

Hannah realized the passionate side of her nature. In Salem such expression of love and passion was considered sin. In Fitch household she was domesticated to wifely duties. In Panpur fort, she came to understand the satiety of total fulfilment. But this pleasure lasted for a while. “She had travelled the world, a witness to unimagined visions, merely to repeat her mother’s folly, and to live her mother’s life over” (238). When Devgad was surrounded by Nawab’s man, Jadav Singh went into a foodless and waterless period of meditation.

The Rajput Raja followed Kautilya’s principle of begging for truce and then escaping to fight guerilla war. So he sent a petition of truce offering fifteen chests of gold, 800,000 rupees to greedy Morad Farah in exchange of Panpur Fort. Petition was accepted with greed and signed up. Raja bundled Hannah and Bhagmati into one palanquin and he himself headed for Devgad. “Guilt did not enter his makeup, only duty, and his duty was to lead, to defend and to fight” (241). The Muslim soldiers slaughtered cows, attacked temples and urinated on idols of Gods. They burned villages and corpses lay face down in paddy field. Finally, Raja was defeated and maimed. His mother called him useless as he could not fight and disowned him.

Hannah washed his wounds and changed his bandage, applying cooling ointments, administering barks and herbs. After few days, his left hand was found limp. Hannah proposed marriage but she was rejected. Mutability and change was a factor to be acknowledged in all spheres of life. She persuaded the Raja to become a father to her child but again she was relegated to the woman’s room. Hannah again accepted the change in her life: “My stepfather was a farmer in the woods, and he became a carpenter in the city. My husband was a
factor, he became a pirate. I was once a respectable married English lady and look at me now—a bibi in a sari. We can all change” (255-56).

This change and adaptability to life and situations makes Hannah what she is, capable of love, of nursing and now she was on the family way. Her final role-playing was an emissary of peace. She was disowned by the Raja and now she turned her focus towards a humanitarian and altruistic cause. She wanted peace to prevail; as she had seen enough bloodshed and violence.

Bhagmati and Hannah entered a secret passage and entered the tent of Aurangzeb “…He was more than eighty, he was older than America”(262). In his tent a globe of gold hung in the cradle of golden replica of Aurangzeb’s hands.” On both sides of the golden sphere, a lion nuzzled a lamb. Embedded on the top of his gold universe, like the pole star, was a single diamond, the largest and the most beautiful, she had ever seen or imagined”. The whole day she roamed in the mughal tent and army. In the night she was given permission to have a private audience with the emperor. “This was the moment, she was ever to have one, when the gods that controlled the universe had conspired to put her Christian-Hindu-Muslim self, American-English-Indian self, her orphaned, abandoned, widowed, pregnant self, her firangi and bibi self into a single message” (268). It was a message of peace, to stop the war. She challenged the quality of mercy and his duties towards his subject. The Emperor gave a patient hearing, but he had his constraints. His predicament was such that he had to fight on. He lamented: “I do not fight for treasure and glory in this life. This diamond is the tear I shed as I discharge my duty. That is why it is called the Emperor’s tear…He restored the diamond to the crown of the world, the seat of the universe (269). The World’s diamond holder, has to fight and discharge duties with tears in his eye. Beigh Masters the narrator, passes the final judgement about Hannah’s character and personality when she acknowledges:
“Wherever she stayed...she would have changed history for she was one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway” (189).

Hema Nair is assertive in her comment: “Hannah is a stunning creation, bold mind striving for identity in strange surroundings, a timeless creature, trying to survive in a rigid, inexorably defined society.” (The Toronto Review, 106).

Hannah’s journey to India is fraught with images of adventure, action and passion. She returns to her native land, not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. Like Jasmine, Hannah finds final contentment and joy in the adapted land and it is the cross-cultural confrontation that she carries along with her. Thus The Holder of the World portrays an entirely different picture of the collision and jostling of cultures, the eastern and the western and the result thereof. Hannah Eastern voyage is mental and ‘interior’ rather than physical. Her whole personality underwent a sea-change during her restless move from Salem to Stepney, Coromandel to Devgad and then back to Salem. Ultimately Hannah discovers that “the survivor is the one who improvises, not follows, the rules” (234).

Bharati Mukherjee is at her most eloquent and intelligent when she explores the complexities of cultural confrontation. Thus The Holder of the World is a tale about dislocation and transformation consequent upon the collision and encounter of two cultures. The novel sweeps across many centuries, continents, culture and religion in order to define a new translation of self consequent of diverse socio-cultural and geographical locale. She creates a universe of infinite possibility and eternal time engendering total transformation of feminine self.
LEAVE IT TO ME

The social backdrop of the next novel Leave it to Me, is the post-Vietnam war American society of the 60’s and 70’s. Bharati Mukherjee makes use of myths from different culture, in order to deal with megascale diaspora, when people crossed borders and continents. This diasporic vision has been delineated through a cross-cultural construct of myth. This is so because myths embody archetypes which speak to all of us, no matter what our ethnicity. Bharati Mukherjee creates a complex, neo-transnational definition of self, using myths as it leads us to Debby’s quest for identity.

Bharati Mukherjee was fascinated by an Asian serial killer accompanied by three white, hippie woman accomplices. While she attended the trial in Delhi, she was emotionally disturbed to such an extent that she transformed this disturbing personal encounter with evil into a novel. To her, art works in mysterious ways and often soothes our nightmares. The first draft of the novel also encountered violence as it was stolen in 1994 along with the laptop. Like Jasmine and Hannah of the preceding two novels, Debby the protagonist, also haunted the novelist like her alternate-self. Bharati Mukherjee says in an interview:

Actually, I think of my last three novels Jasmine, The Holder of the World and Leave It to Me as a triology. The protagonist of each novel- Jyoti/Jasmine, Hannah/Salem Bibi, and Debby/Devi are strong women who long for a world that’s more just and more generous than the one they inherited at birth. These women are so bold enough, or maybe foolhardy enough, to act out their dreams. They are idealists and romantics, and because of this they are also restless. (Reader’s Guide to Leave it To Me, unpaginated).

But each woman responds in her own unique way, and dreams for a better life. Jasmine is innocent, curious; she embraces her new experiences in the new world even though she is often bewildered by them. Hannah is an illegitimate daughter in Seventeenth century Puritan Massachusetts. She has to escape her Puritan surrounding in order to return to it with deeper understanding of its potential as well as its limits. Debby is a multiracial orphan, born and
abandoned in India, then adopted by an American family in upstate New York. She is confused, hurt and angry. She has to sort out her various racial, cultural, social heritages before she can be at peace with herself. Bharati Mukherjee says: “I think of Debby as the difficult sister of Jasmine. These three characters are very real to me. They are still carrying on their lives inside my head” (Reader’s Guide to Leave it Me, unpaginated).

The Prologue depicts the myth of the Mother. Goddess who creates, preserves, destroys and recreates like the Father of the Universe, the Cosmic Spirit. She rides on a lion in the world of evil to conquer the power of evil. The obsession for the search of a mother is in the opening lines of the novel, “The one who gave me birth, and the one I am just beginning to claim. Like them, I took a god of a special time and place as my guide” (09). The preoccupation with birthplace, an orphanage attended by Gray sisters, to get rid of bastard half American was clear with the stark images of desert wind, tropical heat humidity indicating Asia. After birth in an orphanage, she is adopted into an Italian American family in Hudson Valley and her identity for official purposes was Debby Di Martino, a fun loving twenty three year old American girl. However, she made it clear that “Debby Di Martino is a lie” (10) and “Schenectady was fate” (12).

She was an Asian National in the adoption papers, with unnamed father and mother. Along with this identity, she gives a brisk resume of her formative years. She indulged in shoplifting, telemarketing. Wyatt, her first boyfriend, left an important prediction, “You know Debby, I can tell you’re going to be tall and beautiful very soon and someday you’re going to be rich and powerful” (14). Her secure life at Schenectady with hardworking religious parents, Manfred and Serena Di Martino also was not real. Devi believed that her search for her own identity began with a poem. At junior school she was given an assignment by Mr. Bullock about something she knew she wrote about lacy
summertime shadows of the squat oak that her Grandpa Di Martino had planted. But later, when she found herself not included in the deed to the ancestral house, she realized that “…the grandpa who’d planted that oak and landscaped the garden and put in the lily pond was Angie’s grandpa and not mine at all”(17). So she wrote the second poem and disconnected herself from the Di Martinos. The second poem was about herself as a dog and her barking said “Take me, love me, shelter me” (17). These two poems rounded up her stay with the Di Martinos. It set her thinking that she owned nothing and inherited nothing. The poem said “You’re just on loan to the Di Martinos. Treat than nice, pay your rent, but keep your bags packed” (Ibid). She waited for real life to begin as life with the Di Martinos was a lie. “I knew by then that there was a life beyond the state lines waiting for me to slip into” (18). Thus she realizes she has no inheritance, and she has to relocate her genes to find herself an identity.

She loses everything what she had never owned. She became rootless and felt impatient to claim her psychic inheritance. “Who are you when you don’t have a birth certificate only a poorly typed, creased affidavit… No mother’s name, no father’s name… What are you when you have nightmares and fantasies instead of dates and statistics” (16).

She has to search for her roots, her origins and her genes. She had to start with career in telemarketing. It was the job of selling exercise equipment over telephone- which introduced her to the power of her voice, “The surprise for me was that my callers were romantics they believed in me, not in salvation through Elastonomics… Some nights, I tried out thirty persons, my lies paid off”(21). With a spectacular sale record, she was picked up by Frankie Fong the owners of elastonomics. He was Hongkong salad of racial genes. He seeks her out and becomes her lover and first mentor in the art of identity politics. He was just old enough to be his father and she gave him the philosophy. “When you inherit nothing you are entitled to everything: that’s the Devi Dee Philosophy” (67)
She identifies with Fong's Asian origin and is mesmerized by his art of storytelling. She loved his made up Asian childhood and identified with it. She becomes ambitious following Fong's example as CEO and owner of Elastonomics. She pursued building his empire catering to American wants with Asian needs. Another lesson she learnt, "Americans convert needs into wants, Asians want into needs" (35).

However, he discards her when he had enough and Debby takes her revenge being rejected. In true style of feminist rebellion she pushes her destiny westward. On her way to California, she put on flames Frankie's dream house and got her inner peace. She could distinguish between justice and vengeance. There is a similar change of locale in *Jasmine*. She left her village Hasnapur to the city Jullundur and then to Florida, Iowa and lastly California. Devi changes locale from the secured life of Schenectady to California. The issues of identity are central to her search for bio-parents and in each change of location there is transformation of self and identity. She works in Telly-marketing where she has to reveal minimum about her identity. Devi says to Frank Fong: "Not I was adopted but I am adopted, meaning I want you to know that we've both invented ourselves, you couldn't have found another women as much like you as I am if you'd taken out personals" (33-34).

The question of inventing identities is also a central theme in Bharati Mukherjee's novel. As immigrants and expatriates, Dimple, Tara and Jasmine have to invent and reinvent identities. The reinvention takes place with the transformation of self consequent upon the change of locale and migration. Jasmine becomes Jase, Jane in Iowa and California, with change of role-playing as day-mummy to Taylor's child and wife of Bud Ripplemayor in Iowa. Finally, she is an assimilated self, seeking for her freedom from the handicapped Bud, to hold the hand of the man she loved, Taylor. She moves out to California, a new
self with a new identity. Similarly Devi left Schenectady in search for her roots, her parents, to know who she is and where does she belong to.

On her first day in California she resolves to, “Dump pain, pity and rage on somebody else. Pursue happiness: that’s the American way” (61). With the change of the locale she assumes a new name Devi Dee “Debby Dimartino died and Devi Dee birthed herself on the Donnar Pass…” (62). This revealed the birth of a new self with a new name and the death of an old self. Her change of name Faustine given by gray nuns to Debby by the Dimartino and then the second change of name on the way to California is significant to the issues of identity. Originally named Faustine after a typhoon Debby renames herself after a Hindu goddess Devi. Her real life begins when she reaches the bay area. Once she is in the Bay area, she merges fearlessly with flotsam and jetsam – “...a kind of outlaw, on the side of other outlaws. Maybe I was programmed that way: it seemed totally natural to identify with dropouts…” (69).

Thus Debby Dee’s migration involves abandoning Dimartinos and Schenectady society to embrace the Haight’s counter culture. She identifies with the multiculturalism of the bay area. Michiko opines: “on the state border she acquires a new Indian goddess name Devi from the bumper sticker of a blonde who cuts in on her and becomes Devi Dee (Dee from dimartino, but there’s nothing left of their baby now). Once in the bay area she merges fearlessly with flotsam and jetsam” (The New York Times, June 24, 1994, 393). This merging and assimilation into the new culture was vital to her new self. She felt she was reborn and Haight is her space, her new homeland where she could fulfill her mission of looking for her Bio mom. Stoopman was the first neighbour-hood friend she made when she was scouting the city on her own for her Bio mom. She became part of the outlaws that peopled in front of divine inter-glacial church Buddhist Baptist, black Muslims and even Hare Krishna. She sugared her smile, “… and squeeze wads of sympathy cash out of fat cat tourist” (70).
She becomes the girlfriend of Stoop Man who gave him a ticket to soup kitchens. Jasmine too had a similar odyssey, when she enters the soil of America. In fact this echoes Jasmine’s entry into America and her initial experiences in an alien society. This parallels the emergence of a new selfhood despite the vulnerability of her youth and material circumstances. Jasmine’s immigrant life in America with forged documents foreshadows Devi Dee’s life in Haight where she lives in a Corolla car with food from the soup kitchen. Michiko comments: “Jasmine in her arduous journey of survival had accomplished the rare mission of transcending the boundaries of unitary self and identifying with nameless victims of gender, culture, class and imperialism” (CLC, Vol.115, 392). Devi Dee also transcends the boundaries of unitary self to interact with cross cultural victims like friends Frankie Fong and later Ham. Coincidentally, Ham too belongs to flash fan club. He exclaims: “So you’re a Fong fan. This has to be karma” (79). The Indian term Karma echoes in her mind, as she had heard it earlier from the Indian burger muncher at McDonalds, the one who asked her out to an Indian movie. He had explained, “The concept of karma is that fate is very dynamic. Not too many people are understanding that part of it. True concept of karma is: when on a dead-end street, jump into alternate paths” (80).

Consequently for determining a new self, she takes an alternate path and a new fate appears. The dynamics of self and society evolves from Devi’s change of locale. A mutation of self takes place in the diasporic consciousness as the quest for self spreads over Asia, Europe and America. The search for Bio-parents scans over two continents, Asia and America. She befriends Ham Cohan as her new accomplice to fulfil her mission. By assuming the name of Devi, the protagonist enacts the Indian myth of Goddess Durga as mentioned in the prologue to the novel. In the myth, Devi the goddess slays the buffalo Demon because she is charged with the mission by the cosmic spirit. So Debby calls her mission force of nature. When Frankie Fong could not fulfil her dream, a new
path was directed. Devi Dee did not find Ham Cohan confirm to Frankie’s formula “Ham Cohan wasn’t Asian according to Frankie’s formula, but he was a man with more needs than wants” (82). She was attracted to Ham physically. Her need of a job to survive in California was meted out by Ham.

He contacts the hottest media escort business women Jess. The name when revealed to Jess, the latter enquired whether it was an Indian woman “Is it a Hindu name?” (83) Devi says she burrowed it from a license plate. This is her first encounter with her Bio-mom. She is driven with a mission to search her roots. She says, “No force in nature stronger than a child trying to find her mother” (88). She called her mission “force of nature” she knew Ham was the right person to know the times of seventies and help her search her bio mom. “It was true; I needed Ham, needed the nets he cast, the people he knew, the visions and delusions he’d survived. Without him I’d be drifting downstream in the trivia of my mother’s times” (89). If Debby plays the role of the Goddess as an agent of Divine Spirit to destroy evil, then Ham plays the role of a Divine accomplice, a guardian-corrupter, assisting the Goddess in her mission. Bharati Mukherjee in the Reader’s Guide to the novel opines:

...characters like Wyatt Frankie Fong, the blond in the Spider Veloce and Ham operate in a larger than real way. They are Guardian corrupters; as they are demigods, innocent like Greek Gods untouched by the suffering they cause. They operate outside normal laws. They don’t consider the consequences that their actions have on other people’s lives. (Readers Guide to Leave It To Me, unpaginated.)

This clearly explains the violence committed by Debby as she pursued her mission. So after making love to him in the office she put forward her wants, the want that is uppermost in her mind, “I want a detective Ham” (92). Later he introduced him to Fred Pointer, the detective. She was intensely persuasive and tried to win him over by words of admiration. Ham’s reference worked and Pointer acknowledges: “Ham knows I’m a persistent prick, I get things done” (94). He was expensive but Devi knew she needed it. She was roofless as she did not have a house to live not even a name. This absence of
name is absence of identity. After the search was over Ham believed she was of a higher calling, a better destiny awaited her. "He needed to believe I was some kind of a fallen princess, not a no-name street person living out of a car and soup kitchens" (96). They made love in Ham’s house-boat named Last Chance and he promised her that in record time, he would find a house for her because he couldn’t bear her sleeping on a car. The war affected the entire neighborhood. Ham said, “The war screwed us up” (88). The entire neighborhood was peopled with refugees who had taken shelter in the Beulah rooming house “Vannata man wasn’t the only refugee, and Loco Larry wasn’t the only warmaimed...What counted was attitude. Faithandhope. I made that my daily mantra. Trust coincidence, aim for revenge, faithandhope”(98). Devi accommodated herself to the bay area along with these aliens, and fitted into it with ease.

She contacted Fred Pointer, a detective to search for her roots. The latter investigated the Bombay branch of their agency. They discovered that the father was a sex guru serial killer and had a harem of white hippie women of the seventies. Rajiv Raj the agency man at Bombay faxed a message that her father was a polymorphous perverse with a corrupt sexual reputation. Devi had no choice but to continue with her mission, taking the help of Ham. In a clothing store in Fillmore near Sacramento, Ham introduced her to Jess du puree, of the media escort agency, Leave it to me. She could figure out the close ties of Ham and Jess. So she made her next calculated move of getting closer to Jess.

Debby was slowly taking one calculated step after another towards her mission. Finally, Fred pointer disclosed in instalments his findings during early morning runs at the golden gate park it goes like this, “In a small town courthouse in Rajasthan India, Mr. Raj, the Bombay associate of Vulture located files of cases going back further than fifty years”(118). He interviewed Hari the chief chowkider in tourist bungalow, old resident of Devigaon. He told
him lurid tales of sahib and his memsahibs who smoked hemp, danced naked and made human sacrifice. Fred reads the faxed report brought by Mr. Raj. In that cold night, a handsome sahib drove into dead Rajah’s palace ruins in a fancy automobile. Half-blind Hari, witnessed sitting on a broken stool, the lurid murder of one women and one baby. He describes the human sacrifice as follows, “First everybody was living. One, two, three and the baby; so altogether four dancing and singing. Then two became corpses and two kept dancing” (120). However he never reported to the police but went and informed the “sore grease” sisters. Fred then continued his narrative and disclosed his final findings. Debby’s father was the most notorious serial killer He was still rotting in an Indian Jail. Bio-Daddy had the killer hands. He’d say: “Admire my art, envy my strength. He’d seen himself as a proud artist” (122). Bio-Dad and Bio-Mom kept killing till they tried to make their way out of India:

In Bankok, the lovers quarreled they made up in Bali, to break up in Surabaja. In Kathmandu he added a Romanian to his harem. In Kabul, he spent a day in jail for cursing a policeman... She said nothing about the two killings in Devigaon, she said nothing about me at all. (123).

The women reported to Singapore police accusing him of seventeen murders. Later she was arrested on charges of drug peddling and the Interpol tracked her love through turkey, Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. The name given to Indian police was Romeo-Hawk. Ham’s the survivor of the Vietnam War. He sums up the haight war victims as “fucking freaks” and the “surviving core” (128). Mr. Rajiv Raj had met the Bio-Dad in the jail. And Devi assumed that she had inherited her good looks from him. Then Raj went to the grey sisters to know about Devi’s adoption. The details of the adoption were received from sister Madelaine. Devi finding her origin, felt sympathetic towards all the orphans. “I felt sad for all the dumped and the discarded. I heard the cypresses wail.” (126). With the discovery of her identity, she felt she belonged to the entire world. In searching for her identity, she started her journey from one locale to another, to find what genes had gone into her
making and what cultural values and historical events had shaped her thinking. In terms of race, be it white, or part Pakistani, part Vietnamese, she felt at first that she can’t claim any ethnic group. The whole world had gone into the making of Debby. She had to consider that as liberating, inheriting diasporic consciousness. Her genetic inheritance showed murder, drugs, arson and betrayal.

In fact, Bharati Mukherjee has incorporated this element of violence from the Greek Electra Myth. In an interview to *Readers Guide to Leave It To Me* she confesses about the Electra Myth:

> What I took from the Electra myth was a seriously dysfunctional family. This Greek myth revolves around the house of Arteus. You get endless vengeful, in family, adultery, cuckolding, betrayal, murder, the dismembering of little children and even a bit of cannibalism. (*Readers Guide to Leave it To Me, unpaginated*)

This is exactly what we find in the life of Bio-Daddy Romeo Hawk, and his hippie girlfriend. Further, Bharati Mukherjee has selected this ancient Greek myth, replete with violence to explain the violence ridden Post -Vietnamese American society in the 60’s and 70’s. Bharati Mukherjee weaves together this Electra myth and the Hindu myth of Devi Durga. She believes in terms of emotional and moral struggles –myths from different culture have lots in common. So she has endeavoured to present a cross-cultural application of myths to explain the phenomenon of diaspora. She has synthesized a Hindu myth (Devi Myth) and Greek Myth (Electra myth) in *Leave It to Me* to explain Debby’ search for her identity. According to Edith Hamilton, Greek Myth places humans at the centre of the story whereas Hindu Myth places destiny at the centre. In this perspective, Bharati Mukherjee resolves complexities of Debby’s Problems. Debby is convinced that she is at the centre of the universe, but the reader acquainted with the Devi Myth in the Prologue is always aware of Providence. In fact Debby is successful in her mission by dual working of human action or *Karma* and divine intervention of destiny or fate.
The whole world was ‘mine’ to claim with the newly found knowledge that she had inherited the genes of the hippie parents, she could claim whatever identity she chose. However, she drove home with Fred and for the next few nights she was restless with the new knowledge of her self. Loco Larry shared the room below. So he could sense the restlessness. He exclaims, “You at war with yourself, babe?” (134). She identified with Ham and Larry and lived in their world of sex, drugs and rebellion. The war was a kind of apocalypse. The centre of their experience was Vietnam. They faced, it squarely, coped with it, exposed them to adversity and taught them to survive. In their words, “War had blessed them with terrible clarity” (141). Her Bio-Mom too had also faced the consequence of war. She had dumped her bastard child in an Indian prison without thinking of the consequence. Larry and Ham and Bio-Mom learned to survive. Devi learnt this survival in adversity and she analyses the aftermath of the war. They are still wallowing in the after effects of shell shock. She says: “But what about us Vietnam’s war bastards and democracy’s love children. We’re still coping with what they did, what they saw, what they salvaged, what they mangled and dumped on that Saigon rooftop that maniacal afternoon” (141).

In an excerpt of review on the *Leave It to Me*, Mukherjee is inspired here in connecting the residues of 1960’s culture; the self-described idealist who used civil-disobedience as a road to selfish excess; the scared veterans of Vietnam; and between them the damaged children of that generation. She is especially adroit in recalling the Berkeley counter-culture and capturing its later expression in the alternate life styles and self-serving rationales with which ex-hippies defend their current lives. Her most impressive fear, however is in rendering her self-destructive heroine with brilliant fidelity to the American vernacular, profane, brash and amoral. Debby is not likable but she is recognizable and true. *(The Publisher’s Weekly 04)*

She identified with their insecurity, uncertainty and alienated each move she was making towards the fulfillment of her mission. She now needed Fred’s help and she tried to put all kind of persuasion on him. She was in a cocktail-witnessing job. In the middle of the shift, she quit to attend to Fred who came with an envelope. The Bombay investigator titled it “Report of Continuing
Investigation” (144). It brought the news concerning the death of prisoner, “...Eurasian male felon against whom the said Caucasian female had deposed in court” (145). This report confirmed the death of Bio-Dad and Devi had no cause to mourn about. But he had another news up his sleeve: “There’s a fifty- fifty chance that I know your mother.... Your mother could be Jess Du Pree of this city, currently doing million- dollar plus business as C.E.O. of a hot author escorting agency. I showed Jess a copy of a courtroom transcript Rajeev Sent, and she said, “Sweetdick, go fuck the Golden Gate will you?” (146) .This evidence provided by Fred Pointer is authentically substantiated by courtroom orders. So now the next move of Devi was directed to “...focus on Getting Jess” (146).

The next day, she pushed Ham to help get in touch with Jess. In a true ingenious way, she proposed that Jess’s agency was looking for a driver at short notice. So she put forward her case to Ham as a suitable driver using her “...macho charm and muy mucho personality” (147). It clicked and Ham called Jess on his cell phone and she was hired immediately. The force of nature impelled her to use all her wits and charm to achieve her mission. The female power, her sexuality, her persuasiveness, her calculated moves could only come from a ‘She’. She was a victim of adversity, an orphan who uses her charm and wits to search for her genes. With each change of locale, from Senectady to California to Haight Bay area she has a quest for self and a mutation of self. This mission of self-discovery was replete with violence. And with every destruction there was a new creation.

She moved to Berkeley to join Jess’s agency. She was astonished to find her office décor in brass gods and mirrored elephants, copper urns, lacquered bones, sandalwood beads and stone eggs on tarnished trays. This wasn’t California, America but Asian piece de art. Jess briskly came in Armani pants and ordered “No tips in this job,” she went on. “Only egomaniacs for clients.
Still want it?" (148). So the next tip was, "Don’t yak about yourself. A ME doesn’t have personal problems. A ME doesn’t have a life. Your clients got enough for everyone, or thinks he does" (150). The new assignment under new Boss, Bio-Mom was challenging. She had to master contour maps, streets, San Francisco house to house search. It also involved locating new city maps. She felt, "Nervous only like a squadron leader going into battle" (152).

Jess had entered Asia in the fall of 1968 and had bonded with Baba Lahiri’s Ashram. Jess confessed that she had gone to Asia after her break-up with Ham. She spent her childhood in Fresno. It was the war age: "Ham’s age, Fred’s age, those who survived and owned up to what the war’d really done for them, how it’d freed them to be themselves, to curse and fuck and burn and loot, to kill or die, to feel superior while having fun" (153). She travelled across the length and breadth of Asia and Europe, till she reached the village of Laxmipur in a rainless month.

The year was 1971, and Jess was twenty eight and her karma revealed itself in a village, named Laxmipur. Then in the form of a poem, of Emily Dickinson, Jess describes the “erotic moment” (155). She had with a “snake god or snake devil” (Ibid), in the cracked soil of Rajasthan. She heard the origin, “My beginning, I thought. I’ve just heard my beginning” (Ibid). Then she communicates her love for poetry like Devi’s love for words, confirming genes inheritance. Jess said: “Just no describing how erotic it was. I was a poetry mad kid, I thought I was going to be the Emily of Fresno, can you imagine that? Poetry was my God, before that man....” (155).

Devi’s quest for her biological parents was almost half accomplished listening to the music of her origin from Jess. The historical times, the geography and the Asian locale, determined her origins. She visualized and verbalized her paternal figure as Devil God, Prince of Darkness, with killer hands. She could intelligently construe that she had inherited the love for poetry
from her mother and the artistic killer instinct from her father. Thus her karma unfolded itself with the dual working of Jess’s karma and her destiny. She was almost murdered by her own father but she again revived emerging with a new self; a reincarnation with a multicultural identity.

Her first assignment in the agency, Leave it To Me, was with the client Stark Swann. She followed the tips of her boss to give him the ego boost. With a gorgeous smile she introduced herself as Devi from Leave It To Me. When she angled for the agency job she joined it to find out her Bio-Mom. His novels were a tribute to women: “The romances he wrote as a tribute to his mother, to all brave women who deserved better, who deserved the happy fulfilled lives he gave his heroines... He wrote to make reparation for what men did to women” (161). Stark Swann becomes a spokesman for Bharati Mukherjee, for the kind of novelist she was. Stark Swan finished the promotional reading of the First chapter of his novel ‘The Palest Poison’. The pages again echo a eulogy for the sad suffering women by the kitchen stove. The beautiful lines are as follows:

There’s only one way to go: Just suck it in and spur your tired mare on the hot, dusty, cruel trail home, cos there’s a sweet, sad eyed woman waitin for you by the kitchen stove, a loving women who knows you and cares for you, a real women who understands you so well she doesn’t shackel your ankles to the bed post but gives her blissful womanhood to you of her own accord and for as long as you need and want her to, and who senses when to step aside, and lets you go without tears, and weeps only after the dust’s blown...(162).

Stark Swann is just an alibi for Bharati Mukherjee poetic prose portrays the real woman who loves, but never expects and silently gives her blissful womanhood for the man she loves. This is the image of the real woman from whom Devi differs but is infatuated with it. But Debby is not the silent women. She made love with Stark Swan, poisoned him with Mandrax and murdered him with a K-bar knife point, thanking Larry both for the Mandrax and the knife. She explains the killing love, as homage to the women who love. This is again a feminist rebellion against man, whom woman love. She is Devi, the Goddess, who burns evil in Frankie Fong and now murders Stark Swann and the prologue
comes alive with the myth of the Goddess Durga with a buffalo demon as her accomplice. Devi assumes the role of that mad Goddess with Larry the buffalo demon to assist her with weapons of knife and mandrax in order to avenge the male counterpart. Bharati Mukherjee has eulogised the world of drugs, murder and evil to depict the making of a real women in a male dominated world. Devi after avenging Stark Swann like Jasmine’s murder of Half Face assuming the figure of Kali says: “My homage to my neighborhood graffitimiste. Cee-Double-You. Because that’s what the women who give of their blissful selves of their own accord and for as long as you want them to, the real women, do” (163).

Pride of killing was a part of the war heritage. She too was part of that culture, to pride in the artistry of killing. She had inherited the genes of artistic elimination, which she called as “k-bar calligraphy”. She apprehended the death of Fred Pointer to be Homicide with 0.072 percent and the presence of unidentified vegetal poison. It was again the death by the palest poison. Ham and Berkeley were at the centre of this killing. He kept a community of people in his houseboat Sausalito, one for all and all for one team included street people like Stoop Man and Duvat man. Ham and his people were influenced by the work culture. Bharati Mukherjee calls Vietnam War as a divide. This was America after the Vietnam War. There was an upscale in violence committed by war children.

Devi also inherited this war culture and the celebration of violence, killing and the pride of owning it, as a specialized art. Devi’s karma conspired with coincidence. When the envelope came, she was present in the office. Finally, she received the letter which contained a treasure trove of information about her parents with authentic proof of court records and proceedings. The truth about her Bio-Mom as a rebellious self is exposed. She indulged in drugs, alcohol, mandrax and sexual promiscuity.

Similar method was also followed by Devi in killing Stark Swan. This could be inheritance or reincarnation. Here Jess or Devi, do not appear helpless, but they are confident and much in command of the situation, fulfilling their
mission with artistic accuracy. Her quest for her Bio-Mom continued as a mission of self inventions. She went to Jess’s office for more information. In the bottom drawer she found a photograph of her mother and her baby: “Mothers look radiant, always the just born wriggly, helpless, and uglier than garden slugs”(184). The photograph must have been taken by Romeo Hawk.

Then the next client appeared Ma Varuna, who was the author of the new book Vitality. The epigraph to the novel, “poetic penses” was translated as “philosophical thought”. Ma Varuna was dressed in her gazing silk tunic, her satin pants, her rich velvet cape and her silver heeled T-strap dancing shoes was more like an appearance and in words “apparition” when she heard the word Devi Ma Varuna was fascinated by Devi’s name. She thought she did not deserve that name as she had no trait of light. She made a health drink, a brew which she called an antioxidant- and uttered a one liner like “Destruction is creation’s necessary prelude” (211). This line is evocative as a rationalization of violence that would follow in the final pages of the novel. Ma Varuna strips herself suddenly, first her long hair, then her gold brocade silk tunic and lastly she, exposed his lithe body: “There was this apparition .Ruddy roused male genitalia and silver heels mocked me” (212).Devi was flabbergasted by this apparition, as in the place of Ma Varuna, a new transformation, a new self appeared that of Romeo Hawk her Bio-Dad. He declares, “I am your father” (213).

He was in a revengeful mood to atone for his long years of imprisonment. He shouted, “And that bitch deserves serious attention from me .All those years in prison in India, how many deaths is that worth? Karma is groping away out of a maze”(217).Devi tries to keep her cool as per the advice of Fred Pointer. Romeo continues his aggression with a hand gun on his lap .He digs family history. His father Yves Haque ,ran predictable company in the streets of Saigon .His grandfather Ib haq was penniless peddler from Peshawar .His son
changes name from Haqto Haque, buys himself a Eurasian whore for a wife and his son Romeo Hawk, Americanizes his name to H-A-W-K. The Barrister says rightly "the East has played a greater part than the West in the life and character formation of Romeo Hawk" (181). Romeo finally reached Ham's houseboat and captured, Jess and Devi with pointed guns. It was a highly melodramatic situation. He takes full control of the situation by putting handcuffs on Jess. Then he called her with the real name Petunia and refers to the five names she had forged in the passport- "Jess has gone through more melodramatic incarnations than Debby Di Martino." (224). He calls her "My pretty Petunia, Alias Free Love from Fresno alias Jeanne alias Magda alias..." (224). This changing of name is similar to name changing in Jasmine, Jane and Jase in Florida, Iowa and California; a new name for a new locale and a new self, is preceded by a transformation.

The novel ends on a fire eruption, a destruction, a melodrama of violence which echoed Romeo's one liner, "Destruction is creation's necessary prelude" (211). It is certainly going to create a new self, a new identity for Devi, as her historical origins, her genes, her bio parents are confirmed. She can claim whatever culture she wants to inherit. "If you're part ethnic Chinese, part French Vietnamese, definitely part Pakistani" (229). She is in a free land; she is free to choose whatever identity she assumed and whatever names she wanted to call herself. This is Bharati Mukherjee's true American novel where the language according to Zoe Heller was "vulgar and clever, menacing and hilarious, sexy and violent, the language that struts through Mukherjee's narrations embodies the intoxicating qualities of America itself" (Book Review in Book Jacket Cover). It is a pan-American quest for self, quest for biological parents in the multicultural locale of Haight America. Bharati Mukherjee has sketched the power of the female self in Devi who inherited the killer instinct from her parents, to pursue and dig up her roots in a high melodrama of violence and sex.
DESIRABLE DAUGHTERS

The social dynamics in the age of mega-scale diaspora makes the protagonists of the novel Desirable Daughters move from one locale to another. This shifting margin of locale determines a self which is complex, trans-national and subject to mutation. The cross-cultural quest for identity and the mission for root- search started by Debby in Leave It to Me is further pursued by Tara in the present novel. So root-search for identity, cultural and genetic inheritance becomes an obsession with the Mukherjee protagonist and is pursued with a missionary zeal spanning across continents and diverse geographical locales. The self in the transnational and transcultural space and time, away from its roots has a homing instinct. Hence in Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride, the protagonist has a homing instinct to search for her roots in the East Bengal village of Mistigunj. Both Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride, trace the origin through cultural study of myth. In the new emerging trends and hybrid cultural forms among migrants, quest for Identity goes beyond the self to issues of culture and linguistic.

In Jasmine, home is located and relocated in Jullundhar, Iowa, California and the name of Jasmine is changed to Jyoti, Jazzy, Jane, Jase depending on where she makes her home, and the male counterpart she lives with. In Jullunder she is Jasmine, in Iowa, she is Jane, and in New York Jase. The mutation of home is also present in The Holder of the World (1993). The novel tracks the movement of Seventeen Century American women. Hannah and Fitch Legge migrated from Puritan New England to London to Colonial V to Devgad fort of Raja Jai Singh. She comes from Puritan England as a decent English woman to become Salem Bibi of a Rajput king. In the present novel Tara Chatterjee tells the story of trajectory from India to San Fransisco and back to Mistigunj, the mythical site in the family history. As Jopi Nyman shows that, “identity and home are intertwined issues” (Atlantic Literary Review, Vol. 3, No. 4:55) each
transforming and defining the other. The migrant self is essentially mobile. The emigres reinvent their identity as they relocate in various locales. To the geographer Linda Mc Dowell:

> It is argued instead that migration changes individual and group identities, affiliations and cultural attitude and practices, among the mobile population and the hosts...it is apparent that movement involves the remapping of cultural identities for all those involved (Gender, Identity and Place 210).

So in migrant writing, the once glorified travel becomes a sob-story of exile and nostalgia. Earlier travels had been exotic and had often been romanticized in America, in Europe, Paris or Greece. Euro-Americans the discourse characterizes displacement of a migrant in an alien soil.

In describing the diaspora experience in Desirable Daughters. Eliza Joseph has taken the perspective of Metiza consciousness. In describing the migrant consciousness who cradle multiple cultures, the twentieth century Chicana feminist thinker Gloria Anzaldua theorizes the concept of Metiza consciousness. Gloria Anzaldua endorses the new and explains the dilemma of the displaced as follows:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwitched between two culture, straddling all three cultures and the value system la metiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of border, an inner war..... Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. (La Conciencia 766).

The three sisters in the novel Desirable Daughters also cross borders and walk on tightrope, jumping from one culture to another. The identity of the youngest daughter, Tara, is partly Indian and partly Americanized. When the novel opens, she is already a divorcée breaking the ties of her arranged marriage with Bish Chatterjee. She lives with a Hungarian American lover Andy, a Zen quoting biker and retrofitter and her teenage son, Rabi. Dr. S.P.Swain observes: “She travels through a hybridized space where the novelist reconstructs the notion of “home land” in the context of a rapidly transitional society in the era of hectic

Although there are three sisters Tara is the focus of the novel. She was fortune’s favourite to marry the best husband- a Bill Gates of Silicon Valley. In fact, the book delineates the existential dilemma of three sisters caught between cultures. Parvati the second of the Bhattacharjee’s shocked the family by choosing her husband and strangulated the father’s efforts to find her suitable bridegroom. Tara broke tradition by divorcing her husband in America. As for Padma, the eldest and most beautiful daughter now relocated with her Punjabi husband is engaged in endorsing Indian Sarees and Jewelleries among Bengali immigrant community. She is a well known public figure in South Asian diasporic communities on the East Coast and coordinated a community channel television programme called “Namaskar Purobasi”. She becomes a brand ambassador of saree and jewellery and sells elegant and expensive silk sarees with the tag, “Padma Mehta Design, New York”(196). Further, it has proved financially profitable to transform her Bengali identity into a commodity. The two sisters attended a party intended for La cremeole la crème of Bengali New Jersey society, a group consisting of well to do doctors, professors, businessmen and their spouses. They threw these parties so that the community could sample these styles in sarees and jewellery, what that they might be missing by being out of Bengal. Social parties and functions seemed to be subordinated to economic profit. Tara manages to assist her sister in selling the products and the economic profit amounted to 17,000 dollars. Padma preserves her Indianess while she lived a life of freedom with her pathetic husband, Harsh Mehta. In fact she advises Tara not to be too Americanized. Indians can live without visiting any psychiatrist. She had written a letter to Tara:

We Indians don’t run to psychiatrist for every problem. Come to think of it. I don’t know a single psychiatrist. I hope you aren’t doing bad things to yourself to like taking Prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Please, Please, don’t become that Americanized (104-105).
On the other hand, Padma in Bombay lives with traditions accommodating relatives who stay for months. It is Tara who breaks with traditions. Like Dimple in Wife; she arrived at Stanford with Bish as a young. “This is the life I have been waiting for, I thought..., the liberating promise of marriage and travel and the wider world (81).

Bish was acknowledged by her father to be “…the best husband on the market” 26). He was a traditionalist. He was protective and generous, but Tara thought, “Love, to Bish, is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect, and being recognised for hard work and honesty. Love is indistinguishable from status and honours”(27). In the perspective of diasporic consciousness, the issue of tradition versus modernity has been thrashed out by Bharati Mukherjee. As the book-jacket review to the novel notes: “It is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and the contemporary story of American women who has in many ways broken with tradition. But still remains tied to her native country”(Rupa Books 2003).

Unlike Dimple, Tara a modern feminine immigrant is awakened to ideal gender notion and rights. So she is quick to adapt but at the same time acutely sensitive to the plight of her gender back home. She does not lose her psychic balance although her husband was a traditionalist and her lover a Hungarian Budhist belonging to two diverse cultures. As a single parent, she was terrified with freedom in the school at San Fransisco. Her husband has selected a British Model school at Etherton. Even as a Siliconvalley magnet, Bish is a traditionalist, who thought that path breaking modern systems and patterns should not be reflected in gender roles, marriage and family. However he is, progressive enough to develop the system “CHATTY” with out which no communication network works. He prefered well established values and tradition rather than the liberating freedom of contemporary U.S.A. He wanted
his son to take after him: Bish could not tolerate a son with any imperfection. He wanted him to be like him, hardworking, respectful, brilliant, sociable, and athletic. He resists the modernity of American with old world views of duty and discipline. However, Tara is highly assimilative and adapts herself to Indian traditional way and so also to newly adopted Americanhood. She lives a secured life until after a decade of marriage she realized the promise of an American life is not fulfilled. In the process of assimilation, as Eliza Joseph has rightly pointed out that: “She had turned her back on all those stereo-typical images of how married women of India ought to be, obedient, submissive, self-sacrificing, chaste and so on.” (Critical Studies, ed K.V. Dominic, 205).

She could live like an American divorcee but she gets mentally disturbed when Christopher Dey appeared as his son’s guest claiming himself to be an illegitimate son of her eldest sister, Padma. Chris gave proof and evidence of being the son of Ronald Dey, who was Padma’s lover during her teens. Tara was outraged and shocked as she feared the stranger, to be a blackmailer. Moreover, it was unimaginable that her sister brought up in orthodox Brahmin family could get pregnant out of wedlock. This issue of a strange new nephew brought the sisters together. They got in touch with each other. Parvati in Bombay confirmed Tara’s suspicion that he could be an imposter. Even Andy, her lover, agreed with this view. When Padma was contacted, she admitted her infatuation but not an illegitimate son. Tara did not want her son to befriend Chris. So she looked for Bish’s support.

On her way back from her visit to her elder sister in San Francisco, she met Bish. Both were in a mood of reconciliation. Both were apologetic for having ruined each other’s lives. Tara takes the blame upon herself and says: “Bish please, it was my fault, my head was turned, I was so naïve I had too much time and not enough to do –” (265). Bish too in his adherence to perfection, accused himself for his failure: “He had failed in his dharma, the
basic duty of a man in the householder phase of his life, to support and sustain his marriage” (265). This reconciliation is a tryst of Bish’s tradition and Tara’s assimilation of American hybrid life. Bish accepts his wife with a broad democracy of women’s liberation. He accepts her inspite of her lover Andy. However this fusion of assimilation in marriage is interrupted by a terrible explosion. Bish realized that Tara strayed to fresh pastures as he did not give her enough quality time of companionship. At first, it is believed that the accident is caused by cooking gas left open carelessly by Tara. The next day newspaper reports confirmed that it is maliciously planned by Andy, her jealous lover, who felt alarmed to find him being slowly replaced by Bish. Sexual jealousy and frustration probably drove him to desperate action. However, Bharati Mukherjee has chosen to keep it a mystery whether he is the real one or just an impostor. However, his links with Abbas Sattar Hai, member of a terrorist gang is confirmed and they later murdered him.

Bish rescues Tara and Rabi staking his life and himself becomes an invalid. Tara realizes the values of family ties and nurses her husband. They returned to Calcutta for a change, to heal their lacerated minds. Tara’s mother subtly refers to the value of marriage and duties as a panacea to alienation and loneliness. It is family bonds and legacy of cultural roots that sets Tara on a mission of root search. Tara visits Mistigunj along with her son Rabi to trace her family origins. The Metiza consciousness she adopted of living two cultures, again leads her to the past history, tradition and culture. A person who crosses boundaries, eventually learns that unless he is flexible, he cannot survive. She has already embraced American culture and its freedom and now she must reconcile with family roots in order to have a balanced future. According to Anzaldua, “The new mestiza shifts out of habitual formations from convergent thinking to divergent thinking...from set patterns and goals... towards a whole perspective” (La Conciencia 766). This new perspective of Anzaldua was further extended by Bharati Mukherjee with root search for family origin. The
immigrant after embracing alien culture should have the flexibility to bounce back to traditional and original culture.

The angst and alienation of an immigrant can be soothed with the calmness and stability of home culture. Dimple in *Wife* was the maladjusted immigrant, could not be at home with native culture or with the adopted culture and ends up murdering her husband. But Tara is the assimilated immigrant who adopts American culture and has the resilience to go back to soul searching roots of her ancestry. This makes the reinvention of self in terms of past history and present accommodation a balanced one. Eliza Joseph observes: “The alien country had changed them into perplexed and emotionless beings. But the power of their cultural roots restored them to a state of calm and silent bliss. *(Critical Studies* (ed) K.V. Dominic 208). Thus Tara starts her mission of root search like Debby of *Leave It To Me*.

Thus Bharati Mukherjee ideally begins the novel with the flashback of Bengali marriage tracing socio-cultural history of Bengal. She had heard the childhood story of Tara Lata, the Tree Bride from her mother and grandmother. Obsessed with history and culture, Bharati Mukherjee reviews the marriage of a five year old with bitterness. Her feminist rebellion against this system is shown in the opening pages of the novel where she sarcastically says “It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and rebellion”(04). It is an attempt to relive her past family history. She narrates the story of Jai Krishna Ganguly and connects it with her own sister. She confesses : “All my life, or at least ever since my mother told me the story of Tara Lata, the Tree Bride -- and that I had been named for her -- I have felt for no discernible reason, a profound connection”(16). She was somehow lured into the search of her family history. She discovers the myth of Tree Bride where five year old Tara Lata is widowed on her wedding night. She was
married to a Tree, to avoid the stigma of widowhood. The cultural traditions so
close to Bharati Mukherjee’s heart is vividly narrated with details of rituals and
with an undertone of irony:

In a palanquin borne by four servants sit a rich man’s three daughters, the
youngest dressed in her bridal sari, her little hands painted with red lac
dye, her hair oiled and set. Childish voices chant a song, hands clap, gold
bracelets tinkle.... A Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become a
lifetime imprisonment (04).

The details of rituals follow -- The *Tulsi Brata*, a hymn for a generous
husband and not a claim for a husband who was equal to her. In an arranged
child marriage the five year old child’s fate was sealed like Taralata. The Bridal
procession in a palanquin loaded with gold as dowry was interrupted abruptly
by the death of the nine year old groom by snake bite. The boy’s father, Lahiri
claimed a dowry holding his dead son boy in his arm. He inflicts all the curse
and blame on the little girl child. “Your happiness wrecking daughter is
responsible”(11). The poor child had no idea that already she had been
transformed from a bride to a widow. The superstitious groom’s party
apprehended that snake bite of the groom was caused by an enraged goddess
Manasa, defiled by a menstruating devotee. In fact, the snake bite reminded the
patriarch Lahiri and Ganguly how precarious the then social order was and how
destiny could shake the powerful father’s self confidence and complacency.

Bharati Mukherjee in her analysis of Bengali culture lays threadbare the
history of Eastern Bengal of 1879. The eastern region of Bengal consisted of
Muslim majority but dominated and controlled by wealthy Hindu minority. The
Muslim and Hindu spoke the same language but with separate religious
practices. With migration, the city culture had already infiltrated into the remote
provinces. Jaikrishna was a native Calcuttan-- the society was comprised of two
kinds of men, the powerful middle class called the *Bhadralok* meaning
gentlefolk. They are the civilized folk for whom the English fashioned the
pejorative term “babu”. They were known for their fawning insincerity and

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slavishly acquired western attitudes. The other category of men were the "Chotto lok" literally meaning the little people. Jaikrishna Gangooly was a provincial from Mistiganj- third son of a village doctor. Sachindranath Lahiri fifth son of Surendranath Lahiri a bhadralok dramatically demanded a dowry:

He acknowledged that fate was powerful than the workings of English law. Fate did not spare even innocent children. The fate of his five year old daughter was a lifetime of virginity. The patriarch arises from his despondency and declares that he would solemnize his daughter's wedding on the auspicious time to a tree as a groom; so that she would be saved from the curse of widowhood. The innocent girl unaware of widowhood cries to the old women: "... the bride suddenly begs to be carried. Her feet have gone to sleep. She's cold. What if her fancy brocaded sari gets ruined. She needs to pee" 15). She was not able to bear the weight of the gold chain and heavy ornament.

Bharati Mukherjee narrates the pages of history of a community in East Bengal. This community as evident from the above tale of the Tree Bride, exposes a society besieged with superstition, caste, polygamy, child marriage, dowry and worship of husband as salvation. This is a staple diet which a feminist like Bharati Mukherjee could discharge as venom on such a social framework. In true Jane Austenian style, she is able to throw light on the precarious position of women and social injustices meted out to them with irony and satire. She sketches the history of Tara Lata's, family geneology, and social background of 1870's as a flag post to show the future generation of Gangooly and Tara Lata in the present times. Bharati Mukherjee connects the Taralata's story to the Twentieth Century Californian narrator Tara, and her sister Padma, and Parbati. In this connection, we see the anatomy of change, the social dynamics after colonialism, eraser of superstition, and westernization of Gangooly sisters. When a thirty-six years old Californian visits the village of
Mistigunj on a mission of root search and self-discovery, she traces the family tree as such:

The Tree - Bride is stuck on a remote siding of the “Gangooly” family tree. The Gangopadhyaya trunk line that leads directly to my mother, my sisters, and me runs through Jai Krishna’s ninth wife and the birth of my grandfather in 1909, when Jai Krishna was seventy years old.

In the opening pages of the novel, the patriarchal culture, and the low position of women in Bengali Brahmin society is delineated. Jai Krishna was quite incredulous and fishy about the liberals or the Brahma Samaj Social Reformists who tried to rid themselves of the social evils like Sati and child marriage. He was a typical traditional patriarch. He followed tradition and myth and got his youngest daughter married to a tree. As the marriage ritual of “Subha Drishti” goes the bride meets the eye of the groom. Here Tara Lata is described as follows:

She is not a woman cursed by a goddess and shunned like an outcast by her community. She takes her greedy fill of the auspicious initial glimpse. And now she recognizes her bridegroom. He is the god of Shoonder Bon, the Beautiful Forest, come down to earth as a tree to save her from life time of disgrace and misery.

Such was the desperation of situation, and widowhood was such a stigma that an educated man like Jai Krishna was forced to marry her to a Tree. When Twentieth Century Tara hears the story, she comes to know the appalling and mysterious life of Tara Lata, the virgin mother. She never left her father’s place till her death. She remained a virgin and she had no one to please, she grew up and grew old in a single house in an impoverished village. She lived there seventy years and gradually changed the world.

When the Californian immigrant conducted the American impulse of root search, she found she was related to Tara Lata from her maternal side. During that time pure polygamy prevailed among conservative Brahmins: “a women could attain nirvana only through worship of a husband, and a Brahmin was permitted as many wives as he could support, his excesses could be interpreted
as a form of *noblesse oblige*. The final number of wives in fact, speak of restraint, a desperate search for an heir, in an era when some men boasted fifty or more" (19). Jai Krishna was fortunate to have a male heir only from his ninth wife, a girl in her mid-teens whom she married at the age of sixty eight. Tara’s mother too had a polygamous grandfather although practice of polygamy was gradually becoming extinct. Taralata was related to the Tara of Twentieth century through her mother’s side. She found a large signboard gaudily painted outside the ancestral home -- the old Gangooly property in Mishtigunj. The signboard in English the history of Tara Lata was printed as follows:

The Home of Tara Lata Gangooly (1874-1944?) known to the World as “Tara-Ma”. Behind these walls lived an Untrained Nurse, Spiritual Healer and Inspiration to Generations of peace-loving and Peace-seeking Individuals from Around the World. During the Bengal Famine of 1942 she fed the Town and the Outlying Villages. She rallied the Cause of an Independent India and United Bengal and protected Young Freedom Fighters from British arrest. She herself was dragged from her Home on the Night of Oct 12, 1944, by Colonial authorities and Never Heard from Again. Her death was announced on October 18, 1944 and Attributed to a heart attack.

Erected by a Grateful Government in the Name of All its citizens, whatever God They may Worship (20).

This was the philanthropic life of Taralata who dedicated her life to the Freedom Fighters and her community. She became “Tara Ma” the mother of the Mishtigunj society. *Desirable Daughters* maps the complex process of growing up of three Bengali sisters in twentieth century global map. The Second Chapter of the novel follows the sketch of cultural roots, itiology of twentieth century Tara to the growth of sisters in the city of Calcutta and California in the late fifties and sixties. “Sisters three are we... as like as blossoms on a tree. But we are not”(21). Padma was born eighty years after the marriage ceremony of Tree Bride in Shoonder Bon.

The social dynamics has changed in the locale of Calcutta and California. Women no longer consider their husbands as God. Tara, a divorsee, lived an independent life. The three sisters with beauty and brains mapped their own
Tara’s father was no longer a patriarch with several wives. Rather he has renounced his worldly life to live a spiritual life in the hills of Rishikesh. The three sisters liberated and independent won the “Miss Brains and Beauty” cover of Eve’s weekly. The reference to this weekly speaks of a whole new world of women— an open seasame for the twentieth century women.

D.K. Pabby’s paper presented at the MELUS Conference maintains: “the book is a mature narrative commenting on the complex process of growing up, retaining one’s balance in times of crisis, struggle involved in making sense of one’s ongoing journey of life, certain aspects of which may be shaped by forces and circumstances beyond one’s control”(4-5, April 2003). However, the story of Twentieth Century sisters’ interactions shows the youngest Tara Americanized to the extent that the elder sister apprehended that she must be taking prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Tara’s marginality and her estrangement is ventilated in the following lines

I am not the only blue-jeaned women with a Pashmina shawl around my shoulders and broken-down running shoes on my feet. I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I’m convinced. I don’t belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don’t want to belong” (79).

In America, Tara has a feeling of being cut off from her community and its life style. She stands out. She is estranged. She is in the milieu but not with the milieu. As a racialized subject, she encounters the racist and nationalist ideology segregating her, pushing her away from the centre of American experience. Hence in spite of having a Hungarian boyfriend and living a life like a divorcee, She is an outsider. Dr S.P. Swain observes: “Bharati Mukherjee depicts a liquid society in her novels, that is a society in flux. It is a society of constant flow, the flow of migrants, the flow of machines, flow of criminals, flow of extra territorial power structures, flow of people and commodities” (Self Identity in Indian Fiction 61).
This society of global migration contrasts with the colonial society of Taralata, with superstitions, caste ridden and oppression of women. In the Twentieth Century, we have immigrants, racialized subjects, segregated women asserting their identities. Tara as a divorcee is dislocated, still lives in San Francisco pursuing the American Dream. However she fails to make her identity in the new world: “I felt as though I were lost inside a Salman Rushdie novel, a once firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and reemerging as something wondrous, or grotesque”. (195-96). So she tries to forge a new identity broken by hammer blows of immigrant life. She realized that she could only do so by connecting herself to her past, her root culture and tradition. She tried to break up her relationship with a traditional husband who reconstructed the middle class tradition of duty and discipline to family. She became conscious of her existential predicament:

No one behind, no one ahead.
The path the ancients cleared had closed.
And the other path everyone’s path,
Easy and wide, goes nowhere.
I am alone and find my way.”

SANSKRIT VERSE ADAPTED BY OCTAVIO PAZ AND
TRANSLATED BY ELIOT WEINBERGER

The panacea to this dilemma can be only worked out by striking a balance between past and present culture, tradition and modernity. To rebuild herself in a flowing society of flux, she undertakes the root search to Mistigunj. This is an attempt to consolidate, reaffirm and solidify her identity in an alien world. In Leave it to Me, Debby undertakes the mission of search for her Bio Mom and father to attain her real self. The generic links, the qualities she inherits from her hippie parents appear more real than the decent dimartino, where she is adopted and grows up. Hence the adopted culture, country is never real without being harmonized with one’s biological origin and social locale of one’s birth. Thus in the next novel, Americanized Tara after reconciliation with her husband, confronts her past and her connections with the Tree Bride.

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As a women Tara Lata of Mishtigunj and Tara of twentieth century California have undergone a drastic transformation. Tara has emerged from a stereotypical suffering woman, a victim of child marriage and widowhood to become aggressive and independent enough to form a hybrid self partly Indian and partly American. Tara Lata in the colonial days still followed the moral codes of many that denied them a separate existence. But Tara of California, a feminist immigrant, tries to make a synthesis of patriarchal culture of Bish, the culture of Hungarian Budhhist Lover Andy, and the culture of intercontinental relationship of three sisters. As a feminine immigrant, she tried to blend and harmonize her life boldly in the cosmopolitan population of San Francisco. But she remains lonely as an outsider. Finally, Tara is shaken out of her complacency, her emotional paralysis shattered, when Chris Dey appears as an impostor. When her house is firebombed, she is completely exhausted making her yearning for homeland and traditional life acutely painful, she reconciles with her traditional husband Bish and becomes pregnant with a child. Her answer to her questions of gender identity in an alien culture could be answered only with a quest for ancestral roots and traditions. She makes a trip home and traces the genealogy of her family and history in the Colonial times.

Aparajita Ray rightly points out that: “The theme of growing up from childhood to womenhood that is, the Bildungsroman, is a recurrent strategy in Bharati Mukherjee’s novels. Through it she explores female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by patriarchal society” (A Search for Identity, ed. Murali Manohar, 99).

From the feminist perspective, the consciousness of the diasporic women, Tara tries to discover a new self by a search for her roots and tradition. During the search, she came across socio-cultural history of Bengal, impact of western culture on Bengali Society and influences of colonialism. While depicting the practice of child-marriage, polygamy, she tries to interpret
women's responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is the symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition while speech signifies self-expression and liberation.

Thus when Tara reaches America, she feels the tug between tradition and freedom between the self and the other, as she tries to meet expectations that are wildly contradictory. She finds it impossible to convey to an American friend—citizens of comparatively classless mobile society—how circumscribed and static Indian identity is: It is as fixed as mentioned in father's religion (Hindu), caste (Brahmin), sub-caste (Kulin), mother-tongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta). From this fixed society, she assimilates herself into the mainstream to accept American Culture and become a divorcee and have a Hungarian Buddhist husband. The two men in her life symbolize two divergent and diverse cultures, and they represent her cultural dilemmas too. Through this process of assimilation, she explores female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. In fact large-scale migration has brought about feminine emancipation, giving Asian American women more freedom. For instance, Tara could not have taken a divorce from Bish if she had lived in India. Similarly Dimple could have committed suicide in India but she murdered her husband Amit in America. Further, Jasmine could not have deserted her handicapped husband Bud in order to have a new life with Taylor. Thus it can be concluded that the phenomenon of diaspora has a liberalising and emancipating effect on self, society and more so in liberating women. Bharati Mukherjee traces the feudal society of Tara's ancestor, Tara Lata. It is replete with polygamy to show female in bondage and compares her with Twentieth century women Tara a divorcee, a contrast in social dynamics. Tara in the Twentieth century could think of herself and her freedom but her ancestor is doomed to marry a tree to avoid widowhood at the age of five. She remains a virgin all her life and dedicates her life to social-service. Social dynamics has an
determining effect on identity formation through the gradual transformation of the self.

In the next novel, *The Tree Bride*, the quest for roots and mapping of gender identities is done in both colonial India and in the locale of Postcolonial America. She unravels the fascinating life of her namesake Tara Lata as *The Holder of World* unveils the fascinating life of Hannah Easton of Puritan America. The mythic family story narrates the marriage to tree to escape the drudgery of widowhood. The cruelty of the custom as she describes, \"It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion\"(04), seems to befall on Bengali women. Talking about female segregation and this inhuman practice on women, Mukherjee says that there are many Tara Latas married to trees so that they could have a life on earth, a place in society where they would not be considered outcaste and save them from a life of degradation, widowhood and shame. In course of time, Tara Late becomes a legend The Tree Bride, a mythic replica of an archaic custom.
THE TREE BRIDE

The last novel Bharati Mukherjee written till date has a typical postcolonial framework evoking the after-effects of British-rule on a small feudal village of Mishtigunj. Bharati Mukherjee has made a fusion of historical facts and diasporic vision with a variation, from a feministic perspective. In the early novels she has tackled the problems of self in Indian immigrant women like Dimple in *Wife* and Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* who were too passive to assimilate themselves with an alien milieu. Later, she deals with problems of self in highly rebellious and courageous immigrant women who undergo a series of transformations of self in order to successfully assimilate. Jasmine in the novel *Jasmine* and Debby in *Leave It To Me* kill, murder and commit violence before each transformation of self. Further in *The Holder of the World*, the diasporic consciousness of Hannah, a sixteenth century New England Women is analysed to show the cross-cultural assimilation, three hundred years ago. Bharati Mukherjee has always been obsessed with culture studies in the era of mega-scale migration and diaspora. In the next novel *Desirable Daughters* the cross-cultural issues and problematic of self has been sorted out by searching for one’s cultural roots.

In the present novel, *The Tree Bride*, the emphasis is on root-search using myths to negotiate with a multi-cultural reader. The Indian myth of marriage to a Tree evokes the Hindu custom which dates back to the Vedic times. The Tree Bride is a five year old girl, Tara Lata, who is married to a tree to avoid the stigma of widowhood. The socio-cultural landscape of Bengal replete with practices of polygamy, and child-marriage has been thrashed out succinctly. The Postcolonial background shows the Indianization of some British personnels’ diasporic consciousness with a variation. The life of John Mist is a unique example of culture studies worth researching to see the British Hindu wearing dhoti and speaking Bengali. His case-study revealed extreme
assimilation into alien lands, adopting the culture of the adopted land and completely abandoning the white identity to become a British-Hindu.

In *The Tree Bride*, Bharati Mukherjee has gone back to her first love that is the obsession with history and the legacy that she inherits from it. She has traced the history of Tree Bride to her great great aunt and along with it; she has detailed historical data of colonialism in India. Bharati Mukherjee’s love for history is reflected in the life like portrayal of the events and environment of the period. In a book review Sonia Chopra observes:

The Tree Bride is one person narrative of British history in India. A great deal of detail has gone into recreating the British men who left their homeland to fulfill what they believed was, a higher purpose of instilling order and discipline in foreign land (unpaginated data- bookreporter.com,review.2002').

The reverse assimilation of some British men who came to India on sea voyages is delineated in *Tree Bride*. The life of John Mist after whom the city of Mishtigunj is named is one such example. Bharati Mukherjee traces his life and genealogy assiduously; his Indianisation, his idealism and assimilation in the alien land is narrated as a corollary to the life of the Tree Bride. “Many Britishers came to India and became more Indian than the natives learning the language, practicing religion, eating the food, fathering half Indian children from a virtual harem of bibis” (119).

The novel begins with Tara Banerjee emerging from the ashes of a bomb accident handcrafted by Abbas Sattar Hai. Her hair has been stubbed, her face and arms pitted by ember. Bish has become handicapped, his skin burnt and feet transformed into blackened blocks. Rabi their eldest son is fifteen and Tara is expecting her daughter after reconciliation with her husband. Her visit to the gynaecologist, an Indian doctor named Victoria Khanna initiates the history as a first person narrator, she confesses:
I had been writing a book about my sisters Padma and Parvati, and our growing up in Kolkata, and then I'd started something new and strange. This was about a distant relative we called the Tree Bride, my great-great-aunt, a point of light from the remotest, darkest galaxy of my life (22).

After the bombshell, there is a change in the future of Bish, the Atherton Communication Guru, the swami of Stanford. He was the creator of CHATTY with assembly plants in twenty countries, research facilities in these continents and worldwide work force over 1,50,000. The system CHATTY permitted integrated communication between world's computers and universal access to the web. He dreams of unlocking the mysteries of the universe. But this mystic in the guise of scientist, has a reversal of fortune or peripetia. He is delinked from the entire system. Tara confesses:

We still have money, but our life has shrunk to thrice-a-week therapy session and the contents of a sublet with institutional crockery and furniture. It's hard to think that the gods or the ruling deities of the wired universe or hippie California wisdom had not decided to deliver a painful lesson (18).

He is now writing a book in the Natural History of Coincidence- and Tara is writing a book about her ancestors. Tara said what literary people called coincidences, mathematical people called it probability. And consequently coincidence and a connection is built between Victoria Khanna her gynecologist, and Tara. Bish was a student of Prof. Yash Khanna at Stanford, who is the husband of Victoria Khanna. Tracing the history, Victoria Khanna found a further coincidence that, her Grandfather is Virgil Treadwell, Indian Civil Service, District Commissioner in Bengal in the 1930's. Like Bish the mystic, she also believed that, "...there are no coincidences but only convergences" (27). She calculated that Victoria's father must have known the Tree Bride. All the stories of Mishtigunj touch eventually on Tara Lata Gangooly. She is like Ganga where all tributary drain. Tree bride is related to Tara on her mother's side:
The Tree Bride was her mother's collateral great aunt, meaning that he was one of dozen children from at least ten wives kept by my great-great-grandfather, Jai Krishna Gangooly. Not until the ninth wife did he get the only son he acknowledged his line's (and my mother's) continuance. But Tara Lata the Tree Bride, was the third-born daughter from his first wife, born during his early years as a nationalist attorney (28).

She has visited Mishtigunj three times within six years. During her first visit, her knowledge of Tree Bride is limited to certain family facts. It is only during her second visit that she meets old Hajji and buys the Mistnama from him. The research into papers of Treadwell and the Persian Mistnana opens the magical world of Mishtigunj. She describes Bangladesh as: "...greengold village of Hindus and Muslims, the forest called in British days as Sunderbans and the clean, fish-rich river called the Georgeis now a sprawling city renamed Rajakpur... Every few years cyclones send walls of salt water through the marshes, ...where a decade of progress is wiped out in a single day or night" (29). She narrates how river George is unfit for drinking and fresh water fish. We've been trained to think of Mishtigunj as home, in ways that our adopted homes, Kolkata and California must never be. Ancestors come and go, but one's native village, one's desh, is immutable. After years of immigrant experiences, she acknowledges the original home and roots to be Mihtigunj. It is not the adopted home, Kolkata or California.

Victoria Khanna, the doctor and earlier major in English University of Alberta, receives a duffel bag of moldering papers from her father who had received it from Thelma, Verti Treadwell's widow. The papers were given to Victoria as she had "historical curiosity" (31). "So, the records survive through a series of miracles..." (31). Victoria's father was born in Bombay 1897 under irregular circumstances. Tara tried to "...connect the cone of coincidences" (32). Tara calculated that Victoria Treadwell and Tree Bride were contemporaries. She spent sixty three years within her father's compound. She learnt Bengali, English and organized protests. Many activists like Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited her at Mishtigunj. One of the
visitors was Victoria Treadwell. Victoria Khanna's father married a proper colonial lady and, mother and daughter disappeared to New Zealand. He married Thelma, late in life and died miserably. It is Thelma who passes on the valuable papers to Victoria’s father which reaches Victoria eventually. On the third visit for Tara’s medical check up, Victoria Khanna entrusts the papers in the worthy hands of Tara. It was written by Vertie Treadwell in a flowing handwriting. It is Tara’s job to research the papers and unravel the connections of historical data. Bish too is fascinated by the papers. It is like a new toy for him. He believed no information is ever lost, and it can be retrieved by a motivated seeker. Tara thought, in her mission to decipher the ancestor’s anatomy, It is her duty, dharma to write her story. She became nostalgic of childhood days. Tara’s mother was a mesmerizing story teller. Her childhood was brought alive by historical stories of Julius Caesar, Maria Antoinette and Napoleon Bonaparte- story of betrayal, defeat and tragedy sympathized with tears. Of all the stories, the story of Tara Lata with a surrogate husband was the most heart rending. After the bomb blast she visits her mother in Rishikesh and she directs her to visit Mishtigunj. “...my trips to ancient Mishtigunj or modern Rajakpur are now the relics of my life. I have been there three times only once was the experience fully magical” (40).

Modern day reality was slowly catching up with myth. She builds her story based upon the connection between myth, reality and history. Modern day reality is built upon facts of history which had become myth and legends. In the process of unravelling the life of Tree Bride, the novelist exposes the policy of exploitation and history of British in India. As a child she was ashamed of her orthodox background. Tagore and Sidhartha Ray all are Brahma social reformist. But her Great grand father Jai Krishna Gangooly made a choice of accepting English language and British law professionally but he ideologically stuck to Sanskrit verses. This decision to follow tradition influenced family
history. Tara’s father drank scotch but thought like a pious sadhu. At present he led a life of prayers at Rishikesh.

Tara like a postcolonial critic, gives her responses to colonial hegemony. She says she owes the British the scientific spirit of enquiry. As a product of western education, she attended British council debates. In a book review, Sonia Chopra says:

In piecing together her ancestor’s transformation from a docile Bengali girl child into an impassioned organizer of resistance against the British Raj, the contemporary narrator discovers and lays claim to unacknowledged elements in the American identity. (Bookrepoter.com, Review, 2002).

It is her identity that is influenced by the history of her ancestors. John Mist was an outcaste in the British Isles. It is from Victoria Treadwell’s that she explored the life of John Mist. These outcastes from British Isles were not all criminals, some were victims of circumstances, the orphaned, the abandoned and the foundlings. Tara traces the life of John Mist as he was the architect of her ancestral village Mishtigunj.

Shoonder Bon “the Beautiful Forest”, was a dense tiger-and-timber-rich jungle that separated the seas. When a European arrives in the beautiful forest, he becomes free to invent his own life. Such a man was John Mist, the creator of the village for Tara; her desh, her unknown home. Tara traces his life, as he was the perfect example of assimilation, an ideal British Hindu. Bharati Mukherjee from her feminist perspective pursues the life course of a man who has made total assimilation into Hindu Culture in terms of believe, faith, language and custom. In her research into immigrant psychology, he becomes the author’s best example of assimilation into alien culture. He was a foundling in the Betterment Trust, an orphanage. As a child he was called “Jack Snow, Mute” (76). “He was an innocent, capable of cleaning himself in his quarters, enduring punishment and moving through a fallen society without taking special notice of it” (76). Tom Crabbe had a life time impression on him. He was John’s
mentor. He was aggressive and full of vices. He had seen the world and travelled a lot. He opened a new world of aggressiveness to mute John. He joined the life of sailing and John and Crabbe became his mate. They signed a voyage to India and China listening to the endless lectures of Captain Patridge. The old days of sailing was over. Captain Patridge was educated in the modern concept of sailing. He was well versed in contrastive hydrology—the science of waters. Captain had seen the future and the future was steam, human generated wind, directed under pressure. In this voyage Captain sought the company of future Mrs. Humphrey Todd-Nugent, twenty-seven year old governess from Armagh tall, forthright and horsey. She was waiting for an Indian life at Calcutta. Thus starts the voyage to India. But it was interrupted by fire and piracy. On March 12, 1832, Malabar Queen, Orient Patriot, witnessed the worst piracy. It was Tom Crabbe that saved the ship and the remaining crew. He saved the life of hundred lives but Olivia Todd’s life was lost. Little Jack Snow chose to be silent. When the Malabar arrived in Calcutta in March 1932, “...John Mist, the young man who rose in his place did not speak” (102). Whenever he closed his eyes he remembered Olivia Todd and Captain Partridge’s dream life in Calcutta. Jack Snow had hated Humphrey Todd Nugent before even meeting him. A case was started against the Captain of the Malabar Queen, the only defender was a retired barrister David Llewelly Owens and his fastest and most accurate transcriber in English, Persian, and Bengali was Raffeek hai.

Tara, while reading the Mistnama cried out “Eureka” (116). She immediately made the connections that: “Six months ago, my Francisco house was bombed by a Bangla speaking Hai. My husband is crippled on account of Mr. Hai, my son is under permanent threat by Mr. Hai, and he is still out there in San Francisco “(117). It was an intellectual thrill as she could decipher some Mughal paintings in the Mist-nama. She spent six eventful years to research and concluded that “there are no coincidences” (117). “And only a year since I decided I wanted to write the history of the Tree Bride” (116). When the court
case started against Malabar Queen’s failed crew, Mr. Hai was a Vakil in those days, in the new village of Mishtigunj. David Owens, the legal defender, was sixty plus years.

He'd been born and educated in Calcutta and was known as one of the last of the old “British Hindoos”. He was dressed in Indian clothes outside of court and kept four Hindu wives in a block of houses in the native quarter of Sealdah. He was an embarrassment to the British establishment of Chowringhee and Garden Reach (118).

Macaulay’s ‘minute’ of 1832, appeared a year later. Many Britishers came and became Indianized with a harem of ‘bibis. Owen in his kurta-pajama and trail of wives was one such British Hindu. In the turn of Nineteenth century, Christian missionaries came to India and educated the protestant restraint.

Tom Crabbe played a lead role in the enquiry. He was a rebel in the waters. Owens chose the cabin boy, John Mist, a true Christian- who was a true witness to the events was asked to speak. John Mute, who practised the silence of an orphan found his voice. He had cultivated the new refined language of Olivia Todd and Captain Patridge. He gave his opinion that Miss Olivia Todd died in the act of saving his life. He was hailed as the most extraordinary man by the verdict of the judge. Crabbe and his crew were sentenced to ten years of severe punishment in Hazaribagh. He was considered a man of exceptional talent. So he was sent for three years for reformation to Hickey Home for orphans, to learn a useful trade. “Jute, it was thought, might suit him well” (123).

So at the age of twelve John Mist found himself in orphanage where he was preoccupied with jute making for twelve hours a day. At thirteen, the orphans would be expelled to the streets and expected to survive using their Hickey skills. Within a year and a half during his stay in Hickey Home, he was asked to identify the validity of a women’s claim to be the real and resurrected Olivia Todd, escaped from the pirates of Mascarenes. Humphrey Todd-Nugent had no portrait of his beloved so he had to rely on the expertise of young Mr.
Mist. For John Mist, Olivia was as good as a mother. Because of her, all the fear and harshness he’d harbored against women had been erased. "...he vowed to keep his promise of silence and never spoke another word"(136).

However, he was visited by Owen and Mr Rafeek Hai and announced that he would be sent to East Bengal after his three years term in Hickey Home. Mr Hai asked him whether he had forgotten the English language. John Mist assimilation was already in the process in his teens, with his adoption of the Bengali language:

He had not spoken the local tongue but had been living in it, listening to it, exclusively moving to its demands, smiling at its jokes and humming its songs. When he thought about it, he couldn’t say if he’d been talking to his cellmates in Bengali or not- but must have been, since they didn’t speak English. (137).

Only the warden of the orphanage spoke to him in English. He had no means of speaking English. It seemed every conversation he’d ever held with Crabbe, with Olivia, with Captain Patridge had been in Bengali. This was perhaps the language he spoke during his tenure of silence. He declared to Owens, the British Hindu that he was another British Hindu in the making. Owens exclaimed "khub bhalo" when he declared that he no longer spoke English. His first transformation of identity was after the piracy when he was converted to Jack Snow to John Mist. Now after relinquishing the English language, he had another transformation to a British Hindu: "He felt reborn, all his sins washed away, the boy he’d been lay buried under a mound of language he no longer spoke. The sound of English, in fact sickened and enraged him"(137).

The language of English was the language of oppression and domination, which had marginalized him and suppressed him into years of silence as Jack Mute. But now in Calcutta, this heathen language gave him a new freedom and a new identity when he can live a new life. So he willingly renounced his English to adopt the Bengali language. He found safety and security in the East
Bengal where Mr. Hai's family stayed. He was advised not to avail company accommodation as a threat to his life. With Rafeek Hai's help he was directed towards the "Shoonder Bon", south of Calcutta, into the dark Bengali night. Before beginning this new life of existence in Bengal, he took his second oath or vow never to wear English clothes again after the first oath not to speak English. Such was the willing and voluntary adoption of language and costume of India. This cultural adoption by a British lad might have fascinated the feminist writer. John Mist's Seaman's trunk contained the native wardrobe kurta, pyjamas, shawls and turban. It reminds us of Hannah Easton the Salem Bibi in sari and the way she was dressed in Moghul finery in the court of Aurangzeb.

Early novels of Bharati Mukherjee dealt with migration from east to west, Americanization of Indian immigrants. But the later novels deal with migration from west to east and Indianisation of the colonials. In the present novel, *The Tree Bride*, Tara could identify the lush river bank painted in Hajji's Mist-nama. On this river bank, John Mist had laid the stone-work of his first house which was later to be taken over by Jai Krishna Gangooly and where his daughter would spend her entire sixty-five years. The bearded man in a turban in the painting Tara recognized as John Mist at fifty years of age creating his utopian village. The Tree Bride had grown up in Mist Mansion Number one and had never left it. Jai Krishna Gangooly had abandoned his profession in the High Court in Dhaka to launch a new career in an anonymous village. It was at a crucial juncture of social change when his contemporaries like Keshab Chandra Mitter and Harilal Gupta opted for career in Calcutta adopting the liberal thoughts of Brahmo Samaj. Jai Krishna Gangooly remained rooted to tradition, and John Mist in the idealistic mission of creating the utopian village. While his Hindu colleagues in the High Court were strongly attached to British models of justice and addicted to the English language. Jai Krishna was a traditionalist and he moved back to Sanskrit while his rationalist friends became contemptuous of
his Hindu tradition. Jai Krishna finally debunked the colonial life partially when he wore robe and wig of the colonizer during the day and native clothes and hours of prayers during the night.

In 1870, John Mist was emerging from his self-imposed exile after thirty eight years of living a life of a Hindu recluse. During his exile, he travelled, trekked to Amarnath, the sacred ice cave in the Himalayas, visited Benaras, and even prayed in mosques. He was taken for an Indian wherever he went. He accepted the Hindu and Muslim with peculiar kind of secularity. He amassed a fortune in timber concessions with Rafeek Hai’s help. Then he turned his major investments in hemp. He bought and abandoned indigo plantations and converted them to jute or back to rice.

During her first trip to Mishtigunj, Tara had the rare opportunity to glimpse through the pages of the original Mist-nama written in Persian, six years back. Now she repented that the valuable script had slipped through her hands. She could have bribed Hajji ten or twenty thousand for his school. But the valued script was lost with Hajji Chowdhury who died two years ago. His son knew nothing of the valued Persian Mist-nama. However Hajji’s Bengali translation informed Mist having collected, chosen men from Calcutta and Dhaka to his utopian village. So he built his Noah’s ark in utopian community to provide education, justice, health, food and script of cooperation and religion. Jai Krishna had come from Dhaka and Rafeek Hai from Calcutta. Like Mist, they were rebels of colonial oppression: “I am told that you find British law and British customs oppressive to your fine sense of Hindu justice”(147). So Mist’s religious worship was restricted to Hinduism and Islam. Christians were banned from Mishtigunj on the orders of Mist himself.

Here was a British exile, a rebellious self, who had assimilated to the extent of renouncing his own costume, language and culture as they were symbolic of oppression and subjugation. Colonialism was rejected and he
created a village Mishtigunj with utopian idealism. The local Nawab Ghani Rehman Razak, was the nominal owner of Mishtigunj but the financial powers was in the hands of the Hindu Zamindar Ashimlal Dutta. In 1874 when Tree Bride was born- the Nawab’s indebtedness had increased to Dutta and creditors in Dhaka. History of Mishtigunj narrates that Ghani Rehman Razak died in 1902 and Abdul Mohammad Razak was born in 1882 and died in 1949. The latter had participated in the nationalist movement and the old Mishtigunj was named after him as Razakpur. Mist and Hai were hanged by the British as rebels and Razak’s son became an ally of British. Tara again traces the lineage of Hai: “Hai saved Mist but they died together. Hai’s grandson sold me the nama; but perhaps it was his great-great-grandson who tracked me to San Francisco and nearly killed us all” (150-151).

This was the history of Mishtigunj where Hindu and Muslims lived as relatives and cousins. The life of Hai, Mist and Gangooly intertwined like branches around the trunk of the Tree Bride. With John Mist’s life, the definition of immigration and exile achieves a new dimension of total assimilation unheard of history in the past or in the present. “In a century when such total transformation was becoming increasingly rare, John Mist stands out as the perfect, and may be the last ‘British Hindoo’ ” (149).

As a colonial rebel, a foundling and an orphan, he preserved his identity. He had no dual self or hybrid self like immigrants and expatriates like Dimple, Jasmine and Tara of her earlier novels. Hannah of ‘The Holder of the World’ assimilates but goes back to Salem to adhere to her Puritan America with a new knowledge. But John Mist makes total abstinence from colonial religion, from his roots to accept and embrace total transformation into a British Hindoo.

Further, the present novel is a graphic portrayal of colonial history exposing the colonial administration with its subtle nuances. It is not only from the Indian Bengali Brahmin point of view but also from the point of view of
Britishers. She has created John Mist as an idealist and Victoria Treadwell as a typical British administrator from the facts of history and integrated into family roots. It would not be an anomaly to describe it as the history of Tara Lata in the colonial history of India. She has humanized the British authorities like Nigel Coughlin’s compassion for Tara Lata which washes away bitterness and avoids making it a pro Indian anecdote of Colonial history.

We have Victoria Treadwell, an Indian Civil Servant, trying to hold the empire in power. In the book jacket cover, Suzy Hanson rightly points out: “Mukherjee’s rendering of the bitterness of lost empire is compelling”. (The New York Times Book Review Unpaginated). Bharati Mukherjee’s Tara confesses that she needed a Treadwell-nama to unveil the personage of the administration. He was a man who had given 40 years of his life to British Raj and lived without women and love. It’s the tragedy of the Raj. Edwardian and Victorian in his culture, he had the cynicism and bitterness of men who lived without emotions. He was a typical example of British administrator in fact more faithful than any other:

Officers of The Raj behaved like preachers, or imams, or rabbis in some small, closed, self perpetuating sect. They married daughters of other officers, girls who’d grown up speaking kitchen Hindi to the servants... After a few years together, the women would drift back to England when it came time to educate the children (162).

Vertie never saw his children again. He cared less for them than a street dog for its pup. Tara compares his life to T.S. Eliot’s The Hollow Men and also uses the Eliotean allusions in describing his lifestyle. She says: “I’ve been thinking of his life, the barrenness, the sterility, lives like a discarded tin can on a garbage heap. They’d been serving England all their lives but hadn’t seen it in forty years” (163). In fact Tara generalizes the British administrator living a life of bitterness and barrenness without love and emotion serving the Raj with subjugation, servility and mortification.
Bish and Tara take up this onerous job of tracing history in their mellowed middle age years. In the post bombing period, Tara and Bish lived a subdued and solemn life of middle age second marriage. Their life is rounded up by doctors and therapies. It is a period of meditation of a sage, a recluse, cut off from society and high profile job. Bish too was engaged in the deciphering of the Mist-nama.

He reads the Bangla Mist-nama, translating as he goes. He paws through the Treadwell box, trying as I do to find a center to the man. I have enough faith in his genius to believe that if it's there, he'll find it. He never had time for novels, now it's a passion"(165).

Treadwell, a product of St.Alban's school, had a typical public school background. Bharati Mukherjee indulges in a tongue-in-cheek attitude in pulling down the masks of the colonial rule. Colonial rule was described as "forty-five-year observation. India was presented to Britain as a laboratory to work out British, not Indian destiny Britain has failed the test"(183). He ironically comments on Nehru as: “Two hundred years of slaving away, two centuries of selfless sacrifice and untold thousands of deaths have created one stupendously flawed human being in the English mold” (183).

The ethics of the British rule was to alleviate ignorance and backwardness. “The founding principles of the Empire had been sound: educate and elevate a native aristocracy, rather than crush it in the manner of other colonizers.”(184)This was the consequence of Macaulay’s Minutes of educating the native. Bharati Mukherjee then calls Jawaharlal Nehru as: “Case in point, one strutting little popinjay by the name of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. A pretty fair imitation of a British gentleman, at least when he was misbehaving in England. Bolshie to the core and a shameless philanderer” (184). Perhaps this kind of scathing criticism is that he was a threat to the existence of the Raj when Vertie became the District Commissioner for the Sunderbans. In 1920, his autobiography read that Virgil Ernest Reginald Treadwell was born in Otycomund in 1874, November 30, the same year as the former head of the
Colonial Office, the Hon. Winston Churchill. His mother was a Canning-Anglo-Indian in British circles. His father Fleming Treadwell was an officer in the Indian Army along the Coromandel Coast. He was separated from his sister and was brought up by his uncles in East Anglia village to Brynnsmere. In 1924 he wrote an autobiography that goes as follows:

I had a proper English childhood and do not regret any element of it. Following the death of my mother, my care was entrusted to my paternal uncles, hard-working and disciplined men charged with the task of preserving order and the law (188).

He inherited the discipline and early training of respecting social order from them. He hardened, stiffened and became rigid over the years and maintained law and order and served the king of England. His attitude to women and love was also cold and callous like an agreement. “Treadwell opined that looking at their breasts doesn’t seem manly. Much better to address the woman directly, express an interest, establish a price, set an appointment time and be done with it” (193).

It is Bharati Mukherjee’s true feministic stand when she comments Treadwell’s cold attitude to women and sex: “Stare at them as you talk. Never look up, undress her with your eyes” (193). His attitude to women shows only a response to biological urge which can be traded. His mother was cremated in the Anglican Cemetery in Mysore and when his father died in Sudan, he also had expressed his last wish to be buried next to his wife. His public acknowledgement to his similarity with the great British model Winston Churchill was poetic. Like the stalwart, he is yet to be rewarded or honored for his selfless service to the Crown. He had spent a lifetime to save the Empire. His strong affinity towards India and Indians shows his overdrawn pledge to keep the British Empire in India intact. He had the same oratorical skill as Churchill and declares: “I am one of the India-born. Fully ninety percent of my life has been spent in India. I have probably spent a greater percentage of my
life in India than Mr. Nehru has, and certainly more than the late Mr. Gandhi has" (201).

As a staunch fellow of the British Isle and a servant of the King, he believed he built India and saved it from the blood sucking Muslim tyrants, and "their indescribable filth and superstition" (201). He is intimidated that after two hundred years of service they are served notice to leave India. His colonial perspective evokes the bitterness and pathos of life of the British officers and their families who had known no reality but indeed,

loved nothing but Indians, served nothing but India's needs, and buried untold thousands of their children and wives in that malodorous, malarial muck, that steaming bog of vile licentiousness (201).

Here was the man who was making vain attempts to hold the empire together. In 1930 he was posted in Sunderbans as District Commissioner. He had an appointment to meet a Bengali Gangooly Brahmin. The association and interaction between the two unravels the history of John Mist. Tara lata recounted the hanging of Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai when she was six years and five months old. They talked like old friends. She talked about the British atrocities and he defended the native atrocities. When the two men Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai were hanged, Tara's father chanted Ram Ram and the whole village had followed. He was worshipped and the village was named after him after his death. Vertie disclosed that the Britishers included the native police who were used as detective and ploys in the hands of the administrator. This hanging had made Tara Lata interested in reading Orwell's little trifle entitled "A Hanging". Tara, like the true daughter of a lawyer challenged Vertie that, "Had I been permitted a day in court, I could have disproved all your allegations" (217). She charges him of the exploitation of Britishers how they had burned tons of rice instead of distributing it amongst starving villagers. She cancels every allegation of Vertie that Bengal was waiting a hundred years for a peaceful transfer of power. She said she had in her possession eyewitness accounts of atrocities
committed by British troops and police against unarmed villagers in the district of Mishtigunj. However Vertie tried to draw her sympathies by giving the analogy of Mr. Orwell’s Burmese days which convincingly animated “the loneliness and isolation of colonial administration, the intolerable workload, the ingratitude from local, national, and London authorities.”(218).

Vertie developed a weakness: for Tara Lata. He wanted to present her the copy of Mr. Orwell’s *A Hanging* personally. He rationalized his weakness: “He could also defend their lovemaking out of administrative advantage. He would be a spy within the very heart of the enemy camp. Non-coercive intelligent gathering, indeed!” (220). He was a ruthless administrator for whom emotional involvement could be sabotaged for ethics of work culture. “My aim was always the preservation of British rule through the cooperation of enlightened native elites. Win over the elites and rabble will follow” (216).

So he tried to win over Tara Lata. He used diplomacy even in matters of heart and friendship. However, he had confided to Tara Lata that her secret meeting with Nigel Coughlin has been divulged to the Police and the contents of their private discussion has been directly communicated to Dominick Mackenzie.

In fact, this would lead her to find her final denouement. Tara Lata proves even more coercive and shrewd. She could intelligently calculate the ‘winning over’ strategy of Vertie. She crushed these overtures with the clap of her hands and her private army attacked Vertie with lathi and boots in true feminist rebellion. Bharati Mukherjee has answered the male advances from feminist standpoint exposing, the subtle nuances of British rule in India. She has also created Tara Lata, a live ancestor of her community who was commanding, strong enough to protect herself. She is admirable in her true feminine defences – she did not feel uncomfortable when Vertie stared at her bosom. In fact Vertie
was taken aback by female aggressiveness “...her steady gaze and brazen confidence even in the company of males and superiors” (219).

The narrator Tara Chatterjee claims herself to be an expert on the sources of origin of Verti Treadwell after tracing his history for two months. She confesses that what impressed her most was Verti’s love for tigers: “his murderous love of tigers admiring them to kill them almost to the point of slaughter”(224). She tries to understand the psyche of Verti’s mind in loving the animal:

To kill is to possess for all time... To kill is to lose the desirable qualities that attract you in the first place. Early hunters killed to possess the spirit of the animal, his heart, his sexuality, like Tom Crabbe’s Amazon cannibals. Treadwell could have been one of them” (224).

Victoria analyzes further that his identification with a tiger was an attempt to kill himself and the hatred inside him. “All his rage was directed inward? ...It wasn’t India he hated –that long resume of bitterness – but England”(225).

In the last years of the British Raj he wanted to write an autobiography of justification of the raj. He was given the honours “A Tiger in tweeds” by Stafford Roundtree. “After retirement many of the old Raj administrators wrote memoirs of their Indian experiences .They’ed kept diaries and copious notes, they were Victorians after all. They believed in their mission, they felt their lives had contributed somehow to hope and progress” (227).

Tara wanted to write a Treadwell- Nama like Mist-Nama. She found in the last years of the Raj, he was running away from women and from England. As self realization dawned and his ultimate confrontation with his self took place that he was not a tiger but a frightened animal and that his Indian career was one long resume of bitterness .He aspired to be a Churchill but became the pathetic figure “inside Orwell’s especially Burmese Days” (228).
Bharati Mukherjee’s conception of history was that, if nothing in history is ever lost, everything human is finally connected. Vertie’s sister sent to South Africa is also not lost, the aunt who received her is also not lost, the aunt who received her was also not lost. Victoria and Tara are spending Sunday at Victoria’s place, when Tara could identify the Muslim killer. The realization dawned on her that it was not Bish’s money or Bish that the killer was pursuing but it was she. Jack Sidhu also confirmed that “it was intended for you Mrs Chatterjee”(245). Tara says she was the target all along in the course of following custom and a new connection was established. She when the explosion took place and Victoria became the innocent victim. She’d expressed great tenderness for India, she recalled her final words “…five little Indians Bish and I, Yash and she and baby make five. She felt finally she belonged with Indians” (244). So Tara decided upon a Hindu cremation for her.

The narrator summarizes again in part for the life of Tree Bride “Tara lata Gangooly took on tree like characteristics herself. She was rooted to her father’s house. She was silent as a tree. The grave little girl became a somber young lady. Uvaria trees, with their dense foliage, were imported from Orissa to shade the mansion. She communed with those trees for the next sixty years” (251-252). She had three exposures to the outside world. She witnessed the hanging of John Mist and Rafeek Hai. The first was when she was marrying the tree and second was when she witnessed the hanging and third was when she was taken custody by British rifles in 1943. She was not only a lady nationalist but a feminist crusader defying the aggression of colonial male dominance. She was arrested as she kept custody of British male atrocities against native women like nineteen year old Habeeba Shah with her three infant daughter burnt alive, or fifteen year old Kananbala Devi’s rape case. She was waiting for a newspaper anywhere in the world to publish it. It was her dream as a five year old, the dream that she saw with Mist-jethu and cook’s daughter Ameena was an India
with communal harmony. “Hindu and Muslim would live harmoniously in a free and prosperous India.”

She was like Queen Victoria, fertile but virgin. Her motherhood was expressed in form of small saplings trees, shielding the mansion. Tara Lata would sit on the tree, hours on a bench, her arboretum, her “sacred forest” as she called it, reading and talking with the trees. She had never been intimidated by male attention as she was a virtuous married woman. No man had treated her as an object of male desire, until Vertie Treadwell when she was fifty four. She was the virgin recluse of Mist mahal, teacher of literacy, distributor of grains, and occasional oracle on subjects to all. Her house was open to all. Gradually she was called Tara ma as a spiritual idol. She was revered and prayed as an icon when she donated all her gold to Gandhi.

For Bharati Mukherjee number three seems to be a magical number. Tara Chatterjee visited Mist Mahal on three occasions. The Sunderbans forest had been cleared. The Tree Bride faithful children – my great aunts and great uncles, I could say had long since been chopped and burned. The Mist-Mahal had holes in its roof, there were puddles here and there and goats and dogs ran free. Her following of Tree Bride’s history portrayed the third English man with whom, she was associated during her last days in 1928. He was Nigel Coughlin, who had no pretentions like other Englishmen. He was another British Hindu like John Mist, dressed in unclean dhoti. He was on his way to Burma and entered Mishtigunj via the unused ghats to Mist Mahal: “He was tall and extremely thin. He wore an traditional dhoti handloomed from course native cotton in the style and manner approved by Mr. Gandhi” (260).

Tara Lata and Nigel Coughlin made heart to heart talk in bilingual Bengali and English. It seemed to Tara Lata as if cultural communication between two great cultures of the world, the English and the Bengali was possible as it had been in the time of Mist, Hai and her father. Nigel told he
was born in the hills of Darjeeling but learnt the King’s English since the age of seven at England. Both of them had a hearty communication reliving the hanSging of John mist and Rafeek hai. Tara Lata remebered how their families were denied the rights of their bodies. Nigel was something like him. To Tara Lata he was the avatar in manner and sincerity of John Mist himself, he who had claimed to have forgotten every word of English. In company of such a man who had assimilated into a British Hindu, Tara Lata exhilarated in such “exuberance of assimilation. She could imagine to see the day when Indians and Britishers could sit together sharing the best of their common food and experiences. Nigel considered himself a white Hindu. She considered Coughlin a better Pan Indian that she could ever be. He declared:

I am the Church of England in India. I am devotee of goddess Durga. All my life I have been looking for suitable faith, and I believe in India I found it. In religion I am Indian. In political commitment: Russian. In personal aspects of my life, I follow the Greek Ideal (268).

He had educated himself in King’s English which helped him clear his ICS Exam. And his Russian and Bengali tutorials helped him declare his love for India. He could sympathise with Tara Lata’s obsession with freedom. He jokingly called Gandhi her father, Nehru her brother and Subash Bose her lover. The purpose of his visit was to warn her that her names had already appeared in the intelligent files. And he was trying his best to remove her name from the British official; dossier. Tara saw him as the first British officer who was not a brute or bully. He was George Orwell’s great friend. Eric Blair was his name in school. His complete assimilation and Indianization is evident. She chose to remain in India even after retirement and as a ex-Britisher till 1971. He left a legacy of his friendship with Eric Blair in 1950. But the most important legacy was his unpublished monogram in 1920s about the true crimes and execution of John Mist. All these three works remain unpublished.
The narrator Tara Chatterjee finds important source material about Tara Lata and Nigel Coughlin from Treadwell’s papers. However Coughlin’s history of Mist Mahal is more revealing. It unravels the mystery of Abbas Sattar Hai and the intertwining of fate of both the Hai family and the Gangooly family. Tara Lata’s childhood friend, Sameena, daughter of Shafiq Hai, son of Rafeek Hai, he too had witnessed as a nine year old the execution of John Mist and Rafeek Hai, his father.

However Tara Lata had made an enemy, He had fired the cook Abdullah’s Sameena’s father to become a lower post gatekeeper inorder to preserve the purity of the Brahmin cast. But he grudgingly became instrumental in feeding Tara Lata’s name and giving information about Tara lata to British authorities in Calcutta. Abdullah had been able to win the hand of a doctor son-in-law by giving the dowry of the house Mistmahal,that he had never owned. Later it was Coughlin conclusion that, Sameena and Tara Lata’s physician would plot to take possession of Mist Mahal sooner or later. Further Nigel’s history shows the connection:

In 1943, following the death of Tara Lata Gangooly, while in police custody, her house passed on to Begum Sameena Chowdhury, widow of late Dr. Hajji Shafiq Mohammad Chowdhury. She was the mother of Gul Mohammad Chowdhury the old hajji’s son, whom Tara Chatterjee had met in Mishtigunj, on her second visit. I’d met Hajji’s son on leave from New York restaurant while he pillaged his father’s holdings, on my third visit. And of course I’ve had dealings with Sameena’s great-grandson Abbas Sattar Hai, in San Francisco.

The social change that followed was the Muslimisation of east Bengal and the once powerful Hindu zamindar minority was taken over by Muslim majority. The conclusion drawn by them was that, “It means that Victoria’s murderer my would-be-assassin, the crippler of my husband and an indiscriminate killer in India and America was born possibly raised in my
family’s house” (278). It was the same money of inheritance to Olivia which killed John Mist, Rafeek Hai and eventually Tree Bride. This was the bone and blight, illfate and black magic of Mist Mahal which led to hangings.

The last Chapter is a treatise on Hindu culture, its rituals of releasing the ancestors. It follows a cyclical pattern starting from birth to death. Hence it ends in the funenral rites of the ancestor. Tara Lata and birth of Tara Chatterjee’s daughter as a successor of the family tree. Bharati Mukherjee addresses a foreign reader, and calls the ghost of Tara Lata who haunts her for her release on Beulah street. “Set me free” (279). Tara Lata’s ghost appears to Tara in the last leg of her pregnancy and says that “Did you know that Mackenzie hanged me in jail cell?”(280).

She again said “They tossed my body over the prison wall into the sewage ditch, I hovered above my corpse. It lay submerged in filth. Vultures ripped chunks off with their beaks. Starving dogs chewed my bones. I had nobody but I felt the pain and the shame” (281). He requests Tara and asks her son Rabi to release her by performing her rites. Her only plea was not vengeance or revenge but the release of her soul.

Bish proposes to give her soul a send off in Kashi and she is now a ‘preta’a ghost and would become a pitr an ancestor. “India is the navel of the universe and Kashi the navel of India and Manikarnika Ghat the navel of Kashi” (282). In Kashi, death is not the end of life but the soul’s return to the abode of the ancestors. Tara Lata has been waiting for half a century for the ceremonial cremation conducted in accordance with funeral rituals laid down from ancient times is a prerequisite for liberation. Tara Lata’s spirit was restless as he had a death by hanging. Bish and Tara were aliens and burial outside India was not permitted amongst Hindus. So burial at Freedom, United States by priest Veeraswamy electrical engineer was cancelled.
Bish makes the best treatise to Hindu culture with a scientific definition of it. As a traditionalist Bish explains Hinduism: “Hinduism is very scientific, very mathematical. At the center of consciousness is a zero; at the extremities infinity. The universe collapses and expands in fifty-two-billion year cycles, which seem about right-- and has been creating and destroying itself forever, life recomposing itself endlessly around the cores of collapsing stars” (284).

Tara Chatterjee does not consider herself as a pure Hindu like her grandfather. She is a hybrid herself, a migrant in an alien soil, she had crossed the black water, and lost her caste by tradition. She is divorced and she had eaten red meat. So Kashi can only cleanse and purify the ailing soul of Tara Lata. Bish again proposes to Tara as a traditionalist, as he can go to Kashi only as a married man. Again another telling of story of Lord Shiva showing Kashi to his bride Parvati as the luminous city where death holds no terror and no finality. Finally one remarriage remains takes place, that a fifteen minute marriage ceremony, exactly 7 days 21 minutes before Victoria Kallia the daughter was born. A birth death cycle is observed. The funeral rites and ghee oblation was observed religiously of Tara Lata the ancestor, after birth of new progeny into the family. It indicates also reincarnation of Tara Lata.

It is an eulogy to Hindu culture, to Hindu Colonial rule, to British Hindoos and their assimilation. It is also Bharati Mukherjee best treatise on culture studies where she has a global dream of communal harmony. The British, Hindu and the Muslim living together with perfect assimilation. The novel begins with reference to Muslim man Sattar Hai and ends with Hindu ritual of death, birth and reincarnation bidding farewell to ancestor only for another reincarnation of self. The Mist Mahal built by John Mist, a European British Hindu, occupied by Bengali Brahmin Zamindar Jai Krishna and later inherited by Muslim Hai family. Mist Mahal witnessed the cutting across of European, Hindu and Muslim culture. Thus the magic of Mist mahal witnesses this
acculturation of British Hindoos, Muslims and Hindus intersecting culture in a colonial set-up.

*The Tree Bride* shows the phenomenon of diaspora during colonial times and shows transformation of English people like John Mist and Nigel Coughlin into dhoti clad Hindus. It also echoes the transformation of sixteenth century new England Hannah into a Sari clad Bibi of a Rajput king. The theme of root search for identity recurs in most of the later novels that is in *Leave It To Me, Desirable Daughters*, and *The Tree Bride*. In the global world of migration where identities are fluid Protagonist uphold pluralistic self, Bharati Mukherjee suggest the idea of root search for identity formation. She argues that cultural heritage, family tradition and ancestral roots provide stability in a fluid identity. In the novel *Leave It To Me* Debby an orphan searches for her biological parents and genes to seek her inheritance, when she finds she does not belong to the adopted home of the dimartions. Similarly in *Desirable Daughters* 20th Century Tara disillusioned with western family tradition of divorce and adoption searches for her roots in the village of Misigunj for her ancestor Tara Lata. The issue of upholding tradition and culture versus modernism of American culture is sorted out for healthy assimilation in an alien soil.

Bharati Mukherjee seems to bring home the truth that assimilation of the new culture by an immigrant does not mean a complete denial of the past. In *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* she asserts and proclaims that both expatriates and immigrants cannot sever themselves entirely from their cultural roots and ethnic past, despite their moorings in an alien geographical space. In the process of transformation of self in the adopted land, it is culture and tradition which give stability to their identity. Indian Immigrants and expatriates whether from the West or the East struggle to
discard their old selves and forge new ones. They have to reconnect and reclaim their cultural roots and their links with their past to experience true fulfillments in life. So however, Americanised one may proclaim our self to be, his sense of home will be inextricably part of her being.

New Immigrant literature has been approached differently by different authors of Diaspora. For Salman Rushdie, “Exiles or immigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back to create fictions ... not actual cities or villages but invisible ones, imaginary homelands Indias of the mind” (*Imaginary homelands* 10). Carol Davies Boyce too, believes that “migration creates desire for home which in turn produces the rewriting of home” (113).

Eliza Joseph is of the opinion that a person who had crossed boundaries eventually learns that unless he is flexible he cannot survive. A migrant continually walks out of one culture to another. Such an individual according to Gloria Anzaldua marked indelibly with the ‘metiza consciousness’ or in other words ‘a consciousness of the border land.’ The new metiza ‘shifts out of habitual formations from convergent thinking to divergent thinking.... from set patterns and goals ...towards a whole perspective...’ (*laconciencia* 766) Further Gloria Anjaldua has remarked, “living in a state of psychic quest in a ‘borderland’ is what makes poets, writers and artists create.” (*Borderland* 73)

Many creative writers like Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banargee Divakruni try to transform the trauma and agony of dislocation into a celebration where exiles, despite their attendant pain, help them to discover new territories of experience. In each of her novels Bharati Mukherjee tries to affirm the fact that assimilation requires courage and
resilience to make and remake an identity. Dimple in Wife and Tara in The Tiger Daughter remain maladjusted and fail to assimilate. The protagonists of the later novels are courageous women who transform new metamorphosis of self, take up new names in new locals to assimilate. Where ever they go, they contribute to the society; become an asset rather than an liability. These women achieve status of a Goddess. Jasmine becomes Goddess Kali to overcome her adversary Half Face. Hannah creates history wherever she goes, and finally becomes an emissary of peace to confront the Emperor Aurangzeb. Debby takes up the name of Goddess Durga to conquer all adversaries on the way to find her biological parents. Tara in Desirable Daughters and The Tree Bride takes up the courageous mission of searching for her roots in the remote village of Mistigunj. She discovers her ancestor Tara Lata who during colonial time fought as a nationalist and dies as a martyr becoming immortal as Tara Ma. Bharati Mukherjee as a feminist writer believes in feminist power their strength to overcome evil, to assimilate and transform to forge new identities and new self in new locales.

In the preface of her books, ‘Gloria Speaks of defence mechanism of a migrant which gives them additional strength to swim in alien elements and survive. They have to struggle and by stretching their psyche horizontally and vertically they develop resistance to cope with contradictions.

Gloria says in the preface ‘living in the borders and in the margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new elements... I have a sense that certain ‘faculties’ .... dominant areas of consciousness are being activated and awakened. (Unpaginated preface).
Thus Debby in *Leave To Me*, Hannah in *Holder of the World* and Tara in *Desirable Daughters* and *The Tree Bride* are fighter women, Amazonians with courage and strength. They do not indulg in nostalgia, despair and disillusionment. Rather, they embody a great sense of freedom, independence and self-assurance. They revel in unlimited opportunities open to them and achieve goddess like status. She uses the Indian Myth of Goddess Durga, to show the cultural heritage of Indian socio-cultural milieu where the protagonist can bounce back when required to overcome crisis.

The power, the sexuality and the gender identity of feminine women expatriates is problemitized in each novel of Bharati Mukherjee. She gives them a mythical framework, to represent any ethnicity in a migrant world. The social locale determines the dynamics of self in mutation, transforming self identity. Immigrant women like Jasmine, Hannah, Debby and Tara achieve real women status from feminist perspective. Their power and gender identity is eulogized to women goddesses. Tracing back to the roots and culture gives them power and strength, to tackle the adversity and contradiction of the alien world or the land of adoption. Bharati Mukherjee in her corpus of immigrant literature seems to be concluding with the process of root search which has relevance today. In order to avoid identity crisis, tradition, cultural heritage of family tree helps the self to hold together as adhesives to prevent fragmentation of self. Bharati Mukherjee says identity is a question of “all the cultural, political and social inclusion that have shaped an Indian born American writers” (Bharati Mukherjee Interviewed). Bharati Mukherjee is obsessed with history and culture studies that shapes feminine identity in a migrant world. Aparajita Ray says that in the “vein of women writing in English

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lies in the frameworks of its critique of social relationship, in the images of "new women", and in the representation of the entangled space of gender and history. (*Search for Identity* ed, Murali Manohar"101). This is very true of Bharati Mukherjee. The colonial framework, the feudal society of Bengal, the mission of root search, is undertaken against American Haight Counter Culture. In all diverse social locales, at different points in history, where English, Muslim and Hindu culture intersect, assimilation of exile in the adopted land assumes a celebration of self.

In *The Tree Bride*, she cites the example of such assimilation like John Mist and Nigel Coughlin who transform themselves completely into Hindus without any longing or link with home culture. Further, women immigrants like Hannah, Debby, Jasmine and Tara break the stereotypes of immigrant psyche to assume higher self – a kind of metaphysical self to contribute to the society. Thus Bharati Mukherjee has basically a moral tone, although she implements violence as a tool to show transformation of self.
WORK CITED


(All Textual citations are from these editions of the text).


