CHAPTER IV

THE EFFECTS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism is the cultural diversity of communities and the policies that promote this diversity. As a descriptive term, multiculturalism is the simple fact of cultural diversity and the demographic make-up of a specific place. As a prescriptive term, multiculturalism encourages ideologies and policies that promote this diversity or its institutionalization. In this sense, multiculturalism is “at ease with the rich tapestry of human life and the desire amongst people to express their own identity in the manner they see fit” (Bloor 272). The term is often used to refer to many Western nation states. Arguing on cultural identities, Stuart Hall claims:

Cultural identity can be interpreted in two ways. It can be defined as a true self, an essence concealed under other, super imposed, artificial selves. Alternatively taking cognizance of ruptures and discontinuities in our personal and collective stories cultural identity may be taken to represent as well as being....It belongs to the future as much as to the past.... Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essential past they are
subject to the continuous play of history culture and power. ("Cultural identity and Diaspora" 111-12)

Homi K. Bhabha, one of the most important thinkers of postcolonial criticism speaks about multiculturalism in his \textit{Location of Culture}. He uses the term "Hybridity" to refer to the integration or mingling of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures. Homi Bhabha states that the assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices the cross fertilization of cultures can be seen as positively enriching and dynamic ones. The term hybridity refers to the kind of political and cultural negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized. Hybridity of culture refers to the mixedness or impurity of cultures knowing that no culture is pure. He states that the cultures are not discrete phenomena but being always in contact with one another, a mixedness of culture is formed.

Multiculturalism has been official policy in several western nations since the 1970s for reasons that varied from country to country including the fact that many of the great cities of the Western world are increasingly made of mosaic cultures. Multicultural ideologies or policies vary widely, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which
people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to.

In the United States, multiculturalism is not clearly established in policy at the federal level, but ethnic diversity is common in both rural and urban areas. Continuous mass immigration was a feature of the United States economy and society since the first half of the 19th century. The absorption of the stream of immigrants became, in itself, a prominent feature of America's national myth. The idea of the *Melting Pot* is a metaphor that implies that all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated without state intervention. The *Melting Pot* metaphor implied that each individual immigrant, and each group of immigrants, assimilated into American society at their own pace. The immigrant does not simply enter a nation, disrupt it, or change because of it; a relationship develops between the individual and the nation, which enables the nation to transform as well. As Leah Rang observes, "A person belongs to a culture by virtue of the similarities, imagined equivalences and relationships she can draw between her individual self and the nation. Despite the legal shift caused by the Immigration Act, however, American culture continued to define itself based on national origins, implementing a multicultural society that strove to identify (non-white) people based on where they came from and their pasts, not their current location or
their present existence in America Transformation occurs through confrontation with the global and subsequent reinvigoration of the nation” (Bharati Mukherjee and the American Immigrant 14-15). As a newcomer from another culture, the conspicuous immigrant clashes with American culture and highlights inconsistencies in both its present and its past which, as defined above, is not multiculturalism as this is opposed to assimilation and integration.

Bharati Mukherjee’s first novel The Tiger’s Daughter is a fine manifestation of the effects of multiculturalism on an individual. It is the story of a Bengali Brahmin girl who goes to America to pursue her higher studies and accidentally marries an American and happens to settle in the US. She strives hard to establish herself as an American wife. Nagendra Kumar argues, "Tara Banerjee who is identified by a majority of critics as the writer herself, finds herself to be sandwiched between two cultures. Her America, far from being a land of promise, is a land of violence and atrocity. It’s a land of strangers and all her attempts at assimilation are destined to failure due to her ‘otherness’. She breaks her family tradition and marries American David. It is also an attempt to get security in an alien land. But her marriage proves a failure because it’s an emotional marriage, a decision taken impulsively. Since she has not thoroughly understood David and his society,
she always remains nervous and apprehensive. In an attempt to Americanize herself she loses her Indian identity miserably" (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 40). After a long break of seven years she comes back to her home country only to find herself a complete stranger. She could not arrive at the conclusion whether she is an American or an Indian until the end of the novel.

Tara Banerjee is the great grand daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee and the daughter of the Bengal Tiger, the owner of the famous Banerjee and Thomas (Tobacco) Co. Ltd. Tara is sent to Vassar, America at a very tender age of fifteen to pursue her higher studies. She had to encounter the challenge of racial discrimination and many such problems at a young age: "For Tara, Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake. If she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great grand daughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise’s to remain composed and lady-like in all emergencies she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week" (TTD 10). This young woman had become very sensitive and even a small unfavourable action offended her. Her adjustments during her high school days in America are described in detail using flashback technique. She sensed discrimination even if her friend did not share her mango chutney, she used to hang outside the apartment her silk scarves during her depressive days to give the
apartment an Indian look, she prayed to goddess kali to give her strength so that she would not to break down before the Americans. All her efforts portray that she refused to be simply sucked by the alien land. Nagendra Kumar rightly opines, “an immigrant away from home idealizes his home country and cherishes nostalgic memories of it and so does Tara in America” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 31). Tara’s circumstances forced her to fall in love with David, an American. Her accidental marriage with David is thus delineated by the novelist “Within fifteen minutes of her arrival at grey hound bus station there (at Madison), in her anxiety to find a cab she almost knocked down a young man. She did not know that she eventually would marry that young man” (TTD 14). Thus Tara married the American David who was blind to Indian traditions and customs. Tara could not make him understand many things including her status, her family life style and her life in Calcutta. This failure of communication is rooted in their cultural differences. In India a marriage is not simply a union of two individuals, it is the coming together of two families as well. But in countries like America it is just the union between two individuals. David’s questions on Indian customs and traditions put Tara only in a dilemma and she felt completely insecure in an alien atmosphere as her husband was a foreigner.
After spending seven years of married life in America, Tara plans a trip to India. She believes her trip to India would bring back her golden old days, but this never happened. Because she was no more Tara Banerjee but was Tara Cartwright, an American lady who has lost her sense of Indian outlook. She realizes that she has lost her childhood memories in the crowd of America. Her initial reaction on her arrival at the Bombay airport is that of shock and disgust. She does not give a fair respond to her huge relatives who had come to the airport to receive her. Tara’s relatives attributed her arrogance to her American attitude to life and think that her seven years of stay in America has transformed her thoroughly. But the fact is that she was not happy in America either. In Bombay, the railway station looked like a hospital with so many deformed men sitting on the bundles and trunks. She finds it very difficult to travel with a Marwari and a Nepali. Now America appears a dreamland to her. She was afraid to eat any food given in the railways. At Howrah station she was given a warm welcome by her family and relations. But she did not feel comfortable. Sushma Tandon opines, “Tara’s state is incomparable to, though not identical with, that of an expatriate who stands apart from the emotional and spiritual tenor of the country that had once been her own” (Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction 30). It is clear now that the
Americanized Tara is unable to identify herself as an Indian.

While in America she felt herself to be a foreigner and was always under stress. She felt rootless and believed her going back to India would be a great relief to her. But things are quite different after coming to India; the fully acculturated Tara could not cope with India. Things do not appear better in India also. Even her close friends company does not soothe her. She recalls, "Seven years ago she had played with these friends, done her homework with Nilima, briefly fancied in love with Pronob, debated with Reena at the British council. But now she feared their tone, their omissions and their aristocratic oneness" (TTD 56). Tara forgets the next step of ritual while preparing for worship with her mother and she realizes that it is not a simple loss. At once she becomes aware of what America has done to her because religion plays a central role in any culture and the forgetting of it upsets her. "When the sandal wood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the shiny stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions, it was little death, a hardening of heart, a cracking of axis and centre. But her mother came quickly with the relief of words" (51). Certainly her life style in America has changed her to the
core. She even grows nervous and feels the changed attitude of her mother towards her. “Perhaps her mother was sitting severely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had wilfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin was constantly in and out of this sacred room dipping like a crow” (50). It is the American culture that has covered Tara like an invisible spirit or darkness. In the deepest core of her heart Tara has an intense desire to behave like an ordinary Indian but her re-rooted self in America made such common rituals alien to her. She realizes that she has become rootless now. She sees everything with an American eye and comments on everything from the point of view of an Americanized Indian. She finds herself a marginalized person and suffers from a split self. Enakshi Chowdry writes, "Tara was literally neither here nor there. She was a misfit with her Calcutta milieu and she was always under stress in America- trying to be correct, trying not to be a gauche immigrant, trying to be American. Tara is intelligent, highly educated and capable of self analysis. She is conscious of her instability, insecurity and unhappiness" ("Images of Women in Bharati Mukherjee's Novels" 95).

One day Tara’s mother took her to visit her sister and her disabled child. Tara is moved by the sight of the child and in her concern she asks if plasters, casts, and special
shoes had been tried as a cure but she is snubbed and humiliated by her aunt who mistakes her genunity. "You have come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mleccha husband? Tara could not communicate her rightful feelings towards her. She answers meekly, “Why do you hate us?” But she wanted to say “I don’t hate you, I love you and the miserable child the crooked feet, the smoking incense holder, I love you all” (TTD 36). On her way back from her aunts home she comes to know that her aunt had lost her husband in cancer and she is now suffering with her disabled child and that is the reason for her distemper. Her mother who was showing deep concern for the aunt and her child goes for a shopping in the new market on their way back. This contradiction appears entirely incongruous for Tara who had developed a Western mind. These contradictions highlight the Indian sensibility. Sushma Tandon opines, "This ability of an Indian mind to switch over from an intolerably painful experience to a pleasurable prospect is essentially an ‘Indian dialect’ which despite the deep concern and anguish can yet make a person remain detached” (Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction 33).

Tara spent much of her time in India at the Catelli-Continental hotel on Chowringee Avenue with her friends. In the beginning, these parties interested Tara more but later she lost interest as her friends made her uneasy with their
questions on her adjustments and lifestyle in America. She felt that she had committed a great sin by marrying a foreigner. “In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac street, her friends were curious only about the adjustments she made” (TTD 62). Tara finds a sea change in her experiences in India after her Marriage. Though her friends are the same their behaviour and their approach towards her are not the same. They do not bother about their friend Tara, their only interest was to listen to her stories about America. Tara feels for having come there without her husband David. She feels his absence very much. She writes to him regularly but she could not convey all her feelings to him because: “It was hard to tell a foreigner that she loved him very much when she was surrounded by the Bengal Tiger’s chairs, tables, flowers and portraits. How can she describe in an aerogramme the endless conversations at the Catelli-Continental, or the strange old man Joyonto Chowdry in a blazer who tries to catch her eye in the cafe, or the hatred of aunt Jharna or the bitterness of slogans scrawled on walls of stores and hotels” (TTD 63). Tara’s mind is always in a confused state struggling to select between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. She feels abandoned and trapped at the same
time. Lahiri Sharmita says, "Mukherjee highlights the
discontended situation of the women of the model minority
who have failed to bridge the gap between the two worlds
that migration to America has exposed them to" ("Where do I
come from? Where do I belong?" 125). Neither can she take
refugee in her old Indian self nor in her new discovered
American self. This difficulty of choosing lies in her
refusal to totally condemn one world. It might have been
easier for Tara to find her old home contemptible but she
does not. She does not fit in it any longer.

Tara visits a funeral with Joyonto Roy Chowdry the
owner of a tea estate in Assam. There she had an encounter
with a Tantric who asks her hand for foretelling but she
mistakes that the man is asking for bakshees. This
misunderstanding is due to her cultural break up. The seven
years stay in the US has made her to forget not only the
rituals but also many practices. Joyonto Roy takes her to
Tollygunge which is now occupied by refugees. There Tara
loses her balance of mind when she sees a little girl
suffering from leprosy and she almost screams out in fear
of touching her. Tara had never been part of the crowd. She
had always been protected as a child and later as a woman.
Nagendra Kumar views, "Infact disease, suffering and
poverty are part of Indian existence and a common Indian
ignores it or rather accepts it as an integral part of
life. Tara herself once ignored all these things but her
stay in the states has opened her eyes to the gulf between the lives of the poor and those of the rich in her own country. Like the people of the west now she has started looking at India as a land of poor people living in a hostile unhygienic conditions and suffering from starvation, decay and disease” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 37). Tara also testifies to the fact that she has not been able to understand the complications of American culture. In this way her mind is constantly at conflict with the two personalities within her - one of an Indian and the other of an American. During such moments she feels like going back to David where she would be more at ease.

In the summer, she visits Darjeeling along with her friends and family members as a holiday tour. She enjoys the beautiful Himalayas with its pure and chill air. But untoward incidents spoil her trip of Darjeeling. One day Tara, Pronob and Antonio (an American lady) went around the observatory hill. On the way some of the young hooligans tease them which spoils Tara’s mood. Her trip to Darjeeling did not provide her peace but for the darshan of Kannanbala Mata. Her dharshan was an exciting moment for Tara which gave her a revelation beyond expression. She no longer feels the need to express her emotions or share them with others. “Tara found herself shouting “Ma, Ma, Mata!” with the rest, she found it easy suddenly to love everyone” (TTD 173).
Despite that incident all other things that happened in Darjeeling pained Tara. Anand Prabha Bharat says, “Tara finds herself a misfit wherever she goes. With her dangling personality she tries to look Indian and adjust with her friends but there is an invisible gap between them and she feels the breakdown. She is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are the two worlds wide apart. Realizing that the reconciliation is impossible, Tara feels to go back to David” (Bharati Mukherjee and the Immigrant Psyche 57-58). Towards the end Tara decides to go back to David and she calls her friends at the Catelli-Continental hotel to let them know about her decision. She did not know that the whole Calcutta was burning with violent demonstrations and riots. Tara unaware of the outside situation, moves out. Meanwhile a group of demonstrators surround them. It is a violent mob and Mr.Chowdhury is caught by them. Pranob tries to save Mr.Chowdhury but is unfortunately killed by them. The novel ends with an open ending. “Tara still locked in the car across the street from the Catelli- Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she did not, whether David would know that she loved him fiercely” (TTD 210). The novelist ends the novel inconclusively leaving the fate of Tara to the readers imagination.
In *The Tiger’s Daughter* Mukherjee has beautifully depicted the story of a fifteen year old girl who leaves her home to America for higher studies, gets in a marriage knot with an American, and suffers nostalgic memories of her home country and people. Out of love for the home country she comes back to India after a period of seven long years. But her trip is full of disappointment. She did not see the people and country she left seven years ago. Each aspect of life she had witnessed seven years ago completely changed. Now with the eye of an American she perceives India, could not tolerate its difference and decides to go back to America to her David. But the novel has a cinematic climax. Calcutta is burning in riots and Tara is caught amongst an angry mob and she wonders if she could ever get back to her David. Her fate is left to the fantasy of the reader.

Bharati Mukherjee’s second novel is *Wife*. In this novel she exposes the challenges and hardships a multicultural society places on the immigrant. The novel sets it atmosphere both in India and America. The protagonist sets to America soon after her marriage and then the whole novel is set in America. Bharati Mukherjee’s aim in setting her novel in America is to reveal both the nations’ limitations in multiculturalism and to reveal the discrepancy between a policy of cultural difference and the American dream of individualism and opportunity. In the
portrayal of Dimple, Mukherjee delineates the protagonist as suffering under the disempowerment and pain caused by a multicultural society, Mukherjee depicts a fixed American culture that negates individual identity in favour of communal identities located in foreign culture. Only by subordinating both her isolated Indian and American cultural identities through violence can Dimple assert her individual identity. Dimple opts for violence due to the frustration she feels in a multicultural society. Mukherjee exposes the pain of immigration while expressing a hope for the revitalization of American national ideals and enables a return to an American space that enables rather than suppresses the individual.

The conflict between constructed past and immigrant present is realized by Dimple on her first arrival in America. Amit's friend Jyoti Sen and Meena Sen greet and receive them at the airport. Dimple could not take her host seriously as he was dressed in "a red shirt and bright white pants something a Bombay film star Try to wear...She wouldn't have taken him for a Bengali at first sight" (W 51). Jyoti Sen who wanted to maintain his past does it with a difference. Dimple who is a newly arrived immigrant did not need to create this cultural past and therefore finds Jyoti unbelievable, an imitator of an Indian. Leah Rang opines, "As an alternative to performing a fixed American culture which suggests substituting one
culture for another rather than joining multiple cultures to create a new one” (Bharati Mukherjee and the American Immigrant 23).

A few days after her arrival in America Dimple experience the cross-cultural confrontation in an American shop. She was encouraged by Meena Sen, her host, to go for herself and buy her favourite cheese cake from the shop. Dimple goes and asks for the cheesecake but she is mocked at by the shop-keeper. He enquires her if she does not know the Law of the country. She was not supposed to ask for cheesecake in a mutton selling shop. But Dimple could not understand why a shop selling mutton should not sell cheesecake. In Calcutta she could buy anything in the Departmental shop. The shopkeepers reaction for her repeated enquiries make her feel that the irritated man, in anger, is searching for his gun to shoot her. She runs from there for life. This incident left her the feeling that “she’d come very close to getting killed on her third morning in America” (W 60). This incident occurs only because Dimple fails to understand the cultural practices of the immigrant country. This scene highlights Dimple’s alienation as she displaces herself in favour of adopting a culture to replace her own. It shows Dimple’s inability to accept disparate cultures.

One day Meena gave Dimple household hints. She advises Dimple not to go to the basement for washing purposes as
many women in the building had been mugged or underwent hideous experiences in the basement. She says “If the washing machine is in the basement of the building, let Amit do the laundry” (70). Meena’s mundane anecdote, an archetypal caveat of the literal dangers of assimilation, presents physical isolation not only as a way of maintaining individual physical safety, but also as a collective norm to ensure cultural and religious purity. Thus, Dimple is identified, first and foremost by her own peer group, as a woman of colour whose speech marks her as a cultural foreigner among the intimidating, always potentially violent Americans.

Once, the couple is invited by Vinod Khanna, a prosperous businessman in the town. He also offers a job to Dimple but on her husband’s advice she declines it in spite of the fact that the Basus were in need of honest earning. This is because of Amit’s doubt about Khana’s character. In fact, sexism in America appears very disastrous. The couple Ina Mulick and her husband are also evidence to this. Ina, though an Indian, living in American, imitates all bad American habits. She smokes, drinks, and possesses post-marital relationships. This influences Dimple badly and leads her to fall in love with Milt Glasser, an American. Amit and Dimple experience frustration at various levels. While joblessness puts Amit in jitters, Dimple realises that her marriage is a failure: “She was bitter that
marriage has betrayed her had not provided all the glittery things she had imagined, had not brought her cocktails” (115).

Leah Rang opines, “In Dimple, Mukherjee presents an immigrant who unconsciously considers herself a continuous individual, not one composed of a succession of cultural identities. But the pressures of multicultural America prevent her from claiming a personal past and lead her to strive to maintain an (impossible) distinction between India and America, often through force and violence” (Bharati Mukherjee and the American Immigrant 27). Dimple becomes pregnant soon after her marriage even before she moves to America. Instead of becoming happy as a common Indian woman she develops a negative attitude towards the baby “Dimple gave vicious squeezes to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding” (W 31). She takes pleasure in the associated vomiting, delighting in the violent expulsion of an element from her body as a substitute for her desire to discharge the child. She sees the child as a hurdle to their preparation to go abroad. She refuses to name or identify the child, only angrily dismissing – it as evidence of the unfairness of wifehood and her helplessness. So she decides to get rid of the thing in her which would spoil her bright future. Temporarily, Dimple displaces the rage she feels for her baby onto external objects. In a fit of rage, she beats
the baby clothes her mother-in-law had sewn, inadvertently injuring a mouse hidden within the folds. In an outraged mood she chases and kills a mouse that ran out from the garment pile “And in an outburst of hatred, her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she smashed the top of a small gray head” (36). Upon closer inspection, the dead mouse looks pregnant. Dimple enacts her rage and asserts herself, legitimating her emotions and individuality. Dimple ultimately succeeds in skipping her way to abortion, jumping rope until she forces a miscarriage. “She did not want to carry any relics from her old life” (43). A child would serve as a reminder of the past; growing up in a new country to immigrant parents, the child has the potential to truly hybridize the two cultures and assimilate with more ease than Dimple or Amit could. The baby would serve as a reminder of the Old World, the India that the couple intend to leave behind.

Dimple dismisses or neglects the spontaneous aggression of the mouse incident because it happened in India. Once she immigrates, she casts off her past as a means of distinguishing between her past and her present in America. The rise in violence in Dimple’s character climaxes with the death of the mouse and of her child. In America, she placates her violent tendencies and suppresses her individuality for the sake of cultural performativity - the role of dutiful immigrant wife.
Communication between husband and wife is essential to marital happiness. After getting exposed to the alien culture, Amit and Dimple fail to communicate with each other. This has a negative effect upon their relationship. This failure in communication develops a breach between the couple which widens day by day and ultimately ruins their relationship. The situation worsens when Amit gets a job. He fails to understand Dimple. He never spends time with Dimple even when he finds her abnormal habits such as sleeping all day and always spending the time looking at TV. He believes providing material comforts alone will make her happy. After some months’ stay at the Sens the couple moves to another flat – a well-furnished apartment with all sorts of modern appliances as Amit could now provide it. The living condition of the couple improves. But the loneliness of Dimple aggravates her abnormality. She had a friend in Meena at the Sens apartment but now she has lost that too and she suffers from alienation. Her problem with the language of the streets compels her to stay behind at home all day within the four walls spending all the time by watching TV and sleeping.

America has outwitted her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. Dimple experiences loneliness at every quarter of her life. “It is beyond her understanding how could she live in a country where she could not predict these basic patterns, where every other woman was a
stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator?” (112). Dimple’s disgust with American English and American system gets accentuated even by small things. She is afraid to operate the self-service elevators. She has to live within the four walls of the apartment. TV is all her cosmos where she watches endless violence and murder. She hates American English and American system of life. She indulges in a sense of nostalgia thinking about her peaceful life at Calcutta with her friends. She finds it difficult to share her inmost heart even to her husband. Thus, she suffers from abnormality of mind from the crisis of culture. Sushma Tandon argues, “The problem of adjustment that Dimple faces in the New World cultural location seems to stem from her inability to realize that the cultural identity, which she has inherited, is not, in any sense an authentically Indian, indisputably non-western cultural identity, but one that is irretrievably “impure,” culturally mix, having been influenced by the many changes that the British colonial presence wrought upon the Indian Socio-Political landscape” (“Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction” 49).

Dimple finds life impossible with the people who did not understand about Durga Pujah. For Indians, religion is an integral part of life and Dimple’s failure at assimilation with America is due to a lack of shared-faith. An expatriate is tenaciously conscious of preserving his
identity even inmost trying moments of life. In America, she realises how easy it was to live, to communicate, and to share with people in Calcutta. "In Calcutta she’d buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races, she’d never been a communalist. And so long she had money to spend no one would ask her what community she belonged to. She was caught in the crossfire of an American communalism she couldn’t understand" (W 60). She never felt frightened at the sight of the policemen whose faces were so friendly, but the scene has changed completely in the new environment. She had confusion with the American names also. "I get so confused here, Dimple said. Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Iowa; they all sound the same to me" (100). Within the circle of Indian immigrants too, Dimple finds herself an alien. Jasbir Jain opines “Her isolation is rooted not merely in loneliness, in isolation or cultural differences but in her estrangement from her own past and her own inner being. She wishes to begin a journey from midpoint and thus nihilistic undertones of her situation” (“Foreignness of Spirit” 17). The sense of time as it exists in Mukherjee’s novels, is important for the understanding of Dimple’s life. The past and the present do not interact in Wife. The Indians in America who have adjusted themselves to the American ways of life make her feel an outsider. In her own community too she fails to relate and experiences rejection.
She is caught in the quicksand of cultural uncertainties represented by the conduct of Ina Mullick, Marsha Mookerji and her brother, Milt Glasser driven to do something in order to asset herself and her identity, she resorts to passive protest. When Ina and her hunchback friend, Leni fall out in her apartment and Leni throws an ashtray at Ina and casually adds, “It’s only a lousy kitsch ashtray for God’s sake. I’ll go down to Khanna’s Emporium and buy her a dozen, okay?” She does not know what to make of such brazen conduct, and in silent revenge, keeps pouring tea over their cups and onto the carpet until they stop her. Dimple’s frenzied imagination is in a whirl all the while: After Leni removed the cup Dimple kept on pouring...over the tray... till the pregnant - bellied tea pot was empty and Leni and Ina were standing and shaking her, Dimple, Dimple, stop it” (W 152). Despite her Indian origins, Ina, the typical American like, does not exemplify fusion or hybridity. She performs her Americanization, no longer a process but an adopted fact; as a process, it would infer constant negotiation between two or more present cultures. Ina’s theory replaces one with the other, leaving neither time nor space for such negotiation: “Ina has this theory about Indian immigrants. It takes them a year to get India out of their system. In the second year they’ve bought all the things they’ve hungered for. So then they go back, or they stay here and vegetate
or else they’ve got to live here like anyone else” (76). According to Ina, the immigrant must expel India, completely sever the past from the present, in order to assume an American identity. Furthermore, once the immigrant has removed the past, she can no longer get it back. For Ina, this process becomes a succession of supplemental cultures that are ultimately separable and distinguishable from each other and from the self. Separating India and America so completely simultaneously upholds the differences espoused by multiculturalism and encourages constant comparison between cultures rather than fusion. “Dimple, who had believed that she would be “free” to experience a life different and distanced from that which she had left behind in India, finds her existence in a nebulous, undefined social space that, paradoxically, reinforces her indigenous cultural moorings: she is most reminded of her “Indian-ness” among the “Americanized Indians” (77). Marginalized by the patriarchy of Indian culture, Dimple is equally at sea in her “adopted” culture.

Dimple is thus left to her own strategies of survival in the new environment. This evolution is reflected in the modulation of her response to the conduct of Marsha’s brother, Milt Glasser, who hugs, embraces, and even lifts Dimple onto the top of the kitchen counter as their acquaintance progresses. She is at first embarrassed and uncomfortable with him, but slowly she discovers in him a
source of emotional support and even a recognition of her identity, which she had missed in Amit. He too does sense her discontent, but makes no sincere effort to understand or help her out of her melancholy. It is his protracted indifference to her plight that makes her turn Milt as lover and seduce him one afternoon in their flat. Dimple's affair with Milt, however, works as a metaphor for multiculturalism, for it seeks to substitute her Indian marriage with an American relationship, to supplement one culture for the other and therefore maintain the distinction between the two. She identifies Milt as the quintessential American with whom she can engage in meaningless small talk; he knows how to squeeze money from the government, considers himself a jack of all trades, and has a number of vague plans and contacts that imply possibility, “He was, to her, America” (175). If Milt is America, then Dimple believes she can relieve her distress by sleeping with him, thereby adopting his culture and discarding her own. Dimple envisions their affair as the fictionalized play of television. After sex, “Milt lounges on the sofa as Dimple sits awkwardly nearby. She wants to punish him for disrupting her romantic illusions: —She wanted to jolt him, accidentally, of course, so that he could witness her agony. He had no right to read the paper and spoil beautiful endings” (198). After sex, the two remain disparate, seated at opposite ends of the couch. She
is untroubled by any sense of guilt at her infidelity, an indication of her drifting away from her inherited culture and its values, and the distance her psyche has travelled. She, thus, turns a rebellion and violates all stereotyped behaviour of Indian womanhood. When Dimple is seduced by Milt Glasser (without Amit’s knowledge), her isolation and despair become even more acute. Dimple has committed the ultimate sacrilege, the betrayal of her gendered Indian culture: “She was so much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises. She felt like a shadow without feelings” (200).

She is further shaken with the knowledge that America with all its outward glitter allows Indian wives only to create little Indias around them but does not allow them either freedom or fulfilment as evident in the case of Ina Mullick who, despite her attempts at becoming a total American, remains a frustrated individual. After this disturbing realization Dimple sinks into a world of isolation, unable to welcome the bright prospect of setting up a new home even after Amit gets a job. After a few pathetic attempts to merge herself into the new Milt Glasser, Dimple experiences total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. Torn by the conflict between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation, she allows her mind to be totally conditioned by the
commercials on T.V. and magazines so much so she loses the ability to distinguish them from the world of reality. Perhaps it is part of the ad she is trying to follow when she strikes an illicit relationship with Milt Glasser in passionate attempt to find an identity in America. Dimple expected some trouble in American setup when she came to this city because pain was part of any new beginning...But she had not expected her mind to be strained like this beyond endurance. In wearing Marsha’s shoes and clothes, in borrowing English words from Ina and Milt even to quarrel with her husband, and in devising various schemes to commit suicide and to murder Amit, Dimple seems to be indulging in her passion to become a new woman and lead a very free, exciting life as the soap-operas on T.V show.

As she cannot come to terms with either her own culture or America’s culture, she finds herself at cross-roads, and visualizes her life as dying bonfire. At the end of the novel Mr. Milt Glasser’s frequent visit to her house changed her. She enjoys all the prohibited freedom. She starts going out with Milt. She is very much impressed by the character of Milt. She thought, in the hands of Milt she felt that she was safer than ever before. The violence she sees outside turns inside. She feels guilty of her extra-marital relationship with Milt and worries about her hiding the matter from her husband. One night, after watching TV programme, Dimple accompanied Amit to the
kitchen. She thought of informing him about the relationship she had with Milt. He sat on the counter and spilled sugar on the counter, which irritated her. She thought that it was impossible to live with him watching spilling sugar. She murders her husband as she is misled by the popular American culture. The idea of murdering Amit makes her feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a TV series. Dimple decides to murder her husband spontaneously, with the kind of immediacy she recognized as distinctly American in Ina and Leni. Although brief, the murder scene that ends the novel provides a last, concise glimpse into the pain of immigration and the radical violence – and consequences – necessary for the individual to assert herself. Amit chastises Dimple for spending too much money, for not behaving as a wife should. Knife in hand, Dimple approaches Amit by appropriating and performing the role of dutiful wife and tricking Amit into thinking that the circle she traces around his mole is an expression of sexual desire rather than outlining a target. However, Dimple’s newfound consciousness of her performance finally enables her to realize her agency and assert herself; she abandons all convention, dissolving into a stream-of-consciousness as she stabs Amit seven times. She deludes herself into thinking that the action proves the completion of her Americanization, for she has merely
adopted the fiction of America: —Women on television got away with murder (213).

Dimple does not wholly fail, though, because she acts and asserts her individuality apart from the role governed by a cultural history: Individual initiative, that is what it came down to, she finally realizes, and her life had been devoted only to pleasing others, not herself (212). In acting, Dimple grounds her identity in America, for despite its multiculturalism, Mukherjee still considers America the space most welcoming to transformation. Mukherjee acknowledges that Dimple’s immigration has been one of misguided Americanization, but in the end Dimple finally transforms not into an Indian in America, nor into an American, but into an American with an Indian past. Mukherjee suggests that Dimple’s loss of sanity may be attributed to her sense of alienation from her own and American culture; she does not understand the latter, and neither seems to accommodate her. Dimple’s sense of loss is heightened by her seduction by Milt, a moral lapse that is as inimical to her status and self-identity as it is insidious to her role as a wife. Her sense of her own subservience reiterates her marginality, which is further compounded by her continuing frustration in adjusting to her new environment and new experiences. Her descent into madness, in the final analysis, is to be seen as both an
affirmation and a denial of her identity as a victim of cultural displacement and patriarchal discourse.

BharatiMukherjee’s third novel is Jasmine. It is the most widely read of Bharati Mukherjee’s novels. The protagonist inspires us with her innocence in the beginning, later she assimilates into the American mainstream with all her Indianness. As the novel begins, Jasmine is seen as the live-in companion of Bud Ripplemeyer at his home carrying his artificially inseminated child. Only through flashbacks and cross cuts her story in India is revealed.

Jasmine was born in a poor family as the seventh child to her parents. She was foretold at the age of seven by a seer that she would be widowed very young. The rebel in Jasmine could not agree with the foretellers saying. She shouted at the old man “You’re a crazy old man. You don’t know what my future holds” (J 3). The angry old man hit hard on her head which made a mark in her forehead. It took days for Jasmine to forget this incident. In that remote village Jasmine was lucky to get a school master who developed her flair for English. It is because of her knowledge of English she could easily assimilate into the multicultural America. At the very young age of fourteen she was given in marriage to an ambitious engineer Prakash. Prakash was not that of a typical Indian husband. He did not try to suppress Jasmine instead he encouraged her to be
creative. It was he who turned the feudal Jothi into modern Jasmine. His inspiration was the second reason for her assimilation in America. Prakash’s ambition was to settle in the US. He had made all the arrangements to move but his fate mocked at him. He was killed in a terrorist bombardment. This made Jasmine desperate. She has to live in Hasnapur living the life of a miserable widow with her mother. But Jasmine, a born rebel, could not tolerate her fate. She created a mission to herself as to follow the footsteps of her murdered husband. She decided to go to America and to cremate his belongings at the place he wanted to live and to commit “Sati.”

With forged papers she became another illegal immigrant to land in the American soil. Her first day in America was a tragic one. The captain of the ship she took to Florida exploited her innocence by taking her to a remote motel and seduced her. Jasmine could not tolerate this physical molestation. She killed the rapist in a frenzied state and left the motel. Like all Indian girls she believed that her husband had the sole right of her body and to enjoy sex with her. She believed that she is no more pure to continue her mission or commit Sati. It is something unbelievable that an Indian girl with such thinking easily assimilated into the multicultural America and had affairs with many men.
After murdering the captain Jasmine walked into the streets without any motive. Luckily she fell into the hands of one kind Quaker lady. Her name was Lillion Gordon and her aim in life was to help the innocent illegal immigrants who trespassed into America. There were many Kanjobal women in her home to whom she had given refugee. But she took more personal care for Jasmine. She teaches the way to Jasmine to live in America. She coaches her to dress, speak, and talk like an American. "She exhorted me, she showed me how. I worked hard on the walk and deportment within a week she said I’d lost my sidle. She said I walked like one of those Trinidian girls, all thrust and cheekiness. She meant it as a compliment....I checked myself in the mirror, shocked at the transformation. Jazzy in a T-shirt tight cords and running shoes" (132-33).

Jasmine starts to wonder at her own transformation. She is also in all praise for the multicultural America. It did not threat her as it did many immigrants. She developed a liking for everything American. "In one of the department stores I saw my first revolving door. How could something be always moving and always still? The American food she ate soothed her. "I remember Dairy Queen as first true American food. How it soothed my still raw tongue. I thought of it as a healing food" (133). Lillion Gordon’s daughter Kate Gordon helped Jasmine in finding Professor’s Vadhera’s home whom she came in searching for. She stayed
in their home for about five months. They maintained a kind of artificial Indianness in their home. They never watched English programmes on TV. Instead Professor Vadhera’s wife Nirmala brought home new hindi films to be viewed on VCR. They used to start the movie by nine’o clock at night and it lasted till midnight. On Sundays they used to have get-togethers in Flushing where about thirty two of the fifty apartments were Indians. But the activity was the same. “Sundays the Vadhera’s allowed themselves free time. We squeezed on to the sofa in the living room and watched videos of Snan jeev Kumar movies or of Amitabh. Or we went to visit with other Punjab families in sparsely furnished crowded apartments in the same building and watched their videos” (146). The saris and pyjamas brought by Nirmala for Jasmine were dull looking as if specially meant for old widows. But Jasmine had a special liking for the American costumes. Because “American clothes disguised my widowhood. In a T- Shirt and cords I was taken for a student. In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like” (145). She was living the life of a miserable Indian widow in the United States. “....to sit cross-legged on dhurries and matchmaking marriages for adolescent cousins or younger siblings. Of course as a widow I did not participate. Remarriage was out of question within the normal community” (147). Jasmine was lucky enough to find
the truth of professor Vadhera’s real profession one day. He was not a professor as he had told everybody but a hair trader. One day when Jasmine went in searching for him to announce the accident of his parent, this truth behind his profession was revealed to her. So now Mr. Vadhera no more wanted her to be a part of his family as she may at any time reveal the truth behind his profession to his family members. So he readily brought her a green card by forgery and she promised to repay him her debt as soon as possible.

Again she seeks the help of Kate to get a decent job. Kate finds her a job at a white couple’s home in New York. She was appointed as the caregiver of their young daughter Duff. Kate introduced Jasmine to the Taylors on a spring Sunday. Duff was rearing a marine iguana. To impress them Jasmine though with aversion held the reptile on her lap. She felt, “Truly I had been reborn. Indian village girls do not hold large reptiles on their laps. They would scream at the swipe of a dry tongue, the basilik stare of a beady eye. The relationship of any Indian, any Indian to a reptile, any reptile is that of a fisherman to a fish” (163). She remembered her childhood days when small boys used to climb trees or rooms to catch house lizards and then hang them by the neck from tree branches. These lizards used to twitch and turn until the crows found them and peeled them. Young Jasmine used to watch with curiosity the birds eating the lizards like worms. The American
practice of treating reptiles was of a complete contrast to that of the Indians.

Jasmine stayed at the Hayeses for two years and the critics consider this to be the most fruitful period in her life. It is here that Jasmine gets the true American experience and she easily assimilated into the American mainstream. “I became an American in an apartment on Claremont avenue across the street from a Barnord college dormitory. I lived with Taylor and Wylie Hayes for nearly two years. Duff was my child. Taylor and Wylie were my parents, my teachers, my family” (165). Jasmine started to accommodate fully well in Taylors home. Mrs. Taylor treated her in equal terms. She told all the details about their house hold to Jasmine. She was also told that Duff was their adopted daughter. They did not mind revealing the reason behind their childlessness. When Wylie said that the low sperm count of Taylor was the reason for their adoption it was Jasmine who blushed. It is certainly American to be bold enough to reveal such truths even to a maid servant. The truth about Duff was really a great shock to Jasmine. “I could not imagine a non- genetic child. A child that was not my own, or my husband’s struck me as a monstrous idea. Adoption was as foreign to me as the idea of widow remarriage” (170). It was a surprise to Jasmine that a small child “especially a girl who could immediately relate to adults, call them by their first names and break into
their conversations” (166). She had never seen a child like her. Wylie fixed a salary of $95 a week for Jasmine. Jasmine never expected money to take care of a child. She wanted only food and shelter. So her salary gave her extreme happiness. Taylor was very kind to her. He smiled innocently and friendly to which Jasmine fell in love with him. “he smiled his crooked-toothed smile and I began to fall in love. I mean I fell in love with what he represented to me, a professor who served biscuits to a servant, smiled at her and admitted her to the broad democracy of his joking even when she didn’t understand it. It seemed entirely American” (167).

The very first morning in Claremont Avenue was a new experience for Jasmine. “Even on the first day morning I saw naked bodies combing their hair in front of dresser mirrors. Truly there was no concept of shame in this society” (171). Jasmine fell in love with that new world which had nothing to hide. While living with the Hayes family, Jasmine began to master the English language, and thus she empowered herself to accommodate into the American culture. To fully learn a language is to appropriate a culture, for language affords the means by which the identity is expressed, thus as Jasmine becomes more fluent in English, discovering the intricacies of vernacular expressions, she becomes more American. Sharmani Patricia Gabriel opines “Mukherjee does not pursue assimilation as a
cultural strategy that leaves unproblematized the terms encoded within the melting pot itself...Drawn to the narrative of assimilation her immigrant is prepared to discard nostalgia...” (“Immigrant or Postcolonial” 86). Taylor begins to call her "Jase" and "Jassy," Anglicized versions of her name that represent the emergence of her increasingly Westernized identity. Again, Jasmine is being renamed by a male figure, thereby suggesting that she does not have a great deal of agency in the creation of her new self since Taylor constructs it for her. Jasmine's comfort with English also provides her with a new perspective on America as well as a more familiar relationship with the culture as a whole. "Every morning, the news sank into my brain, and stayed. Language on the street, on the forbidden television, at the Haynes' dinners, where I sat like a guest and only helped with the serving (and increasingly controlled the menu) all became my language, which I learned like a child, from the first words up. The squatting fields of Hasnapur receded fast” (174). Language becomes Jasmine's key to understanding American culture and claiming it as her own, thereby allowing her to produce "Jase," who possesses a completely different consciousness than the previous selves of "Jyoti," "Jasmine," or even "Jazzy." The new consciousness of "Jase" is apparently more Western and confident, filled with a desire to imbibe as much of American culture as she possibly can, without fear
or regret. Hasnapur and feudalism was receding fast from her mind. O.P. Budholia states, "Remembering Hasnapur, Jasmine experiences the pangs emanating from the meeting of two cultures in her: one that she inherits from the feudal society of Hasnapur of Punjab and the other she receives from the non-shared environment of America. Hasnapur acts as a semiotic text in "Jasmine"...There comes an inner strife due to the native sensibility or "marga" as culture and the association with the culture of non-shared community in Europe" ("Dialectics of Culture" 21).

Though Taylor is married, he and Jasmine begin a rather promising romance. As she falls in love with him, she desires to change herself into the being she believes Taylor sees her as. "The love I felt for Taylor that first day had nothing to do with sex. I fell in love with his world, its ease, its careless confidence and graceful self-absorption. I wanted to become the person [Taylor and Wylie] thought they saw: Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful" (J 171). Jasmine suppresses her sexuality because she associates it with the shame and dread of her rape by Half-Face. Instead, she attempts to bury it under a change of personality: a transformation into a woman who is confident and refined but somewhat asexual, and to a certain degree, the woman that she believes Taylor wants her to be. Meanwhile during her early second year with the Taylors she underwent
another unexpected change. Wylie fell out of love with Taylor as she developed a love with an economist Stuart. She told her love affair to Jasmine before she revealed it to Taylor. “It’s all so messy. Taylor’s such a sweetheart and there’s Duff and Stuart’s three kids, but this is my chance to real happiness. What can I do? I’ve got to go for it, right?.. “He’s wonderful Jase” said Wylie. “It’s the real thing this time” (181). Jasmine could not understand Wylie’s words. She felt that America had thrown her again. “She wasn’t happy? She looked happy, acted happy. Then what did happy mean? Her only chance? Happiness was so narrow a door, so selective” (182) To the great disappointment of Taylor, Wylie deserted him. In the early days after Wylie’s departure Taylor was very upset. But as days went by he got accustomed to the situation.

Now he turned his attention on Jasmine. As the relationship progressed, Jasmine cannot ignore her attraction to Taylor nor his to her. T. Padma says, “Jasmine’s calm acceptance of both – the change in her own scale of values and the largesse of Taylor in remaining above racial and cultural barriers –is worth noting” (165). Jasmine realizes that her desire to change for Taylor was not only unnecessary, but also born out of what she believes to be her own desire to erase her associations with her sexuality. "Taylor didn't want to change me. He didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness...I
changed because I wanted to" (185). At this point, Jasmine appears to be expressing a change in the nature of her agency, and it seems that she is taking full responsibility for the creation of her new identity. She lived a very happy life at Taylor's as she, Taylor, and Duff became a perfect family. But this happiness did not last long. Her fate again smiled at her this time in the face of Sukhwinder Singh, the murderer of Prakash. She happened to see him in a park. She believed that he would certainly harm her or her companions. So she left Taylor to Iowa in spite of Taylor's repeated saying that Iowa is flat.

Jasmine moves to Iowa where she meets a banker Bud Ripplemeyer and finds a job in his bank as a teller. Bud though a married middle-aged man of fifty-five, falls in love with Jasmine at the very first sight. They eventually marry and Bud renames Jasmine "Jane," yet another evolution or her name and sign of her new identity initiated by a male figure in her life. Bud is reminiscent of Prakash in the manner in which he views Jasmine, for he sees her as a sexual being as well as his companion. Yet Bud differs from all of Jasmine's previous lovers in that he is the first one to view her sexuality through the lens of his own Orientalist fantasy. Jasmine knows this, and unequivocally states, "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I
am" (200). By simply being who she is, she helps the relationship move forward and for Jasmine this progression is worth the price of essentialist stereotypes, at least at this point in her life. Jasmine has almost totally appropriated American culture, and in Baden County, the community desires to make her familiar and see her as assimilated, thereby allowing Jasmine to adopt a completely new identity with ease. She says "I changed because I wanted to. To bunker oneself into nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bullet proof vest was to be a coward" (165). The "Jase" of New York has now receded so that Jane may advance: "I whisper the name, Jase, Jase, Jase, as if I am calling someone I once knew" (204). Though living in Baden she always longed for the love of Taylor. This is understood when she readily deserts the crippled Bud when Taylor comes in search for her. Yet in characteristic style, Jasmine cannot remain in this stable life in Baden, for she desires more adventure and disruption, and she thrives on the presence of change in her life. The end of the novel finds Jasmine moving to California with Taylor, uncertain of what the future will bring but nevertheless confident in her decision to leave. Jasmine's desertion of Bud for Taylor at the end of the novel suggests that she will create yet another identity for her new environment, wherever that location may be. This sense of movement at the end of the novel further reinforces the notion that
Jasmine's identity is forever evolving in relation to her surroundings.

In *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee has delineated the influence of multiculturalism on the two Bengali sisters - Padma and Tara. They undergo completely oppositional experiences of cultural acclimatization. Padma is shown as a resistant to the alien culture while Tara... She and her Indian friend Meena amuse themselves while reading the topics discussed in the magazines: "Does your husband know how to satisfy you? (First time I have heard "husband" and "satisfy" in the same sentence, giggled one of us.) Are you his breakfast, his snack, the main course - or the dessert? (–Definitely his Alka-Seltzer! We giggled again. These American magazines and American marriages were not geared to the lives we led.) Do women marry the best lovers they ever had? (–I think, unfortunately, we can all say yes)" (83). It is understood from the above quotation that a woman’s sexual pleasure seems to be a significant issue for American women as presented in these magazines. They often encourage women to experiment with - “sexual positions, and pointedly meaningless one-night stands” (83). Besides sex, these publications also stimulate women to talk about their problems and - share their disappointments.

But Tara and her friends do not belong to a society where sex is discussed casually. It is evident that the values behind these magazines do not match hers and her
friend's reality. First of all, as the protagonist herself states, women in her family are not used to talking about their feelings or thoughts. When she calls her sister Parvati or her parents in India, they do not discuss such issues since they assume that their "personal defeats are too banal to waste money on" (55). Sexual fulfillment is an even less likely topic to be discussed. Before Tara asks for a divorce, she can never accurately answer if Bish is the best lover she has ever had since he is simply the only one that she is allowed to have a relationship.

Tara does not fully assimilate the American culture to which she is exposed in the U.S.A. But, in certain respects, she transgresses the traditional constraints of her society where her gender is suppressed. While she is in India, she basically fulfils the obedient and passive role of daughter and sister. It is in America, however, "after crossing the dark waters to California" (24), that she is able to destabilize the traditionally assigned roles of daughter, sister, wife, lover, and mother. Gayatri Spivak argues, "The disenfranchised woman of the Diaspora.....cannot....engage in the critical agency of civil society ... to fight the depredations of "global economic citizenship...For her the struggle is for access to the subjectship of the civil society of her new state: basic civil rights. Escaping from the failure of decolonization at home and abroad, she is not yet so secure
in the state of desperate choice as to even conceive of ridding her mind of the burden of transnationality” (“Diasporas Old and New” 252). The most significant alteration that Tara acts out is related to her role as a Brahmin Indian wife. She slowly starts enacting minor transgressions, such as calling her husband by his first name or nicknames, and major ones such as when she asks for a divorce. As Miller observes, “although she claims that she is not a modern woman, ‘Tara inhabits a world that her more traditional sisters criticize and reject” (63). Tara’s divorce and her subsequent relationships with other men such as Andy imply her rejection of some forms of gender roles that are traditionally acted out by Indians of her social milieu. She explains that when she married Bish and moved with him to the USA, she thought she was going to live a more liberating life and marriage and that she was going to travel around and expand her horizons as well (82). As a dozen years go by, Tara notices that her husband has actually become even more traditional and that he seems only interested in displaying his wife around to his family, showing off that he has transformed Tara into a well-trained and attentive wife and daughter-in-law (82). In other words, she realizes that she is playing a role that she does not particularly want to, and that “the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled” (82). As a result, she asks for a divorce.
After she gets a divorce from Bish, Tara lives a completely new life. She experiences love relationship with many men. She gets the opportunity to date which was something out of question for girls of her caste and class back in India. Tara reveals the several relationships she has after her divorce as she rehearses a conversation with her eldest sister Padma:

I may be alone right now, this week, but these past three nights are the first time I've been without a man or the attention of many men, most of it unwanted, in seventeen years! You thought that my world ended when I left Bish? You think I'm so unattractive, so uncomplicated, and so unadventurous that I've been sitting at home alone for five years just raising a son? I never told you about Andy, or Pramod or Mahesh or Donald – but could you not have guessed? Why must you presume that my life has been all orange juice and Coca-Cola?” (184)

The male names mentioned in this passage and Tara's description of Andy as “my balding, red-bearded, former biker, former bad-boy, Hungarian Buddhist contractor/yoga instructor....my carpenter” (25) points to one of her several destabilizations of gender relations as she actually does play the modern girlfriend role. She is not only being subversive as she has relationships with men out
of wedlock, but she also dates men she is not even supposed to relate to. Some of Tara’s boyfriends who were not Indians were not approved by her father as tradition demands and, therefore, are not considered to be appropriate for her Hindu Brahmin background.

Although she mentions several names of former boyfriends, it is her affair with Andy that is described in more detail. It is through her relationship with him that she becomes aware of the differences between the ways each one of them understands love. The protagonist explains that:

Love in my childhood and adolescence (although we didn’t have an adolescence and we were never teenagers) was indistinguishable from duty and obedience. Our bodies changed but our behaviour never did. Rebellion sounded like a lot of fun, but in Calcutta there was nothing to rebel against. Where would it get you? My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage. The qualities we associated with our father and with god were not notably divergent from the respect we accorded the president of the country, the premier of the state...great names in history, science and literature, older uncles, cricket players, movie stars and - of course - the boys
our fathers would eventually select for us to marry. (27-28)

While Tara learns in India that love ought to be associated with duty and obedience, for Andy, love is having fun with someone else, more fun with someone than with anyone else over a long haul. In contrast, for Bish love is “the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect, and being recognized for hard work and honesty” (27).

Tara’s divorce and her ensuing relationships with other men in the novel also make her an untraditional mother. Since marriage is supposed to last forever, being a divorced mother with eventual boyfriends places her in a very untypical situation. Vijayasree argues, “a woman is either transported from place to place by her mobile parents, or turns into an appendage to a male passport losing her nativity and nationality with marriage” (“AlterNativity, Migration, Marginality and Narrative” 127). As Tara lives in between cultures she has trouble in raising her adolescent son Rabi. As Rabi was born in the Unites States and is much more assimilated to the country, it is difficult for Tara to raise him according to Brahmin traditional ways. On the other hand, the protagonist feels pressured by her family members and ex-husband to provide their son with a conservative education and upbringing.
Bish wants Rabi to have in the United States the same form of rearing that he had in India. As Tara explains:

I cannot remember a night at home when Bish did not complain of Rabi's careless appearance, his sloppy penmanship, his slouching posture, his shuffling walk, his talk, his manners, and his limp handshake. Remember, people are judging you by what they see. They can't look into your heart, into your soul, into your brain. Is your shirt tucked in? Are your shoes polished? I know, he'd say with a certain glee. Let them judge, what do I care about people like that? To Bish, Rabi was too dependent, except when he was too adventurous. He was too fanciful, but not sufficiently bold. Life was all a matter of shaping up and hitting one's mark, satisfying expectation, achieving a quota. Repudiations of reality were destined to die a dishonorable death. (153)

Rabi's mother explains that Indian fathers, such as Bish, think that America makes their children "soft in the brain as well as in the body; it weakened their moral fibre" (154). In order to correct such undesirable situation, immigrant fathers invest in creating degrees of difficulty for their children so that they can have an idea of the stress and deprivation that those fathers once went through as children in India. That is why, for instance, Tara's ex-
husband makes sure that their son goes to a school much like the one he went to as a child. He sends him to a conservative British school in California "that prided itself on the English model" (159).

After the divorce, Tara destabilizes the so-called traditional Indian mother role as she does not force Rabi to study in Atherton School. Instead, she sends him to the Academy of Atherton, a more liberal school in which he can develop his artistic abilities. Sharmita Lahiri opines, "She has endeavoured to refashion her life in the new space of America through her choice of freedom over family, duty, and community, her appearance, her acceptance of her sons ordinariness as well as his Homosexuality, and her declaration of complete separation from the Tri-State Bengal community" ("Where do I come?" 126). Even though she is not such a demanding mother, her relationship with him is not an easy one. Her conflict with Rabi is well exemplified in the passage in which she feels like slapping him when he asks her why she hates her sisters. Considering his question disrespectful, she reacts in the following manner: "Shit! I scream, and that gets his attention. It’s a parent-child thing I never went through, a teenager, single-mom scenario I never thought I’d have to live through, or something every immigrant goes through, so much we want to communicate, so much that they don’t want to hear? So much we can’t let go of. Shit, shit, Shit!" (DD 40) Her inability to deal with her son does not seem to be
exclusively a matter of generation conflict, but also a matter of cultural conflict. In spite of their clashes, Tara proves to be an understanding mother since she does not demand that Rabi becomes a traditional Brahmin son and nor does she react with prejudice when he tells her he is gay. The protagonist becomes, therefore, a very untypical mother, especially by Indian standards, as she destabilizes the traditional role of mother that she had learned in India.

But her American living elder sister Padma shows several conflicting attitudes. It is from the narrative of the chief protagonist Tara, the story of Padma is understood. She is different from other Indians in many attitudes. The attitude of an Indian abroad is to offer their home for the relatives who come from India or a long way. But whenever Tara had gone to her sister’s home in the past she was not offered to stay at Padma’s home. She had to stay in the hotel. Tara views, “The idea that I should have a sister within a hundred miles of the city and be forced to stay in a hotel is unimaginable in our culture, but somehow I’ve never found it bizarre” (94). Keeping your family around seems to be a characteristic of their culture and an expected behavior, but Padma is not completely open to that. Before actually meeting Harish, Tara comments on her sister’s behavior: “Harish Mehta, my brother-in-law, is a man I’ve never met. Didi has never sent me his picture, although they’ve been married twenty-years” (173). When she
decides to spend some time in her sister's house, out of her depressive mood at her home, she travels to New York by plane and when she arrives, she expects to be picked up by Harish in the airport. She waits for him for three hours, but finally has to take a taxi to go to her sister’s house because he never comes. Surprisingly this time, Padma is quite attentive to her sister. She takes her around and makes sure her sister is properly fed, dressed, and taken care of according to Indian tradition.

As a wife, Padma seems to present some kind of disruptive behaviour. It is understood from Tara, Indian husbands are supposed to be the providers of their wives and children. Tara’s husband Bish was a great provider. Although neither Harish’s nor his wife’s occupation is well defined, she seems to be the one who earns the money. Her occupation is defined by Tara as that of an actress who performs for local schools and community centres shows that are usually about Indian culture. She also works for the owner of a community channel and has plans of filming a "vernacular soap opera for North American thirty something Bengalis, full of vicissitudes of American life from an Indian perspective" (175). Acting, however, is not the only occupation she has. Padma also has her own clothes design with saris and Indian outfits in general and is involved in home shopping service. Her friend Danny Jagtiani views: "Padma Mehta is a television personality. She is an icon among Bengalis of the tristate area. What she wears and
what she recommends are taken as fashion statements in the community. They are high-rollers, but their wives don’t get out that much, and the men don’t like to waste time coming into the city on Sundays. So Padma thought up these parties as a kind of home shopping service for upscale Indians. There’s an economic benefit for participating merchants, but the social values far outweigh it. And so, from time to time, we throw these parties so that the community can sample these styles in saris and jewellery that they might be missing by being out of Bengal” (231). Padma, then, is a type of Indian celebrity in New York who embodies the so-called high-classed Indian way of life and profits from maintaining this image. While she has multiple occupations, there are no references to her husband’s means of earning money. Tara describes Harish as living in Padma’s shadow: Her radiance helped him wipe out his past, her past, India, his former marriage, his children in Texas and California, and his multiple failures to establish himself as entrepreneur, consultant, money manager, and venture capitalist” (183). Harish, then, does not seem to have an occupation. As Tara describes it, he seems to be so unsuccessful that he would certainly not be the appropriate husband for a woman such as her sister or the appropriate son-in-law to the demanding and conservative Motilal Bhattacharjee. As Padma’s husband does not seem to work, there is even an inversion of the gender roles of wife and husband in traditional Indian terms, for she is the one who
works outside the home. As Padma states, trying to downplay
the significance of her disruption of traditional gender
roles: “‘Harish was so lucky’, she repeated, louder than
before. ‘How many Indian families do you know, Tara, where
the wife goes out to work and the husband stays at home?’”
(182).

Harish and Padma are a non-traditional family.
Although her marriage does not look like a traditional one,
that is, the one that she was learned to desire when she
was a girl in India, Padma always rebukes Tar for her
divorce. As the novel’s protagonist says, her sister: “She
had chosen to echo our mother and our aunts - things are
never perfect in marriage, a woman must be prepared to
accept less than perfection in this lifetime - and to model
herself on Sita, Savitri, and Behula, the virtuous wives of
Hindu myths” (140). It may be true that she accepts less
than perfection in her marriage since she accepts Harish’s
unsuccessful life, but she cannot be said to be a typically
virtuous wife. That is why Tara considers her sister a
hypocrite for making such comments. She is a hypocrite who
cannot be said to practice what she preaches. Padma is
indeed, as the critic states, much closer to her gay friend
Danny than to her own husband. Thus, the way she plays the
wife role to Harish cannot be said to mirror the virtuous
wives of Hindu myths. Padma seems to be aware that she is
playing the gender roles of the traditional Brahmin woman
in the United States. It is through this conscious
performance of gender roles and ethnicity, that she is able to lead her life in New York. Like Tara, she never mentions that she desires to assimilate particular liberal attitudes or feminist behaviors. In her statements, she actually rejects the way some women behave in American society. As she believes Tara is not taking care of herself in America, she questions her sister: You’re worn out and skinny, Tara, what kind of life are you leading out there? Are you starving yourself? I know, I know, these so-called experts are always going on about too much fat in the diet and girls like you who should have more sense must be listening. I tell you, they should all be locked up, all those skinny so-called experts in white coats, they’re killing our girls (185). Her criticism of the stereotypical way women in the USA are concerned with body weight and with being thin can be regarded as a rejection of some cultural aspects of American society. Therefore, Padma advocates in favour of the maintenance of tradition criticizing Tara’s divorce in spite of her untraditional way of managing her own marriage with Harish.

Her defence of tradition is contradictory because she does not effectively do the things she claims women of her background should do. She does not have a conventional marriage, she works outside the home, and her relationships with her sisters and friends are not traditional ones. On the one hand, she does not seem to express the so-called interests that women may have as displayed by the American
magazines that Tara mentions. On the other hand, Padma’s transgressive behavior in the United States seems to make her a modern woman since she does not behave like a conservative wife, daughter, sister of her class and caste. After her diasporic experience, Padma, like her sister, does not express a desire to simply assimilate the American way of life. Although she is smart enough to take advantage of the freedom she has in the USA, she also tries to maintain the appearance of being a traditional Hindu Brahmin woman by taking advantage of that exoticized image. Unlike her youngest sister, Padma does not seem to be in conflict with her choices. She seems to be both comfortable with her transgressions and satisfied with her performance of traditional roles for American audiences.

Every culture has its own strengths and weaknesses. The immigrants often try to find sync between the native culture and the adopted one. But this has resulted in psychological eccentricities that are alien to both the cultures. Hence the solution to this problem is retaining one’s culture as far as possible even while living in an alien soil.