CHAPTER V
Conclusion

Multiculturalism entails the policy of accommodating any number of district cultures within one society without prejudice or discrimination. In its descriptive aspect, it refers to cultural diversity and implies, in its normative aspect, a positive endorsement, even celebration, of communal diversity based on either the right of different groups to respect and recognition of the larger society of moral and cultural diversity. It is supposed to be a:

…fairer system that allows people to truly express who they are within a society that is more tolerant and better adaptive to social issue. An ongoing argument related to it is that culture is not alone definable thing based on one race or religion, but rather the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes. (web)

Multiculturalism has been official policy in several western nations since the 1975os. It started as an official national policy in Canada in 1971, followed by Australia, where it has since been displaced by assimilation in 1973. Multiculturalism was quickly adopted as official policy by most member-states of the European Union except for the official policy of monoculturalism in the Netherlands and Denmark. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act and section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms “safeguard multiculturalism to the effect that accusing a person of racism there is usually considered a serious slur” (Ibidem). And not established in policy at the federal leave in the United States:

Multiculturalism has been an issue primarily through the school system, with the rise of ethnic studies programs in higher education and with attempts to make the grade school curricula more inclusive of the history and contributions of
non-white peoples. The idea of the Melting Pot, or the Salad Bowl, in America is a metaphor that implies that all the immigrant cultures are mixed and amalgamated without state intervention. (Ibidem)

The Melting Pot implied that each individual immigrant, and each group of immigrants, assimilated into American society at their own pace is not multiculturalism as this is opposed to assimilation and integration. This Melting Pot tradition co-exists there with a belief in national unity that should never be split into a number of unsocial, Jealous, and alien sovereignties.

As a philosophy, multiculturalism had begun as part of the pragmatism movement at the end of the 19th century in Europe and the United States, then as a political and Cultural pluralism at the turn of the 20th century. Philosophers, psychologists, historians and early sociologist had developed concepts of cultural pluralism from which multiculturalism emerged. Later on to it became prevalent as a result of the various Civil Rights movements that arose in the 1950s and 1960s by which minority groups demanded their share of the American promises of justice, freedom and equality for all citizens.

Instead of the use of the term multiculturalism, the term diversity (within the Indian culture) has more often been used. The culture of India is an amalgamation of diverse sub-cultures spread all over the Indian subcontinent. Only in the recent times has the term multiculturalism been used by the left liberals and the communists in India.

The term crossculturslism also needs to be mentioned here in regard to describing discourses involving cultural interactivity, or for promoting (or disparaging) various forms of cultural interactivity. The
term crossculturalsism became prevalent in cultural studies in the late 1980s and 1990s. Like multiculturalism, it has been sometimes construed as:

...ideological in that it advocates values such as those associated with transculturation, trans-nationalism, cosmopolitanism, interculturalism, and globalism. But as distinct from multiculturalism which deals with cultural diversity within a particular nation or social group, crossculturalsism is concerned with exchange beyond the boundaries of the nation or cultural group. (Ibidem)

Since multiculturalism claims to stand for the sanctity and worth of each culture, the discovery that its real tendency is to dismantle the existing European-based culture of the United States should have instantly discredited it.

The first ever novel written by Bharati Mukherjee *The Tiger’s Daughter* is multicultural in perspective but only to some extent. It underscores, in the main, an encounter as well as difference between the Eastern (Indian) and Western (American) climes and cultures. In response to “one important question” fired by Irish-American Negro Washington McDowell- “Don’t people here use deodorants? ---- Tara Cartwright’s (nee Banerjee’s) friend Meena tells him: “We don’t need deodorants, Washington. We people take three baths a day. We leave scents and deodorants to Europeans (Americans) (148). And when Meena’s parents ask McDowell----“How did he like India?, he tells them that “he couldn’t take the heat. Everything in California was air-conditioned (140). Vassar educated Tara knows “Americans’ respect for statistics” (147) as against, perhaps, Indian’ respect for emotions, even then she marries the white American David Cartwright and thereby essays to bridge the cultural gap between the East and the West
at a very heavy price. Back home in Calcutta after seven-year stay in America, she has become “lone Americawali” (151). The Tiger’s Daughter explores Tara’s Sense of culture shock, when he travels back to India, intertwined with the political situation in Calcutta and West Bengal. The *mise en scène* in which events and incidents of the story take place in the novel is Tara’s native city Calcutta. Though characters delineated in the novel are mostly Indians, yet presence of “a real American”, a representative of American culture, Antonia Whitehead (186), Anglo-Indian Victoria Fernandez (164), Carefree Kevin—“a pole in Colombo” (59), a pale “Londoner” and “a new breed of British Council director” Worthington who likes to wear Indian dress on Sundays” (66), and Irish-American Washington McDowell give the novel a multicultural twist.

Conceived in three parts, the perspective of the second novel by Bharati Mukherjee *Wife* is bi-cultural, Indo-American. The setting in which events take place till the end of the first part is that of the city Calcutta. Amit Basu, a consultant engineer, and his wife Dimple Basu (nee Dasgupta) take off and land at the Kennedy airport in New York at the beginning of the second part. The narrative of the story, revolving around the relationship between the husband and wife, paces with jerks and shocks until it reaches its climactic end in violence at the end of the third part. Inhabiting the landscape of America in the novel are mostly Indians from diverse ethnic and sub-culture groups--Bengalis, Gujaratis, Punjabis. There are only a handful of Americans such as Milt Glasser who seduces Dimple, Larry Friedkin (Milt’s friend), Walt Frazier (Milt’s special hero), Leni Anspach (Ina Mullick’s friend), Marsha Mukherjee nee Glasser (Milt’s sister) married to Prodosh Mukherjee, and “Puerto Rican girls of Bleeketer street looking devastatingly like Indians” (162).
The problem of Dimple is not what her husband Amit says, “It was culture shock and that culture shock happened all the time to Indian wives” (180), but rather a congenital problem. She turns psychotic, neurotic, and schizophrenic and when she fails to cope with her precarious predicament, in desperation she kills her husband “women on television got away with murder” (213). The leit-motif of the tragic novel *Wife* is *fi fe fo fum* which is expressive of blood thirstiness or murderous intent.

Bharati Mukherjee’s expatriate phase of Indian context ended with *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*, and her transitional phase of Canadian context began with the eleven tales collected in the volume titled *Darkness* (1985). While three of the eleven stories belonging to Canadian context ---“The World According to Hsu”, “Isolated Incidents”, and “Tamurlane”---are the tales of “aloofness of expatriation” of people who are unable to root themselves in Canadian culture because of the rampant racism, covert or overt, and discriminatory, state-sponsored policy of multiculturalism in Canada. “A father” and “Nostalgia” are about South Asian men who cannot stop seeing themselves as expatriates and therefore keep looking homeward. While “Saints” and “The Imaginary Assassin” are about immigrant youths born in North America yet feeling attracted to Indian stories about saintly figures, “The Lady from Lucknow” and “visitors” are about frustrated Indian wives seeking fulfillment outside their marriage. Only “Angela” and “Hindus” are about characters that have liberated themselves from the country of their birth and are raring to accept America and its culture. In the best of all stories in *Darkness* “The World According to Hsu”, Mukherjee has identified the “virulent and unabashed racism inherent in the Canadian discourse of multiculturalism that has obstructed the attempts of ethnic citizens like
her and her characters from staking a claim to a home in the mainstream spaces of Canadian society” (Gabriel: Web). This story, written during the period of her “unhousement” in Canada draws on her experience of the cultural exclusivity of the Canadian nation, explores and expresses new ways of perceiving Canadian multiculturalism and the national imaginary. Ms. Mukherjee has used the socio-cultural context of the Clayton’s holiday on an island off the coast of Africa for interrogating the organizing dynamics of Canadian multiculturalism. She has employed the idea of the geological concept of plate tectonics as an analogy to question “received paradigms that stress homogeneity, continuity and cohesion in the discourse of multiculturalism and national unity” (Ibidem). Classified in Canada under the rubric of “visible minority” status, Ratna Clayton finds herself, even after being the wife of the Canadian Professor of psychology Graeme, excluded from the dominant discourse of Canadianness. Half-European Clayton’s (daughter of Czech mother and Indian father) darkness of skin is the signifier of the difference which fixes her cultural identity as an Indian or south Asian ethnic mutually exclusive with Canadianness. In “Isolated Incidents” and “Tamurlane”, too, she has indicted the virulent racism and discriminatory policy of multiculturalism in Canada.

What makes for the multicultural vision of Bharati Mukherjee in Darkness is the convergence of her characters from diverse ethnicities, cultures, and lands. Angela in the titular story is a Bangladeshi Christian girl, a victim of war, adopted by a Midwest farm family in Van Buren country in Iowa and love-sick Dr Menezes is from Goa (India). Nafeesa Hafeez and her husband Iqbal, an IBM employee in “The Lady from Lucknow” are from Pakistan whereas Ratna Clayton, wife of the Canadian Professor of psychology Graeme, is of Indo-Czech parentage in
"The World According to Hsu". Mr Bhowmick in "A father", a metallurgist working in Detroit, is from Ranchi in India. Dr. (Ms.) Supariwala, with doctorate from Western Ontario and Bombay, is and Indian immigrant and John Mohan parsawd is a Guyanan in "Isolated Incidents". Dr Manny Patel married to Camille from New Jersey in "Nostalgia" and his son Shawn Patel are of Gujarati (Indian) descent. The owner of Mumtaz Bar B-Q in Toronto, his legalized immigrant chef Mr. Gupta, and the bus-boy Mohan are Indians. Leela Lahiri, a Bengali Brahmin married to Canadian Derek and ex-maharajah Patwant Singh of Gotlah are from India. While Shawn Patel is a second generation American son of Dr Manny Patel, his friend Tran is a Vietnamese boat-person. While Sailen Kumar and his wife Vinita are from Calcutta (India) in "Visitors", the narrator of "the Imzamary Assaissin" is a young man born to Sikh parents in Yuba City, California. His grandfather tells him magical and miraculous tales rich in imagination. It is the poverty of imagination in American culture that the "romantic" in the narrator (180) hates. By making the Mughal emperor Akbar command his court-painter Basawan to give him total vision" (199) in the last tale of the volume "Courtly Vision", Bharati Mukherjee is aspiring metaphorically for total multicultural vision so as to celebrate life and "the creative possibilities contained within people" and their "ability to give up fixed worlds, to break out of cages and relate to a multicultural world" (Nazareth 190).

In *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), we witness a multicultural mosaic of immigrant enactors (characters) who come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds from almost half the globe and "shed their racial, religious, and cultural prejudices and promote a real integration among themselves" (Tandon 109). Converging in America, these immigrants intermix and promote a new kind of culture. The wife
Panna Bhatt says in “A Wife’s Story”: “I’ve broadened my horizons” (31). Similarly, rest of the immigrants too have broadened their horizons and have become what Ms. Mukherjee has called them “Conquerors”.

The canvas of The Middleman and Other Stories is truly multicultural. To articulate her vision of the “new Changing America” (1988 interview 648) and “the interaction between mainstream Americans and new immigrants” from various races and lands, Ms. Mukherjee has expanded the range of her characters, settings, and narrative perspectives in the fictional tales of this collection. The central character of the titular story of the collection, the Middleman is Alfie Judah is a Vietnam war veteran of Middle Eastern Jewish descent from Iraq. A husler and a professional soldier he travels around the world from Afghanistan to Baghdad to Bombay to Brooklyn (Central America) providing people what they need — guns, narcotics, automobiles and involves himself in a Guerrilla War. “A Wife’s Story” is about an Indian wife Pnna Bhatt in North America who is likely to break loose from her kind. Having temporarily separated from her husband, she goes to Broadway and flirts with her Hungarian immigrant lover Imre whereas her oriental roommate and model of Chinese descent Charity Chin sleeps with her “plastic surgeon every third Wednesday” (29). Jeb Marshall of “Loose Ends” is a Vietnam war veteran working in Miami as a hired killer. Doc Healy’s admonition to him “If you want to stay alive…. just keep consuming and moving like a locust …. And you’ll survive a natural death” is not only a survival mantra for him only but also for other immigrants. Rindi (Renata de Marcos) of “Orbiting” is a second generation Italian-Spanish American woman of dating with a young Afghan Ro (Roshan). Mr. Griff in “Fighting for the Rebound” is another American asked by his Filipino girlfriend Blanquita to commit himself to her.
While in “The Tenant”, Maya Sanyal there is a Bengali Brahmin woman adrift in America. Divorced from her white American husband Vern, She shares her life ant time with her new American friend Fran. She has, however, has assimilated herself fully into the American Culture. “Fathering” has another Vietnam war veteran who has to choose between the claims made on him by his half-Vietnamese daughter he has rescued from Saigon and his white American common-law wife Sharon. The following story “Jasmine” centers on a Trinidadian teenager girl of Indian Diaspora. Leaving her parents back in Trinidad, she has come to Michigan as an illegal immigrant via Canada after having negotiated for herself a “smooth, bargain-priced emigration” (Middleman, 130) from Port of Spain because “Trinidad was an Island stuck in the middle of nowhere” (Middleman, 124). Following her survival instinct, she survives in America through her sexual encounters. Danny Sahib (ne Dinesh) in “Danny’s Girls” has come from Shimla (India) to America and has expanded his marriage business to include mail-order brides with a Nepalese woman “imported” into America as a mail-order bride. The Story also recounts the infatuation an adolescent Ugandan-Indian for a Nepalese prostitute Rosie.

Mr. NKS Venkatesanis a middle-aged Tamil school teacher from Sri Lanka in “Buried Lives”. An illegal immigrant to Canada, he ends up “a lusty criminal” (175). He is Queenie’s would be “German Citizen” and “husband” (176) whose dream remains unfulfilled. Mrs. Bhave of the last story “The Management of Grief” is an Indo-Canadian who has lost her husband and two sons in an air crash plotted by Sikh terrorists. Two other victims of that tragically disaster are widow Kusum and Dr. Rangnathan. Such is the multicultural canvas on which the characters in the fictional tales of this collection act and react.
The third novel by Bharati Mukherjee Jasmine (1989) has the story of its eponymous heroine who, like the Trinidadian Jasmine of the title story in *The Middleman and Other Stories*, tries to adapt to the American way of life in order that she may survive. The former jasmine differs, however, from the latter in respect of her changing identities and nomenclatures (from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jazzy to Jase to Jane) so that she may live up to the culture she thrusts herself into. Her Journey appears to have a “direct association with the subject of immigration and, in the process, offers an insight into the issue of multiculturalism” (Web). The backdrop of the novel Jasmine is based on the marriage of the East and the West. The development of the character of Jasmine, her Journey from Punjab (India) to the U.S., and her shift from one culture to the other in the course of living, immigration, change of culture, and multiculturalism are traceable among the most important and obvious themes of the novel. The typical aspect of the themes of immigration and multiculturalism in *Jasmine* is that both appear to be the cause as well as the effect of one another. The protean character of culture has been revealed through the occurrence of events with Jyoti’s (Jasmine’s) shift from one culture to the other and from one identity to the other.

Her Journey as an illegal immigrant from India to America and from one place to many other is symbolic of her transformation, displacement and shift of identity. She had been to the US with her husband Prakash viz once before, but after his assassination by a Sikh terrorist her second immigration has much to do with culture and multiculturalism. By making her journey towards the Western culture, she not only shifts her identity but also sheds one culture and adopts the other. The change of her name is much symbolic of the change of her identity as well as her shift from the Eastern to the Western culture. She
becomes representative of the immigrants to the U.S. from the East and seems to speak like her author “My roots are here. There is no going back” (Ameena 26). Apart from Indian and American characters in the novel, there is a Vietnamese Half-face sea captain who rapes Jasmine in Florida and consequently gets killed by her. Jasmine and her adopted Vietnamese son Du appear to “have been many selves” and have “survived hideous times” (214).

*The Holder of the World* differs from Jasmine in the sense that it is the west that marries the East in it. Hannah Easton’s case is opposite of Jasmine’s. Unlike Jasmine, she undertakes her Journey from the West to the East and back to the West again. She marries the mysterious visitor from Ireland” (65) Gabriel Legge, a Swashbuckling adventurer and swaggering seafarer, and with him embarks on a journey first from Brookfield in the Massachusetts Bay colony to Stepney in England and thereafter to the Coromandel coast in Southeastern India and consorts there with the king of Devgad-Jadav Singh. She gives birth to a female baby “Pearl Singh” she had conceived of Raja Jadav Singh “Somewhere in the South Atlantic” (284) as a fusion of the East and the West.

Hannah Easton also shifts like Jasmine from one culture to the other and from one identity to the other and locates the trajectory of her identity and cultural politics in the course of crossing and re-crossing, like her own author, multiple borders of language, history, race, time and culture. Like Jasmine’s, her transcontinental and trans-cultural journey too is symbolic of her self-transformation, displacement, and shift of identity. Like *Jasmine’s* the themes of *The Holder of the World* too are immigration, change of culture, and multiculturalism. Three cultures----Christian (Puritan), Hindu (Indian), and Muslim (Mughal) ---- intermingle in it without losing their separate identities.
Beigh Master’s enunciation at the beginning of the narrative—“I live in three time zones simultaneously, and I don’t mean Eastern, Central and Pacific, I mean the past, the present, and the future” (5), her passion and hunger for tracking the cultural and racial connectedness (she is a “searcher-after-origins” (9), and her consorting and MIT computer engineer from Madras (India) Venn Iyer also serve as pointers to the multicultural conception or basis of the novel. Ms. Mukherjee’s interest through her narrator Beigh Masters is more in “Precious-as-Pearl” (The World-Healer) Hannah Easton than in Aurangzeb (The World-Taker or Holder of the World).

Bastard birth and orphan origins of the heroine, her adoption first by Catholic gray nuns of Les Soeurs Grises in Mount Abu then by Italian-American parents Manfred and Serena DiMartino, her shifting identities, change of culture and nomenclatures (from Faustine to Debby DiMartino to Debbie Di to Devi Dee) offer an insight into the issue of multiculturalism in Leave It To Me. At 23, she is intrigued by the “un-claimable part” of her life—“That is the part I want to remember” (10). Debby’s quest for her nondescript Bio-parents is a quest for her “another life, her real life”, a quest for her true identity or self-hood. In course of the discovery of her Bio-parents, she plays fortuitously cameo roles in her life. In search of her long-lost Bio-mom, she is drawn to the West coast. And as she crosses the continent, she transforms herself into Devi Dee. While working at Media Escort Agency “Leave It to Me” in California, she encounters several individuals who know, but for herself, who they are. The evidence that crops up from conversation transcripts, death notices, court records, a photograph, and passports, seems officially convincing to her that Jess DuPree and Romeo Hawk are her Bio-parents. However, her attitude towards then remains unsentimental in the cerebral
storyline of the novel: The man and woman who’d given me life were as strange to me as honeymooners from the Mars” (224).

The perspective of Leave It To Me is also multicultural like those of Jasmine and The Holder of The World. Bio-Dad of Debby DiMortino, a sex guru and serial strangler of Eurasian descent Romeo Hawk has multicultural vista along with some other multicultural characters in the novel. Madame Kezaria aka Linda Szymborska- Wakamatsu is a palmist (110). Dahlia Metz, one of Hamilton Cohan’s many execs, is said to have discovered her talent in a women’s prison in Afghanistan (11). Baba Lalji’s Napa Ashram as a B and B is there in wine country of “Pure air, great meditating, tantric fucking, holistic healing, the works, and all of it gratis!”(114). Linda was born in a displaced persons’ camp in Germany, spoke her first word (cuidado) in Argentina, married a Japanese doctor in Brazil and divorced him in Chile, then found fulfillment as a psychic in the Haight (118). War-maimed Loco Larry spits out his Vietnam Stories (136). Foster parents of Debby DiMortino Manfred and Serena DiMortino are Americans of Italian origin. Hari, the oldest resident of Devigaon, the media reporter Rajeev Raj, and Mukesh are Indians. Francis a Fong, his father Aloysius Fong and mother Baby Fong are of Chinese descent (24). Debby DiMortino’s hippie mother Jess DuPree, Hamilton Cohan, Fred Pointer, Wyatt, Bullock (Junior High School teacher), the stoop man, the Duvet man and Stark Swan are all Americans. A Vietnamese waiter (104) also figures in this novel. With multicultural riches of San Francisco, there are Somali women stewing “goat meat in sneezed hot spice” (188). Living in a big Italian family house in San Francisco area residents including Debby of diverse nationalities:
My floor had an astrologer who read future off a software called Disaster, a retired Belgian Chocolatier and a Somali medical student supporting his wife and two kids, a bunch of sisters and an elderly woman by doing body piercing, body spackling, tattoo erasures and Clitoridectomies. The ground floor had larger rooms and longer-term tenants; including a political refugee from a place he called Vanuatu, a preschool teacher and her harpsichordist lover, a Serbian photographer and a Vietnam vet. (97)

These multicultural characters happen to live together in the house sharing “toilets and kitchens” with the mantra “Faithandhope” (98). Besides this, the protagonist Debby DiMortino abandons her stable Schenectady society of New York and embraces the Haight’s “counterculture” that deliberately rejects the perceived social norm.
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