CHAPTER - IV
DISENCHANTMENT AND ASSIMILATION

When the loss of self is felt by modern man he is in danger of becoming insane, if he does not save himself by acquiring a “secondary sense of self” which fits into one of the current patterns accepted by the Society. Elaborating on this aspect Erich Fromm illustrates his point with the examples of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*. Peer Gynt discovers the loss of his self and realizes that he is like an onion with layer after layer, without a kernel. Ibsen describes peer Gynt’s dread of nothingness and the panic seizing him which may lead him to insanity. This precisely is what happens to *Wife*.

Bharati Mukherjee has maintained a distinction between “expatriate” and “immigrant” writers. She says in an interview: “An expatriate works very hard to artificially hang on to the past. I say let the old self die, if it must, if the new self must be born” (17).

Mukherjee herself was in Canada for about thirteen years but was disillusioned by the experience in Canada. She returned to the United States of America with her Canadian husband. She experienced herself as an outcast in Canada. She considers herself as an immigrant writer and explains her convictions about a writer’s obligation. All her works
explore the theme of immigration and expatriation. *Wife* is an insider novel--a novel about immigration which generates psychological cries. Her experience has helped her to write novels with this theme. In Bharati Mukherjee's words:

I am in fact writing about America more than about dark-complexioned immigrants. My focus is on the country. On how it's changing minute by minute. My stories explore the encounter between mainstream American culture and the new one formed by the migrant stream. I'm really writing about the seams joining two cultures. Many expatriate writers are destroyed by their duality, I personally feel nourished by it.(17)

Bharati Mukherjee is trying to portray schizophrenic mind in *Wife.* The protagonist of the novel Dimple Dasgupta shows the symptoms of psychic dislocation. The mind and the body lack total harmony and such symptoms are of a schizophrenic mind according to Lee.R.Edwards:

Schizophrenic exists by virtue of their inability to define, express or experience themselves as self-sufficient monads, as entities simultaneously discrete and unified. They defy the concept of the western person as a bounded, unique more or less integrated motivation and
cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background.

(28)

The novel opens with Dimple Dasgupta pining to marry a neuro-surgeon who could give her a "different kind of life". And life to her meant: an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to new market for nylon saris" (Wife-3).

All her dreams of marriage are fed on the hope that it Would:...bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love" (Wife-3).

Surprisingly that any Indian girl who is an heir to all that long tradition of love of nature, human relationships, art, music, literature, our many festivals, happy home with husband and children and a readiness for suffering and sacrifice, should harp so irresponsibly on "freedom and love" values which might more appropriately be associated with Western ethos. While there is no denying that ideally speaking marriage ought to be a means of liberation and not imprisonment, the freedom that this
ignorant girl craves for is freedom in the modern, vulgar sense, oblivious to its deeper meanings. Dimple dreams of living in foreign countries. With these dreams, she enters the wedlock with Amit an ambitious engineer who is about to migrate to the United States. But Amit’s delay in getting a job abroad frustrates her. Moreover the atmosphere of her in-law’s house disgusts her. Yet she remains calm as her days in India are numbered.

India is a country known for its rich culture. To preserve this, parents have to inculcate Indian values in their children. Since women play a significant role in the family life and the preservation of tradition, parents ought to make their daughters aware of the various roles that they have to perform in the institution of marriage. While some parents are keen on this, others ignore this aspect. The result is that the girls develop false concept of love, life and freedom. Such is the case with Dimple and she fails miserably in the end.

Married life elevates the status of women to motherhood – a stage which throws Indian women to exultation. In this context, as Alladi Uma avers:

She turns towards her motherhood with an overpowering zest, with the enthusiasm of a child discovering that it can walk... As she lacks companionship, her husband
having found no time for her, she turns towards her children for companionship and emotional fulfillment.(5)

Dimple comes to Amit’s residence at Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road after her marriage. Basus are good people, but their house is not that spacious and attractive. From the very beginning Dimple does not feel easy there. Her mother-in-law dislikes her name “Dimple” and wants to call her “Nandhini” instead which simply infuriates the bride. However she thinks that all their problems are temporary and with the confirmation for immigration they will eventually come to an end. She frequently talks with her husband about the anticipated foreign trip though the thought of living in Africa or North America terrified her.

Dimple Basu has always lived in a fantastic world, a world which is created by herself. But when she confronts the hard realities of life, the feathers of her imagination are clipped. All her dreams crumble one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage is better than getting married. She starts hating everything. “She hated the gray cotton with red roses inside yellow circles that her mother-in-law had hung on sagging tapes against the metal bars of the windows”. (Wife-20)
When she meets her friend Paramita Ray, whom everybody calls Pixie, she shares her feeling with her telling that marriage has robbed her of all romantic yearning so tastefully nourished.

One evening Amit takes her to Kwality’s by taxi and orders chilli chicken, chicken fried rice and chicken spring rolls. She feels uneasy handling the chicken pieces with fork and knife and thinks that it would have been better if Amit had taken her to Trinca’s instead:

He should have taken her to Trinca’s on park street, where she could have listened to a Goan band play American music, to prepare her for the trip to New York or Toronto or to the discotheque in the Park Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle. (Wife-21)

The excitement of marriage diminishes as the time passes and she becomes pregnant, a stage known for vomiting tendency. Her nauseating proneness is abnormal because she deliberately vomits and never leaves any opportunity of doing so at all hours of the day and night. She feels a strange sensation:

The vomit fascinated her. It was hers; she was locked in the bathroom expelling brownish liquid from her body. She took pride in brownish blossoms…. (Wife-30)
Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women because they are supposed to maintain the continuity of the clan. They are the very source of creation. But it seems Dimple does not show any interest in it and rather she finds out ways to get rid of it. Her killing of the mice which looked pregnant also suggests that she does not feel at ease with her pregnancy.

Dimple, who is never taught the significance of married life and motherhood reacts contrary to this view. She feels motherhood will rob her of the pleasures of leading a cosy life in foreign countries. Hence, she violently aborts her baby.

Dimple is about to migrate but she does not want to carry any relics from her old life. She counts her pregnancy also among the relics and ponders over the ways of getting rid of it. At last she decides to end it by skipping ropes. The description of her self-abortion is very poignant and touching:

She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; Then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed. (Wife-42)
She has no remorse of her action and gets relieved on the pretext that she will no longer carry any relics from her past life to the US. This cruel action shows how the dream of migration rings out the moral degeneration of Dimple. Rosanne Klass observes:

For an Indian wife, childlessness is a disaster, pregnancy the achievement that seals her status. To over turn such ingrained values would involve a major emotional upheaval; Yet Dimple acts on the vaguest and most defined impulses, and thinks more about it.(88)

Bereft of Indian values, Dimple lands on the Land of promise with her dreams and aspirations. In spite of possessing an adventurous spirit, Dimple gets baffled by exposure to American culture. Nagendra Kumar explains her condition thus: “How a boorish, an innocent Indian wife can keep her nerves in a country where murder was like flapping the bugs?” (49).

The following lines explain Dimple’s state of mind:

She was caught between in the cross-fire of an American communalism. She could not understand. She felt she’d come very close to getting killed on her third morning in America,(Wife-60)
Dimple’s reaction is quite natural as she comes from a sheltered home. At the beginning, Dimple suffers due to Amit’s joblessness. Later, Amit’s professional life makes her sad as he finds no time for his wife. The Indian Americans are represented by Sens, Mehras, Khannas, Bhattacharyas and the Americanised Indians are Mullicks. This is for the first time, Dimple happens to see so many Indians since she has left Calcutta. The Indian Americans care for their Indianness. For example, Sens create an Indian aura in their apartment with a framed batik wall hanging with a picture of king Ram and his court. Indian Americans are conscious of their Indianism, whereas, Americanized Indians care for their oneness with the alien culture. Ina Mullick represents this attitude by wearing “pants and Mascara” and is more American than the Americans. She smokes, drinks, flirts and goes to night clubs. Though the Sens warn Amit, against the evil influence of Ina on Dimple. The latter has an illusion about American life and falls an easy prey to Ina’s mysterious charm.

After getting exposed to the alien culture, Amit and Dimple fail to communicate with each other. This has a telling effect upon their relationship. Dimple feels like basking in Amit’s love. In turn, Amit needs Dimple to console her when he is jobless. Both fail to communicate their true feelings for each other, both draw a cocoon for themselves, and live with it. Amit and Dimple experience frustrations at various levels.
While joblessness puts Amit in jitters, Dimple realizes 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 under canopied skies and 3 A.M drives to dinzy restaurants where they sold divine kababs rolled in roti. (Wife-102)

She hates Amit as he fails to fulfill her dreams. He is not the man of her dreams. Dejected Dimple leads a lonely life of assisting Meena Sen, watching television or reading newspapers. In the absence of a good facilitator and adequate knowledge to help her to encounter the alien reality, she has access only to the televised version of the alternate reality. Through the media, she is introduced to violence. Added to this, she hears more about murder and smuggling in the basement of the building. The art of communication is very important in marriage. Padmini Singh in an article says:

Communication between husband and wife is essential to marital happiness. So be bold enough to communicate your true feelings and views. This is how you are to go about it. (24)
This failure in communication develops a breach between the couple which widens day by day and ultimately ruins their relationship. In her new version she gives her heart away to their meantime shelter-provider Jyoti Sen and imagines: "it could easily have been Jyoti instead of Amit that she had married since both were of the same caste and both were engineers" (Wife-85).

The situation becomes worse after Amit finds a job. He devotes more time to his work in order to retain his hard-earned job. He believes that providing material comforts alone will make her happy. The couple moves to Marshas' flat - a well furnished apartment with all sorts of modern appliances. The living conditions of the couple improve, yet they feel lonely.

With the partially fulfilled dreams, Dimple tries to assimilate with American culture but fails. She feels it is difficult to adjust with the people who do not understand about Durga puja. Dimple’s attachment to rituals shows the throbbing of Indian pulse in her. Moreover, it throws light on the Indian woman’s failure to getting assimilated to the foreign culture. As Lakshmi puts it: "……for a woman, religion is not just something linked to a god but a cultural practice that she is supposed to preserve" (4).
Dimple analyses her smooth Calcutta life and the dangerous New York life thus in terms of Choudhury.

She is scared of self-service elevators, of police men, of gadget and appliances. She does not want to wear western clothes as she thinks she would be mistakenly taken for a Puerto Rican. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated, marginalized. (84)

Dimple is so troubled by the American life that she hurts Amit with a knife when he comes from behind to embrace her. She apologises to Amit and blames America for making her timid and nervous: “This would not have happened if we had stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home”. (Wife-132)

Dimple struggles within herself. Asnani’s lines clearly show the mental condition of Dimple:

Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be a submissive and self-effacing. (42).
Amit and Dimple move to Mookherji’s apartment in Manhattan. They are shifted physically from expatriate community. Dimple mingles with people like Milt Glasser, Ina Mullick and Leni Anspach. She explores the outside world with Ina and Glasser. At one occasion Dimple tells her friend Ina:

there are something I can’t do. Wearing pants is one of them. I could not walk down the street in your pants and sweaters..... what is more normal and graceful than a sari? (Wife- 154)

Dimple continues telling Ina that even Amit takes off his western clothes and puts on a pair of loose khadi pajamas and a thin ‘kurta’ the moment he comes back from office, for he feels comfortable and at home in them. In fact, Indians try to preserve their cultural relics which makes them all the more nostalgic.

Dimple and Amit just cling to the alien land even though they miss their nativity all the time. They pine to go back home but their ego prevents them to do so. Dimple has expected pain when she comes to America but then, she tells herself, pain is part of any new beginning. Although eager to move freely and adopt the American environment and
its way of life, she abandons this idea for a while and once again struggles to adjust herself with the environment.

America has outwitted her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. She is unsure of living there. The narrator comments: “how could she live in a country... where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator? (Wife-112).

She feels that Amit has failed in feeding her fantasy life. She of course brackets her husband with the electronic appliances. Amit is just a robot and not an actual human being for her. Her disgust with American English and American system gets accentuated even by small things. She is afraid to operate the self-service elevator. Linda Sandler explains it in terms of her traditional upbringing:

Dimple emigrates to the electronic age with her traditional values almost in fact, only partly modified by the pop culture of modern Calcutta, she is unable to make the transition from Before to After and chooses violence as a problem solving device.... (75)
Dimple experiences loneliness at every quarter of her life. To drive away that feeling she turns to the media. Television becomes her sole companion. Her involvement with the media is so deep that she gets obsessed with words like dark, evil, sinister, gruesome, murder, suicide, smuggling etc. She fully trusts the media. Even her body seems curiously alien to her. Linda Sandler comments on her emptiness:

She is uprooted from her family and her familiar world, and projected in to a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustrations and unhooks her further from reality.(84)

In order to cope with her alienation Dimple starts searching for alternative including attending and throwing parties and serving food in a glamorous way. As she herself remembers:

I would read up recipe and make water cress soup. I would do wonders with two carrots and chicken. You know what I mean? Something daring and glamorous. If it were my party, I’d serve drinks indoor and food on the patio or should it be food indoors and drinks in the patio? (Wife-88-89)
She is tempted to roam in markets. She loves to go out with Ina to the restaurants for pizza-eating. But it is the window shopping which she likes most. Watching T.V. and reading magazine become her favourite past time. She thinks of T.V. as her friend.

Dimple’s spirit rebels due to over exposure to the alien culture through the media. To feed her rebelling spirit, she starts socializing with Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser, wears Marsha’s outfits, and goes to the extent of enjoying the prohibited freedom. She uses Marsha’s tinted glasses, because the purple tinted sun glasses are perhaps the most typical index of American culture. For Dimple, they are a disguise, borrowed from the west, just like Marsha’s clothes and the apartment in which she is living. Above all, she seduces Milt in her own bed room and hides it from Amit. Dimple’s activities are purely an outcome of her attempt to become one with the American culture. Finally she turns into a neurotic. She complains against her life:

Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera ... she was furious, desperate, felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster... (Wife-156)
Her frequent interaction with a hunk Milt Glasser and a flirt Ina inflate her hate for Amit beyond scales. Her fondness for Milt dissolves the east bonds of favours for Amit was not like that of Milt and Ina. In the heart of her hearts she likes Milt Glasser:

He was the only one she could talk to. With the others, people like Amit and Ina and even Meena Sen she talked in silences. With Milt she could talk about all sorts of things,(Wife-191)

Consequently, she turns much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians.

The alien circumstances accentuate her hypertension and drive her to the brink of regression and abnormality. She had shown potential signs of alienation in Calcutta before embarking on her voyage to America, and now the alien environs prove to be inexorable. As a result, she finds herself ill at odds to suffer the terrible assaults of lonely existence in America.

Amit observes the external changes in Dimple and he relates them to cultural shock. Influence of the media on Dimple's life takes an ugly turn. She gets totally cut off from the outside world. This situation starts
thwarting her life. The isolation and powerlessness is so acute that the other potentialities such as sensuous, emotional and intellectual one which are essential for life and evolution of personality cannot be realized by her. The lack of inner security and spontaneity blocks this realization. This blockade increases with the shock of another culture. The fear of losing her identity grips her. She is afraid to imagine herself as Ina, in a few years when she too would wear a T-shirt and blue jeans and sit on the unmade bed tell an immigrant wife her pitiful story. It is obvious that the stress caused by displacement is too strong to withstand for Dimple who develops the symptoms of insecurity. For Dimple, the future is bleak, the present dull and boring, and the past too remote to be connected. The thoughts about suicide haunt her and she thinks only about different ways of committing suicide.

In the borrowed flat, borrowed clothes and country, Dimple loses her identity and feels as if she lives a borrowed life: "In her borrowed clothes she felt she could risk anything and get away with it" (Wife-175).

Dimple starts contemplating the murder of the husband. She now fails to differentiate between what she sees on television and what she thinks, the idea of slaughtering her husband fascinates her. She thinks:
She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American some how, almost like a character in a T.V series. (Wife-195)

No matter how hard Dimple tries to assimilate the alien culture, the Indian values lying dormant within her condemn her regarding the extra-marital relationship with Milt. Her deterioration is complete when, in an almost dream-like state, she kills her husband. Dimple is a victim of her own neurotic sensibility fed on popular advertisement fantasies. K.S. Narayan Rao looks at it from a specific angle:

The novel raises an important question: was the Indian wife happier in India with her limited freedom and greater docility, or does she achieve happiness in her painful search for more individual freedom and in the process of maturing. (475)

Of course, the Indian wife was not happy in Calcutta either. She would have learnt to reconcile herself to her frustrations if she had stayed in India. She would not have become murderess. In fact, there is no wonder in her becoming a murderer as in America, talking about murder is like talking about the weather.
Dimple’s cultural shock turns her into a neurotic. The individual as delineated by Bharati Mukherjee is a disenchanted lonely thinker, searching for ethical significance in the smallest of things, and struggling for identification with race or class or group. As she could not attain any of these, she is thoroughly disappointed and remains fully disenchanted. Dimple’s story is of a disenchanted expatriate certainly prepares the stage for the story of Jasmine, an assimilated immigrant.

In *Jasmine* (1989), Bharati Mukharjee attempts to unravel the complicated layers of cross-cultural reality through a series of adventures which the heroine Jasmine undertakes during her odyssey from Punjab to California via Florida, New York and Iowa. Her struggles symbolize the restless quest of a rootless person piqued by a depressing sense of isolations all around. As the novel opens the astrologer of the village sitting under the banyan tree foretells Jasmine’s widowhood and exile. The narrative shuttles between past and present, between India of the narrator’s early life and America of her present one.

In the post-modern climate, the notion of America as a melting pot for different cultures and the need for assimilation into what was thought to be the American culture is passé. Today the American attitude towards ethnicity and foreignness has changed.
*Jasmine* is an enactment of encounter of two cultures, one ancient and the other modern, each illuminating and enriching the other. The Indian experience is reinterpreted through the western idiom. Mukherjee repudiates the outer trappings of Indian culture which go by the name of nostalgia:

When I visit writing classes around the country and see younger versions of myself--Asia-born and United States-raised writers now in their 20's who probably couldn't wear a sari and other native dress even if begged to do--I feel immediately envious of the experiences they have lived through and the stories they could tell. It's with a sinking sensation that I read their stories, too often hokey concoctions, composed of family memory and brief visits to ancestral villages. Here they are, masters of America in ways I can never be, turning their backs on some of the richest material ever conferred on a writer, for the fugitive attraction of something dead and charming.... Editors and classmates will indulge you, and faintly condescend. And your material is dead. Let it die, I want to shout... Turn your attention to the scene, which has never been in greater need of new perspectives.(3)
This is what exactly Bharati Mukherjee has done in *Jasmine*. She has allowed her Indian protagonist to interact freely with American culture so that she not only takes but gives as well and by giving she endows a new perspective to the land she inhabits. Jasmine, the heroine leaves Indian ghetto in Flushing and adopts to the patterns of the dominant American culture. But this does not mean she throws to the wind her race, her religion, her beliefs. Bharati Mukherjee herself points out in an interview in *Span*:

I have a different sense of existence and of morality than do writers like Malamud. I believe that our souls can be reborn in another body. So the perspective I have in a single character’s life is different from that of American writer who believes that he has only one life. (36)

The theme of Jasmine is an Indian immigrant’s encounter with the new world and her gradual transformation as she thoroughly imbibes the new culture.

At the beginning of the novel Bharati Mukherjee stresses the beliefs and superstitions, rituals and customs embedded in Indian ethos. Early in the novel Jasmine tries to raise herself above blind faith in fate. While scavenging for firewood Jasmine gets a star shaped wound on her fore head. That scar becomes her third eye with which she was peering
out into invisible worlds. Her journey through life led Jasmine through many transformations--Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase, and Jane through large geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and finally towards California. At every stage of her life Jasmine revolts against her fate and the path drawn for her. There is a shift of past and present and vice versa as the novel progresses. The present is her life as Jane in Iowa, where she is a live-in-companion to Bud Ripple Meyer, a small town banker. Bud is fascinated by her foreignness, but never asks her about India. The past is Jyoti’s childhood in the small village of Hasnapur, Punjab, her marriage to Prakash, the young ambitious city man, who always thrashed traditions. Like prof. Higgins in Pygmalion he has given her a new identity and new name Jasmine for she was small, sweet and heady.

The American experience shocks Jane and she is disgusted many a time. She thinks:

This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing....There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams. (Jas-29)
Jasmine’s husband, Prakash plans to study in the United States but is murdered by terrorists fighting for a separate Sikh homeland. Equipped with forged papers she goes to America, intending to commit sati on the college campus where Prakash hoped to study. After a hazardous journey in a shrimper called the Gulf Shuttle she reaches the Florida coast as an illegal immigrant. Capitalizing on the helplessness of Jasmine on the Florida coast, Half Face the captain of the shrimper takes her to a Florida motel and rapes her. Jasmine murders him there in the motel itself. She surrenders her plan of committing sati sullied by the act of rape. This act symbolizes Jasmine’s decision to burn her deforming past and survive in the alien land.

Hence forth, all her encounters with strangers in the new land are benign.

Lillian Gordan, a kind Quaker lady in Florida shelters her, and also several illegal immigrants and teaches her American way of life. Here Jasmine becomes Jazzy. Lillian gets her a job in Taylor and Wylie Hayes family as care-giver in Manhattan. She becomes a care-giver and is treated as a member of the family and not just a maid servant. Here she is called Jase. At the very first meeting Jasmine falls in love with Taylor.
I began to fall 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. I was curious about his life, not repulsed. (Jas-167)

Here she stays for two years and learns the ways of American family life, husband helping in the kitchen, wife working for longer hours outside and that the young couple could adopt a daughter and not wait for the natural child.

She loves and admires the American world so lovely as she remains with Hayes’ family. In New York, Jasmine is shocked by the sight of beggars, one of whom curses her as a “foreign bitch” when she refuses him alms. The taxi driver in New York is a migrant doctor from Kabul, who lives like dogs. On the streets of New York Jasmine sees more greed and more people like herself. “New York was an archipelago of ghettos seething with aliens” (Jas.-140). The biggest shock to Jasmine is the truth of the professorji’s means of earning a livelihood. The experience with the professorji’s family is even more frustrating.
I was spiralling in to depression being the fortress of Punjabiness in their house...In Flushing I felt immured. An imaginary brick wall popped with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time.(Jas.148)

He is not a professor but an importer and sorter of human hair. America has not robbed him of his self-respect. "He needed to work here, but he didn't have to like it. He had sealed his heart when he'd left home...He was a ghost hanging on (Jas-153).

Jasmine's immigrant experiences are supplemented with similar experience of Letita from Trinidad, and Jamaica from Barbados. Letita grumbles : "Slavery making a big comeback?" (Jas-179).

While Jamaica cries her heart out every night because she is too proud to return to her native country, Jane is shocked by the switching of relationships in America:

In America nothing really lasts. I can say that now, and it does not shock me. But I think it was the hardest lesson of all for me to learn. We arrive so eager, to learn, to adjust, to participate, only to find the monuments are plastic, agreements are annulled. Nothing is forever.
nothing is so terrible or so wonderful, that it won't
disintegrate. (Jas-81)

Jasmine understands that clinging on to one's own culture
tenaciously while living in an immigrant locale does not help an immigrant
in any way. The freedom loving spirit of Jasmine finds it difficult to cope
with the conservative India represented by the Vadheras and after
spending five frustrating months at Flushing one day, she deserts the
Vadheras and sets forth for another adventure.

Jasmine lands at Claremont Avenue of Manhattan with Taylor and
Wylie Hayes as a care giver to their adopted daughter, Duff. This is the
best period of her stay in the States. She discovers to her excitement that
Taylor is a true professor and at once feels impressed by his human
conduct.

Taylor gives her a new name, "Jase" and she is all excited about
her life with the Hayes'es. She becomes more Americanized, more
confident of her proficiency in English but her instinctive Indian values do
surface now and then. For instance, when she comes to know that Duff is
not a natural child but an adopted one, her reactions are culturally
revealing:
I could not imagine a non-genetic child. A child that was not my own, my husband's, struck me as a monstrous idea. Adoption was as foreign to me as the idea of widow remarriage. (Jas.-170)

Jasmine again feels outwitted at Wylie's decision to leave Taylor for economist Stuart in search of "real happiness". She feels defeated: "America had thrown me again. There was no world I could learn, no one I could consult, to understand, what Wylie was saying or why she had done it" (P-181-82).

However, she is not unmindful of the positive side of American ethos. She appreciates the Americans for their democracy of thought and their sense of respect even for those doing menial works. The western civilization has a "work culture" and in this set up everybody is discharging his duty without complex. She compares her own situation with the Mazbi woman who worked in her house at Hasnapur:

In Hasnapur the Mazbi woman who'd stoked our hearth or spread our flaking, dried-out adobe walls with watered cow dung had been a maid servant. Wylie made me feel her younger sister. I was family and I was professional. (Jas.-175)
Jasmine has experienced the best moments of stay in America in the company of Taylor and Duff who are like family for her. She is absorbed in the American world forgetting all about her strange mission. She thinks that she has got an established home and now she will no longer be haunted by rootlessness. She feels rooted, but still her destination is not reached and she is forced to run from New York. She sights the assassin of her husband, Sukhwinder, and runs for life to Iowa. But her escape is not a sign of her cowardice, it is life-affirming, she is running away for life not escaping from life. Pushpa N. Parekh thinks that Jasmine’s stay at Taylor’s for two years is the most fruitful period of her life in America:

This period in Jasmine’s life is the most restful and comforting, emotionally and psychologically, intellectually, however, it is a phase of minute observations of complex inner deliberations on, and keen involvement in her new environment.(113)

Jasmine’s life in Iowa again begins with her chance meeting with mother Ripple Meyer who helps her getting a job in her son Bud’s bank as a teller girl and after six months she is the live-in companion of Bud Ripple Meyer. Bud not only gives her a new life but also a new name-Jane. Bud is a tall, fit fifty-year-old banker, husband of Karin, father of Buddy and
Vern. After one year he is a crippled man living with his Asian wife and adopted son, Du who is a Vietnamese brought from a refugee camp by him. She has fully assimilated herself to the American family life with adopted children and pregnancy, but is waiting for her real love which she finds when Taylor comes to her.

Jane likes Iowa because it is very much like Hasnapur. The farmers here are very much like the farmers of her own village: “Modest people, never boastful tactful and courtly in their way” (Jas.-11).

Jane, in Baden, Elsa country, Iowa, encounters differences by recognizing food differences. Cumin, coriander, varieties of peppers, gobi, aloo, and matar paneer define her Indian heritage, while pot roast signifies mainstream America.

The interaction between two cultures is seen in the following lines:

In our three and half years together, I have given Bud a new trilogy to contemplate: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

And he has lent me his: Musial, Brock and Gibson".

(Jas.-8)
Again the interaction of two cultures is seen in the way Jasmine tries to explain to Taylor her father’s mission in life in terms of Hindu philosophy and Taylor’s Matter-of-fact western reaction to it:

May be Pitaji’s mission was to pluck a certain flower and release a certain seed. The scale of Brahma is vast. As vast as space in the universe. Why shouldn’t our mission be infinitesimal? Aren’t all lives viewed that way, equally small? (Jas.-60)

Jasmine’s Indian sensibility is quick to catch the contrast between two cultures. This comes out forcibly in a passage like this in the predicament of an Indian widow and an American widow:

Vimla (the Indian widow) sets herself on fire because she had broken her pitcher; she saw there were no insides and outsides. We are just shells of the same Absolute.

In Hasnapur Vimala’s is not a sad story. The sad story would be a woman mother Ripple Meyer’s age still working on her shell, bothering to get her hair and nails done at Madame Cleo’s. (Jas.-15)

When Jasmine informs Taylor about the death of her father who was killed by a maddened bull just as he had alighted from a bus. This
comment is embedded in Indian ethos but Taylor’s reaction emanating from Western ethos comes as a cultural shock to the protagonists:

We have no husbands, no wives no fathers, no sons. Family life and family emotions are all illusions. The Lord lends us a body, gives us an assignment, and sends us down when we get the job done, the Lord calls us home again for the next assignment.... I know that sounds soft, "very, very, very Indian Jassy" that's what Taylor used to say, back is Manhattan. "You don't believe that, do you? You can't, you are more modern than that. (Jas.-59)

The interaction between two cultures leads to a gradual transformation in the protagonist: she walks American; she dresses American. But even as she is getting transformed she does not forsake her innate Indianness and feels uncomfortable at the speed of transformation. She also feels uncomfortable in professorji’s house, which they have converted into a Punjabi ghetto; she wants to get away from this claustrophobic “Indianness”: "In this apartment of artificially maintained Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from every thing Indian, everything Jyoti-like (Jas.-145).
She notices the fact that professorji and his wife don’t give anything to America. But Jasmine wants to establish a give - and - take relationship with America thereby stressing the need for the synthesis of two Cultures. She feels to be reborn when she holds the giant lizard in Kate’s apartment:

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 basilisk stare of a beady eye.

The relationship of an Indian, any Indian, to a reptile, is that of a fisherman to a fish. (Jas.-163)

The ‘giant lizard’ becomes a metaphor for Jasmine’s rebirth. As Jasmine is still shackled to Indian ethos much more ancient than the birth of the New world, the stories that she tells Duff are about Gods and demons and mortals. She tells Duff the story of Nachiketa (“Nachos” in American) and Yama. But Jasmine does find a new identity in America and she gradually finds her roots in America: “America may be fluid and built on flimsy. Invisible lines of weak gravity, but I was a dense object. I had landed and was getting rooted” (Jas.-179).

Jasmine’s every movement is a calculated step into her Americanization and with each development a vital change is marked in
her personality. Jasmine’s flight to Iowa and her renaming as Jane is indicative of a slow but steady immersion into the mainstream American culture. Here we encounter a changed Jasmine - one who had murdered Half-face for violating her chastity, now not only willingly embraces the company of an American without marriage but also is carrying his child in her womb. One cannot forget the fact that she is a rebel who revolts at every step against the path drawn for her. She is an adapter and a survivor.

An immigrant’s life is in fact a series of re-incarnations. He lives through several lives in a single life-time. This truth explains the condition of Jasmine. This applies to Bharati Mukherjee also. As Mukherjee considers in one of her interviews:

I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill civil rights activist I was in Canada, and from the urgent write that I have become in the last few years in the United States. (18)

This statement has a marked similarity with Jasmine’s out cry: “There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We
murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves- is the images of
dreams" (Jas.-29).

This assimilation of Jasmine is not so smooth as it might appear on
the surface:
Fear, anger, pain, bitterness, confusion, silence, irony,
humor, as well as pathos--underline her observations as
she discovers for herself the undefined median between
the preservation of the old world and the assimilation into
the new one.(Jas.-117)

All is well with Jane in Iowa till Du leaves for Los Angels to join his
sister. She has started identifying herself with Du because he is an
immigrant like herself. Both are in a great hurry to become American, to
forget the nightmares of their early lives. All through her stay for more
than three years in Iowa Jasmine has been faithful to Bud. She has acted
like an Indian wife who exults in her loyalty towards her husband. She
has identified all her dreams and wishes with Bud's. She thinks that even
the memory of the past life amounts to a kind of disloyalty to Bud because
he feels frightened by her stories of Hasnapur. Taylor and Duff come to
take Jasmine to California where the new world, the promise of America is
eagerly awaiting her. In deserting Bud and choosing Taylor Jamine does
not exchange between men but she changes her whole world. As she herself confides:

I am not choosing between men. I am caught between
the promise of America and old world dutifulness.

(Jas.-240)

From the "sati-goddess" Jyoti to the "Kali-Jasmine" to "adventurous Jase" to "Plain Jane", has been an eventful, uneven odyssey, protagonist's name changes as well as her shifts in places of residence become metaphors for an immigrant woman's process of uprooting and rerooting.

She is loved by all for her Indianness which has made her a lovable and caring, wife, an affectionate mother. She echoes her sentiment again and again. At one instance she considers food as a way granting or withhold love: "A good Hasnapur wife doesn't eat just because she is hungry. Food is a way of granting or holding love" (Jas.-216). At another instance she talks about the food habits of Indian woman: "I will wait supper for you. Indian wives never eat before their husband?" (Jas.-213).
The above statements show that even if she is living with an American in an American household, among American appliances her ideal is an Indian wife who is by nature self-sacrificing.

She protests against rigours of Indian culture. Her protest, like that of Bharati Mukherjee herself, is not against Indian culture per se, but against its relentiveness and its particular way of partially comprehending the world. She revolts against conservative Indian attitude towards poor widows who are treated like non-entities. She resents against the ‘sati’ system which compels Indian women to sacrifice their life although they want to live. She rebukes the male dominating Indian society which discourages self reliance in women. Her grudge is against the artificially maintained ghetto which bars the non-resident Indians from identifying themselves with the progressive ideals of the west. However, her native values determine substantially the quality of her life. Indra Bhatt observes: "the person we see at the end of the novel moving away with Taylor, is very much the same person we encounter at the earlier stages in the novel" (77).

Sarah Curtis also subscribes to a similar view: "By the end of the book she is almost all American..." (436).
Jasmine is also not blind to certain drawbacks in American culture like the disintegration of the family. When Du her adopted Vietnamese-American son leaves. She considers it a miscarriage. But she wants to banish this typical Indian sentimentality. She wants to be like Lillian Gordon:

Be unsentimental, I order Myself. Don't cry. Don't feel sorry for yourself; be proud of what we did. He (Du) was given too us to save and to strengthen; we didn't own him, his leaving was inevitable. Even healthy. (Jas-224)

The synthesis between two cultures has given her a true perspective where she can see traditional Indian and contemporary American way of life unblinkered. She is the survivor in the end, seeking pastures anew. She does not carry the burden of the past; rather emerges, time and again, a new being.

It is clear that an immigrant always faces difficulties in assimilating with the alien culture. When subjected to cultural confrontation, naturally the immigrants tend to lose a certain degree of their culture and imbibe the qualities of other culture. Such assimilation or acculturation is the only way to keep a fine balance between illusion and reality and lead a meaningful life preserving his identity as well.
Jasmine has reinvented herself and has forged a new identity in the country of adoption. This kind of tendency in Jasmine is the one that contributes wholly to the optimistic end of the novel. An immigrant is one who is reborn in the adopted culture.

Jasmine’s acculturation and assimilation into American culture is certainly better than bunkering in nostalgia or remaining torn between two worlds, two cultures, two ways of life and two faiths for a lifetime.