Chapter: 2

PROBLEMS OF INTRA-CULTURAL AND CROSS CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS
O you who love clear edges
More than anything, watch the edges that blur.

Adrienne Rich

Cross-cultural migration in today’s world has become an irrevocable precursor to the re-negotiation of identity, the re-mapping of boundaries, the re-naming of the self within and a re-structuring of the life without. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptation has been investigated extensively in different countries including United States, Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Israel, Sweden and many more. Millions of people change homes each year, crossing cultural boundaries. Immigrants and refugees resettle in search of new lives in different countries. But in those different countries, they are challenged to face one another’s numerous cultural differences and search for profound human similarities. In a way, individuals crossing cultures can be described as experiencing a degree of existential alertness. Many people struggle to cope with feelings of inadequacy and frustration in their changed environments. Regardless of resettlement circumstances, all immigrants are compelled to make adjustments in their habitual ways of carrying out their life activities. Those who fail to do so find themselves staying on yet experiencing emotional and social isolation from the new environment.
As life is an alien culture is full of difficult choices, set-backs, dilemmas, and breakdowns, so is the fate of relationships, may it be man-woman, or parents-children, siblings, or even queer relationships. Individual choices regarding human relations echo the socio-cultural trauma that a hyphenated individual has to go through. The choice can be any of the two cultures or the best of both the worlds, and even an attempt to break away from the strict code of conduct and the set patterns lay down by them. The day-to-day dilemma and the entire process of resolution mirror the life of the ethnic community in the US. This dilemma is reflected in the novels of the two diasporic women writers Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Ann Bhalla. Their novels centre around protagonists who are forced to make choices and the whole gamut of cultural upbringing, social conditioning and hyphenated existence goes into this process of decision making.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s “The Mistress of Spices” is a novel that strings magic, memory, and immigrant life into a tale of love and survival. This novel blends the immediacy of urban America – in this case Oakland, California – with the timeless mythology of ancient India. In this novel, set in a sacred, mythical frame, the conflict is between desire and duty in the life of the protagonist, Tilo, the spice-mistress, the healer. Tilo is a young woman from a distant time and place whose in the ancient craft of spices by
First Mother and initiation in the rite of fire allow her to become immortal and powerful. Traveling across time and space, Tilo comes to live in Oakland, California, in the form of an aged woman and establishes herself as a healer who prescribes spices as remedies for the local Indian immigrant community, a community that consists of scantily clad of teenage girls, abused wives, a nurse in an AIDS ward, and a very attractive Native American man named Raven.

Elizabeth Softky’s review praises the novel for making cross-cultural connections, and explains that:

“Tilo dispenses spices – not only for kofta and curry, but also for the homesickness and alienation that plagues the Indian immigrants that patronize her dusky shop.”

Her vows forbid her to become overly involved in her customers’ lives, to use her powers for her own benefit, and to ever leave her store and her emotional integrity. Abandoning her own desires in order to please the spices and win their power and approval, Tilo abides by the rules. She tries not to become overly involved with the customers for fear of the spices and rules made by the First Mother:

“Are you ready to give up your young bodies, to take on age and ugliness and unending service? Ready never to step out of the places
where you are set down, store or school or healing house? Are you ready never to love any but the spices again”? (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 42)

But as this mystical handler of spices (Tilo) engages in flights of imagination, she confronts through various customers the harsh reality that immigrants face in an indifferent city and starts intruding into their lives-a practice strictly forbidden in the code governing the conduct of a mistress of spices. For the first time when she meets Haroun, a Kashmiri Muslim who drives cars for living, she gets emotionally involved with his life and breaks one of the rules made by First Mother. When Haroun comes with a new taxi at her door and insists her to come out to look at his taxi, she thinks that:

“…a joy does not become real until you share it with someone dear, and in this far country who else do you have. So I must step onto the forbidden concrete floor of America, leaving behind the store as I am never supposed to do.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 30)

At last when she gets to know about “the dark which is reaching for him with its hungry hand” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices , 191), she again makes her mind to break the rule to help him. As the “events in the outer world are nothing to Mistresses (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 178), she assumes herself a different Tilo from that one who left the island before.
Now she can do anything to save his life. She decides, “You must go to him. Yes, out one more time into America.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 191) But as she breaks the rule of made by First Mother, she faces a problem of finding address and phone number of Haroun and when she uses her power to get that, she realizes that her power of memory is leaving her:

“I Tilo of whom the Old One once said that the parrot, bird of memory, must live in my throat. Too late I begin to see the price I have unknowingly paid for each step I took into America. Inside me a voice cries What else is lost.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 193)

She also gets pleasure in the moment when Haroun kisses her hand to thank her and does not pull her hands whether it is not allowed a mistress to touch someone:

“It is not allowed to Mistresses to touch those who come to us.”

(Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 6)

She speaks to First Mother:

“All those things you warned me against, First Mother, I wanted them. His grateful lips innocent and ardent in the center of my palm, his sorrows shimmering like fireflies alighted in my hair.” (Divakauri, the Mistress of Spices, 29)
Tilo continues to rebel against the strictures of the spice mistress, even explores the alien America into which she has been dropped and worst of all she falls in love with a handsome American, Raven, who visits her shop. She thinks about the warning given to her:

“When you begin to weave your own desires into your vision,” the One One told us, “the true seeing is taken from you. You grow confused, and the spices no longer obey you.’ (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 75)

As she has a soft corner for Raven, she also wants to help Geeta, a professional Indian woman who has fallen in love with her colleague Juan Cordero, a Mexican boy and faces her family’s opposition to a marriage outside the Indian community. When Geeta’s grandfather comes to her and tells about Geeta’s act to her she feels sympathized with her:

“Geeta, like you I too am learning how love like a rope of ground glass can snake around your heart and pull you, bleeding, away from all you should.” (Divakaruni, *The Mistress of Spices*, 95)

When Geeta’s parents get to know about her affair with a non Indian boy, they get angry and Geeta leaves the house to live with her friend. On the request of Geeta’s grandfather, Tilo agrees to go to her whether it is not allowed to her. As she can not go to her in that clothes which are given to
her at her arrival to America, she thinks of buying new clothes. But at the same time she thinks about First Mother and her views that she would say if she were here:

“Hasn’t that always been your trouble Tilo, you who think you know best, who chose to forget that the highest motives lead fastest to doom. And are your motives so high, or do you help Geeta because you see in her forbidden love an image of your own.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 136)

She also buys different things which are forbidden to her and thinks:

“Tilo have you gone crazy is this why you broke the rule of boundary and stepped into America. For this.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 138)

She feels ashamed of her frivolity and leaves all the things except clothes and mirror, the most dangerous of forbidden things.

When she comes back to her store, she imagines First Mother sitting “cross-legged, her spine curving inward as though something is too heavy for it to hold up.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 147) but in real it is her spirit that is with her. Tilo asks First Mother whether it is bad to help Geeta in this way, First Mother replies:
“Daughter the help you try to give outside these protected walls turns on itself, don’t you know that?...When you step beyond the old rules, you increase the chance of failing a hundredfold. The old rules which keep the world in its frail balance, which have been there forever, before me, before the other Old Ones, before even the Grandmother.”

(Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 147-48)

As the novel moves on, Tilo becomes more fascinated towards Raven and gets confused with her choices in life. Now she is unable to decide what she should choose between spiritual and physical existence:

“Do I not know my duty as well as I do my pleasure?” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 197)

This is the change Divakaruni went through herself, as she recounts in one of her Salon columns: She recalls the traditional spices and oils her mother used on her hair and her body as something that lingers in our subconscious, comforting and giving joy, making real what would otherwise be wooden and wordy (Salon, 26 June 1997). This therapeutic use of spices is something she has taken with her into American culture, she says, when she uses lavender to drown out her children’s illnesses and fears. But at the same time, she relies on modern medicine, thus adjusting traditional ways, combining them with the new and thus leaving a part of her past behind.
Similarly, this is what she practices in the narrative of the book: trying to combine Hindu mysticism with Western narrative, she transgresses each of them.

On Monday when Tilo keeps his store closed for customers and devotes her full day to the past, she finds Raven standing outside of her store’s door. She again becomes perplexed about whether she should maintain her relationship with First Mother or with her lover, Raven. As she does not speak to others expect First Mother on Monday, she is unable to decide what to do:

“Standing outside in stillness, did he feel me too? Pillar of ice frozen on the other side of the door, and inside me all the old voices clamoring Don’t answer. Clamoring Have you forgotten, today is the day consecrated to the First Mother, when you must speak to no one else?” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 156)

Tilo’s life in America shifts from a spiritually endowed nun to a desiring woman as seen especially in Tilo’s love for Raven (the Native American). When Raven brings a dress for her she finds it the loveliest dress she has seen and wants to wear it but again First Mother’s warning comes to her mind and she lays it down:

“First Mother who warned us, who watched sorrow-eyed as our bodies twisted into age in Shampati’s flames, did you foresee this
moment. This regret raking me inside and out.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 203)

She heals people as the Mistress of Spices but the spices have stifling qualities which impede her to explore her own desire. While on the one hand she serves the people of Oakland with her medicines concocted of various spices and while spices sometimes help her, we also come to realize that the spices give her constant warning not to become involved in any relationships that undermines between a man and a woman. She is subjected to warnings that if one becomes involved, or, other words if the mistress of spices becomes involved in any relationship of love not only she be destroyed, literally, burnt, but the entire land. The spices always warned Tilottoma what might occur if she mutates from her existence of mistress of spices. The spices warned her constantly about the danger of betraying the spices that she would be scorched and burned by Shampati’s fire and then Tilo thinks:

“I never thought I would again in this life – light Shampati’s fire and step into it. But this time without the Old One’s protecting eyes. I Tilo who have broken so many rules that I do not know what the spices will –.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 248)

Tilottoma almost flees from Raven knowing that Shampati’s fire will get Raven as well into trouble if she stays near him, but in reality, she is
forgiven by the spices. Thus, she writes to Raven as she persuades him to drive her back to her store at Oakland:

“Raven forgive me, the note will say. I do not expect you to understand. Only to believe that I had no choice. I thank you for all you have given me. I hope I have given you a little too. Our love would never have lasted, for it was based upon fantasy, yours and mine, of what it is to be Indian. To be American. But where I am going – life or death, I do not know which – I will carry its brief aching sweetness. Forever.”

(Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 311)

This novel functions as a showdown between the mystical powers of quasi-virginal creativity and a life of love and physicality. As she loves both the spices and her lover, she wants to be with both of them and as she know that it is not possible because she can not keep her power and love together, she questions the spices:

“Can I not love you and him both. Why must I choose. The spices do not answer.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 202)

The author portrays the complexities in forging interethnic and interracial relationships. In Raven and Tilo’s relationship, Divakaruni explores what it means to be Indian – of America and India. Largely allegorical and mythic
in its conscious structure, this novel does not repudiate the social: instead, it makes a case for the integration of the sacred and the social accepts of life. As the ordinary human love and ordinary human life is not for her, she decides to forget all the rules and triumphs over all her dilemmas to resign from her role as the Mistress of Spices and achieves fulfillment through her corporeal and spiritual union with Raven:

“I am giving myself to love. Not the worship I offered the Old One, not the awe I felt for the spices.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 233)

She knows that she has to pay for it but she admits:

“If you can stand the pain, you will be granted your desire.” (Divakaruni, The Mistress of Spices, 222)

Raven and Tilo represent the concept of relationship between two different cultures but at the end of the novel they represent the blend of these cultures. With her new name, Maya, she has acquired a new identity which completely liberates her from the role of Mistress of Spices. Marriage between two individuals belonging to the same culture sometimes runs into difficulty, but when we come to inter-cultural marriages, the problems of marital discord, conflicts and tensions get still more serious for the reasons that persons of different cultural backgrounds have different
values, beliefs, customs, traditions and style of life. The married partners come together through marriage with all the `peculiarities of their personalities and try to evolve a new ethos which suits their convenience. As such, the personality adjustment of such couple is a bit difficult. But if the partners in marriage are not extraordinary introspective and are not able to sort out their differences, the couples coming from diverse cultural backgrounds face a problem more severe than the one faced by the people coming from a similar cultural background.

The inter-cultural or inter-racial marriages are basically unwholesome and most of the times, the persons who come to take part in them, often find themselves maladjusted. This is because of the fact that marriage within a particular culture has its own special liabilities and problems. In substantially dissimilar marriages, personal, social, physical and economic factors begin to operate upon the spouses and lead to their success or failure to varying degrees. As such, inter-cultural marriages are full of insurmountable problems. There may be the problems of racial conflicts, religious faith and philosophical differences, and even the customs and laws governing divorce.

It is well-known that cultural dimension is a significant aspect of inter-cultural marriages. If a person marries someone from another culture, it is
presumed that he or she knows the difference in culture and is ready to sort out the initial problems of understanding and adjustment. But tension gradually sets in when the time comes for the actual acceptance and sharing of interests, proprieties and even ideas. The straining of relations begins to assume importance when the partners regard their particular cultural values superior to the others and begin to talk loudly about the superiority of their background. Moreover, it is rather difficult to accept fully the validity of a value system to which one is not born. As such, the attitudes of individuals become important determinants of the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage.

“Purple Is All Done”

This mood echoes in the under-noted text of Ann Bhalla’s ‘A Season for All Things’. Five-Year-Old Pascal is the pivot of the lives of those she holds most dear. Her parents, whom she idolizes, are headed for a disaster when dashing young American, Tom Carter, appears on the scene. The distance between her father and her beautiful mother Chantal starts increasing with the appearance of Carter resulting in mounting hatred in her for Carter. Will Tom Carter succeed in luring Chantal to leave Ranjit and Pascal, and the country Chantal has grown to dislike, to make a new life with him? Roopa, Pascal’s beloved grandmother is longing for an opportunity to eventually
oust Chantal from her son’s and granddaughter’s lives and affections. Will the events lead Roopa to success? Sarika, the sister of Ranjit’s friend, is Pascal’s adored young teacher. Shy and innocent, she has been silently in love with Ranjit for years. Will Chantal’s dalliance with Tom Carter pave the way for the fulfillment of Sarika’s dreams and hopes! Will Sarika be able to achieve a permanent place in the life of the man she loves and the child whose affection she wholeheartedly returns? All these questions will be analyzed here through the characters of Ann Bhalla’s ‘A Season for All Things’, with special reference to the feelings of intra-cultural and cross-cultural relationships.

Before analyzing the text and the incidents occurring in the novel, breaking down the tendencies of the characters in the novel would be more appropriate. The events revolve around Chantal who is the perpetrator of all the successive events.

Under-mentioned reference of Iroquoian people will be appropriate to increase the visibility of Chantal’s character.

John David in the book ‘Paulin Johnson, the Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature’ tells about ‘Iroquoian people’ formerly living along the Mohawk River in New York State is known as Mohawk people. The Mohawk name Paulin Johnson used, “Tehationwake” 2 (pronounced
dageh-eon-wageh), means “double wampum” or “double life” in the Mohawk language. Pauline Johnsom assumed her great-grandfather’s name, Tekahionwake. She alleged that:

“My name Tekahionwake belongs to my family. Johnson is only a baptismal name that was first used by my great-grandfather. The Indian word signifies, literally, ‘double life’, meaning it is hard to kill a Tekahionwake. You have not killed him once till you have killed him twice!” (83)

Pauline’s great grandfather had the name Tekahiwnwake before he was baptized as an Anglican Christian and given the name Jacob Johnson.

“Although Pauline was never formally adopted into her Mohawk family clan, Pauline used “Tekahiwnwake” to call attention to her Native ancestry.” (83)

The name used, “Tekahiwnwake”, for “double life” is a fitting name because in a way, Chantal leads a double life. Although Chantal is an American, where she stays after marriage is largely non-Native, that is India. At the same time, Chantal thinks of assimilating herself in the adopted land as purely Native, She even marries an Indian. Chantal is a bourgeois and does fit into the white world, but she tries her ways to India and finds that she has to assert her Native identity when she is in Indian society much
to her chagrin. Because of the “double” life she lives, Chantal has to deal with Indian culture and people who do not understand her Native heritage, which is American one. Some non-Native people even think that Natives are wild savages. These people are sometimes puzzled by her “civilized” manner. On a visit to a club, she meets a friend of her husband from US, with whom she marries and divorces her Indian hubby.

To have a look on Ranjit’s and Chantal’s early relationship, undermentioned extracts from ‘A Season for All Things’ has been espoused. Now, come August, almost three months since they has been “going steady”. She hasn’t been able to break through the conventional code of behaviour that Ranjit has set for himself towards a young unmarried woman and she was getting restless. She has invited him often to come up to her apartment but he would always refuse…:

“It’s not proper,” he would say, “I don’t want to spoil your good name. Besides what would people think?” (Bhlla, A Season for All Things, 107)

Here he is reminded of his father, who had always been his mentor who often told him in his growing-up years, “to treat every young girl as he would like his sister to be treated- with dignity and respect” (AST, 107). The result- Ranjit is diffident and filled with “Old World” courtesy to permit him
to go beyond kissing. But Chantal has invited him so frequently to her apartment only to evince his refusal. Ranjit’s traditions are nothing more than an inclination towards backward mentality in Chantal’s view; consequently she makes fun of his words and keeps uttering:

“What people?” she would laugh, “The guy at the door?” No one bothers about these things here. Come I’ll cook you a nice French meal and we can make mad passionate love after dinner. All night if you like.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 107)

After analyzing closely the nature of Chantal, here it is noticeable the presence of temperamental selfishness up to some extent in her behaviour. As it is a preferable part of western culture, so much so in Chantal. Having pre-martial sex is not a big deal in her culture but in case of Ranjit:

“As much as he wanted to take up her offer, he would curb himself, kiss her and shake his head no.” young women should not be taken advantage of”, his mother was fond of saying.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 107)

The August moon perhaps has something to do with a shift in his thinking and upbringing…. A sexy alluring “La belle Dame Sans Merci” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 107) Ranjit is mesmerized….The shimmer of August moon softly caress the planes and angles of her face etching it with
light and shade cracking into the proverbial armour of self control being sported by Ranjit. On the other hand Chantal is imploring God to fructify this meeting, and lo and behold, her unholy petition is immediately granted:

“Against all the teachings of her early Catholic upbringing uttered a quick impetuous prayer that this time he would not back off…. And to her vast surprise her hasty, unholy petition was immediately granted…. Shall we go up…. He had whispered his mouth close to hers....” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 108)

Human beings satiate this very many desires in varied manner. The implication of satiation of physical need varies with culture. As for his wont, Ranjit always tries his level best to maintain his distance from her in weak moments and “shake his head no” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 107). But Chantal has never left a single moment pass by without fanning the fire of desire for Ranjit. So in that weak moment she prays for her unholy desire. After that they make love frequently. “And being the type of person that he was, his upbringing precluded anything less” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 109). He has been taught that sex is supposed to come after marriage, but since he has reversed the procedure it does not mean that he will not honour the woman with a marriage proposal. But again, his upbringing and his traditions will not allow him to do so.
His proposal has to be preceded by his mother’s sanction that will not be in any way inclined to accept a foreigner into her family- an exercise doomed from the word go. Moreover, Ranjit has sworn that he will not get married to an American and although Chantal is not a US national, he knows that will be a “superfluous technicality in his mother’s eyes” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 109). On the plus side is the fact that he is not going to settle in the States, the other apprehension she has “voiced before his departure” and which he has promised would not happen.

Temperamental selfishness is also responsible for martial discord many a time. When they first make love, Ranjit is “innocent and unknowing”. Under Chantal’s discreetly expert guidance, Ranjit could make the impossible possible. Months later when they are married and living in India, Ranjit has looked up at her from a magazine he is reading, an “enigmatic look on his face” and asks her:

“Did you do a lot of horse-back riding when you were in your teens?”

“Yes” she said, surprised. “Why?”

“Oh, I just wondered.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 108)

Chantal’s answer allays his doubts. Later, she glances at the magazine’s contents, and is glad that she has sorted his query. Even after this incident,
Chantal does not tell him about her past. Here that can be considered fine, if anyone does not want to tell about one’s past, but one can regret in oneself. But Chantal is glad that Ranjit could not even guess about her past as she responds well on his query. This shows her cultural background where such things are trivial issues and nothing more than that. But on the other hand she is glad for keeping her marriage safe because if Ranjit would have known about her that she was not virgin when she met Ranjit, it could have destroyed their married life. Moreover:

“Ranjit was a virgin but Chantal was not…..” (A Season for All Things, 108)

The story gets entirely changed when Ranjit introduces Tom Carter, his new friend, to Chantal. The new friend of Ranjit brings in his own charms:

“Chantal seemed to undergo a metamorphosis whenever Tom was present. Her low pitched voice with its faint French accent would drop a notch and her normal, merry laugh would become a husky semblance of itself... They would speak in murmured undertones, exchanging constant sidelong glances full of hidden meaning that seemed to speak a language familiar only to them.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 7)

Varying degrees of Temperament cause emotional discord in marital relationship. Same is happening here, earlier when she was new to India,
office work consumed all of Ranjit’s time leaving nothing for Chantal. However by the time he realizes his mistake and it is too late to make amends. He has a mess with Chantal on Tom’s and Chantal’s shopping visit but he kisses on her cheeks and whispers in her ear at the dining table:

“Ask Ruksana to stay late with Pascal tonight. Let’s go out for dinner – just you and me,” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 30)

This dinner is aimed at patching up but he feels he should devote more time to mending fences to save his marriage after he senses the worsening of the situation. This incident reflects the deep – rooted inferiority complex of one of the partners where the other automatically tries to dominate. Following extract could aver that anyone who is assimilating in new venture also can feel an urge of prolonging ones Identity, now and then if not so often. Out of concern Ranjit sends Rita to accompany Chantal and that makes her very upset. Later her scheming mind strikes and she smiles inwardly feeling a stab of rancorous satisfaction in “getting even with Ranjit” (A Season for All Things, 44) for “foisting this visit onto her” (A Season for All Things, 44). She turns to Reeta and asks her:

“Ranjit and I are going out for dinner. Why don’t you both join us?” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 44)
This she does to overcome the flash of anger against Ranjit’s concern of sending Reeta to keep company with her. She feels humiliated:

“How dare he treat her like a child, deciding for her when she was to play and with whom?” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 43)

Chantal’s quest for identity is obvious in her behaviour. And with Ranjit’s suddenly improved behaviour, “The Bundle Theory of the Self” coined by David Hume gels well as he tries to behave as he used to in his early days of relationship with Chantal. The theory states like:

“Hume undertook looking at the Mind/brain identity. He investigated a person’s character and the nature of agency. Hume pointed out that we tend to think that we are the same person we were five years ago. Though we’ve changed in many respects, we might start thinking about which features can be changed without changing the underlying self. Hume, however, denies that there is a distinction between the various features of a person and the mysterious self that supposedly bears those features. When we start introspecting, ‘we are never intimately conscious of anything but a particular perception; man is a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in perpetual flux and movement’”. (1)
Later on when Ranjit comes to know that Chantal invites Rajesh and Reeta for the dinner even though she knows that it is supposed to be just them, Ranjit rage on this is a genuine thing when he adds bitterly.

“I should have asked Tom Carter to come along with us. I am sure you wouldn’t have thought of inviting anyone else then.”  

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 44)

Apart from the personal discourse, Ranjit appears to rely on the power of male chauvinism. He feels his ego bruised. Here I am reminded of a few words of an American song writer, singer and director Barbra Streisand articulated in an interview:

“A person would seem to be mean for no reason. He may not be a mean person. Maybe he is rude without being aware of it – that’s possible.’ (Barbra new.com, 2006)

These words describe aptly the mental status of Ranjit. His feeling of remorse from the morning fades as he tells himself angrily to stop trying to patch up. It is obvious that she is not suffering from a “lack of his company.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 45) He is a fool to care for the first time in six years, he considers the “possibility that perhaps his mother was right” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 45); he should not have married a foreigner and brought her out to India. Their values are so
different from ours, he thought. He couldn’t visualize any married Indian woman of his acquaintance permitting a man the liberty of public demonstration of intimacy.

The notion of alienation is too strong here; Chanal’s deportment makes him very disquieted. Especially the way Chantal refuses to go out with him to dine.

“As things stand, I am in no mood to go out for dinner myself. With you or anyone else for that matter.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 45)

A “Theory of Ethical Egoism” given by James Rachels, outlines the following argument most commonly touted in this favour:

“Each of us is intimately familiar with our own individual wants and needs. Moreover, each of us is uniquely placed to pursue those wants and needs effectively. At the same time, we know the desires and needs of the others only imperfectly, and we are not well situated to pursue them. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that if we set out to be ‘our brother’s keeper,’s we would often bungle the job and end up doing more mischief than good.”(532)

Similarly, if Ranjit would have known the basic issues of Chantal she had to face during the assimilation in an adopted land, everything might be fine.
But both of them were too busy in their own charted routine. Consequently, dismal unavoidable circumstances occurred in their lives.

Ranjit accepts her frequent emotional outbursts with a resigned acceptance of her abnormality due to alien culture. One day, it was “Friday – the 13th”, Ranjit wakes up with the superstitious thought that the day can not bring anything more in the shape of ill luck that what has already been dished out to him. His wife and he seem to have reached an impasse in their relationship that precluded even a discussion. His wife seems so remote and detached. Under her false façade of reserve, he senses the dormant discontent seething and bubbling which he hesitates to break through, scared as he is of the probable discovery and knowing intuitively that in some indefinable way it was linked to her friendship with Tom Carter. A tinge of change in the partner’s behavior can flare suspicions. Such demeanor of Chantal has also been alleged as the basis for egoism cum immorality. As third president of the United States Thomas Jefferson describes in his ‘Thomas Law of Self Love’:

“Self-interest, or rather self love, or egoism, has been more plausible substituted as the basis of morality. But I consider our relations with others as constituting the boundaries of morality. With ourselves, we stand on the ground of identity, not of relation, which last, requiring
two subjects, excludes self love confined to a single one. To ourselves, in strict language, we can owe no duties, obligation requiring also two parties. Self-love, therefore, is no part of morality. Indeed, it is exactly its counterpart.” (31)

As earlier Chantal always refrained from drinking hard liquor in her mother-in-law’s presence but at the time of dining on his mother’s birthday party, when he pours out whisky and soda for himself and his brother-in-law, he enquires of the women if they would like to refill their soft drinks. Roopa and Anjali nod their heads with “no thanks” but Chantal in defiance of her mother-in-law, twists around in her chair to face Ranjit and utters:

“Yes please. I’d like a gin and lime.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 27)

Ranjit raises his eyebrows at his wife, waits a moment for her to change her mind but gauging the adamant look on her face, he shrugs to avoid raking up an issue. Chantal is not a lady from his culture where women are supposed to keep mum when it comes to following the husband. She hails from a culture where one takes care of one’s interest first. And then Ranjit makes the drink and brings the drink to her. Hence proves that:

“Initially she did so to please him but now it was more a matter of habit” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 28)
Now as she is going steady with some other guy, her mother-in-law is the biggest element to head her towards such things. Being emotionally alone she starts searching for a companion in Tom. This manifests into a serious affair which converts into marriage later. Till that date, Ranjit’s innocence about this affair is shattered when Roopa, provokes by this act of Chantal, decides to tell everything to Ranjit in front of everyone. That narration of their malevolent adventure plants a seed of suspicion in Ranjit’s mind. His suspicion becomes confirm the day when he sees cigarettes packs in Ramu’s cupboard in the kitchen, when he goes there in search of a matchbox to light his own cigarette:

“Ramu do you have a match?... Yes Sahib here... Ramu said and reached up to a small cupboard at one end of the kitchen where he stored many of his personal belongings. … Ranjit looked on when Ramu fumbled at the latch and then took a hasty step back as the door swung free and a cascade of unopened Marlboro packets came tumbling out.…” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 65)

This is shocking for Rajit to see this quantity of expensive cigarettes that too in the cupboard of a domestic help. They are about 15. Without getting over exertive, he thinks better to ask Ramu about the whereabouts of these cigarette packets instead of keep guessing. So he asks Ramu:
“Ramu, where did you get these from? … Sahib, the American sahib
gives me one every time he comes here. … I collect them and when I
have around 20-30 packets I sell them at karol bagh. …” (Bhalla, A
Season for All Things, 65-66)

Ramu flusters that he has not stolen all these packets. He anxiously hopes he
is not going to get into trouble for accepting them. But he does not know that
after knowing the source of cigarettes, Ranjit will lose his cool. The full
implication of Ramu’s disclosure strikes him like a slap across his face.

Ramu’s disclosure makes it evident:

“Tom Carter had been paying almost daily visits to Chantal for God
knows how long. And she had not breathed a word to him about them
except once several months ago and then again just before his mother’s
birthday dinner.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 66)

Ranjit delves on the fact that Chantal is a Western lady and the very many
ways to move her from his affection. He invites trouble when he introduces
Tom to Chantal and asks him a favour in order to provide a good company
to his wife;

“She gets bored as home and since the embassy is so close it would
cheer her up if you dropped in now and then…” (Bhalla, A Season for
All Things, 66)
Ranjit’s trust in the institution of marriage in Indian society is noteworthy. He is seeped in Indian culture whereby a husband trusts his wife by all the means whether he is with her or not. I am reminded of a few lines of John Donne’s poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”:

“… As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix’d foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the’ other do. …

…Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And Makes me end, where I begun…” (Donne)

On analysis of Chantal and Rajit’s relationship it is clear that Ranjit believes- lovers cannot escape from each other as they are like the needles of a compass making circle always! Even if one dies or going away for some time the soul of one will be always circling around the other one forever!

He believes that his wife must not indulge in adultery. This demotivates Ranjit from shouting at Chantal even after knowing everything from Ramu. Ranjit pours himself a stiff brandy, but he does not know how to brook the topic of cigarette packets and Tom’s visits. He takes recourse to TV to come out of the burst of anger and anguish. This incident shows Ranjit’s way of acculturation with Chantal to distance her from any kind of nostalgia and anomic feelings. Ranjit has tried to make things easy for Chantal by giving
her the space desired by hr. Further, it can be said that caring is mutual. And he always tries to avoid trivia for the sake of keeping everything fine between husband and wife. Consequently, this time also he does not want Chantal to get upset or to prove him too besought by sick mentality. He asks Chantal, “Would you like a brandy” (67) for something to say. He adds:

“Chantal I don’t want you to attend these theatre meetings any longer. It sounds like a lot of childish nonsense. Besides, I don’t think Ma would approve.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 67)

Here ‘The Samkhya Theory’ is very much applicable in describing Ranjit’s character. This story says: “That Man (Purush) and Woman (Prakriti) are eternal and there exists spirituality in the two. Motherhood is considered supreme. It is the woman, who bears a child, cares and nurses it, trains it with her tender hands. So it is said that the hands that rock the cradle rule the world.” (ignca.nic.in) There is no position to match a mother. That is why Ranjit gives importance to his mother every time over his wife Chantal. But it does not mean that he is entirely careless towards Chantal. He leaves the house of his mother and shifts to a new home for them to keep Chantal happy. Juxtapose, after hearing Ranjit’s words, Chantal’s face flames with anger. Give up the chance of meeting Tom just because a woman, who despises her will not approve? She replies in fury:
“That’s nothing new. She hasn’t approved of anything I’ve done ever since I’ve known her. I don’t care how childish or nonsensical it sounds. I’m going to carry on attending them. …” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 67)

Somewhere deep, Ranjit is expecting this answer from Chantal. But he is gaming with hope, perhaps everything will be fine. But destiny is governed by chance. The discord in Ranjit’s life makes his life more of a bane—an unavoidable suffering. Thence to keep pace with Chantal he articulates:

“Why are you being so stubborn about it? Is there another reason why you want to continue? Perhaps it gives you a chance to meet a certain person who is no longer welcome in my house?” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 67)

Chantal stands up abruptly and goes out of the room without batting an eye to him. Ranjit’s thoughts run over and over the sequence of events from Chantal’s shopping trip with Tom to his discovery this evening of Ramu’s collection of cigarette packs. He freezes when realization dawns on him that this deception has been going on for months”

Oh! A clandestine friendship even when she was beholden in his arms!

He has meant to take a firmer stand just now and tells her that he is aware of Tom’s visits, that she is not to meet him ever again, either here at home or
outside. But he is afraid of the expression of the depth of her feelings for Tom, and the death knell it might ring. This is a high-ranking evidence that Indian ethos stands high as against Western ethos, notwithstanding the testing times being forced by the home institution wrought upon it by the augmentation of women’s liberties and rights long denied to her in the tardy evolution of past generations. An English daily of San Jose on March 24, 02, reports that:

“The west is now shrugging out at marriages. Unfortunately the institution of marriage, upon which the solid structure of society is based, is dwindling, shaking and tumbling.”

It is depressing and dejecting. The British Cabinet split on the point that the marriage institution e promoted and kept alive. But here Chantal’s behaviour is suggesting else. Pascal doesn’t like Tom’s frequent visits at home so Tom and Chantal decides to postpone their meetings till Pascal goes back to school. But Tom wants to meet her daily. Resultantly, he suggests:

“If I can’t come there, makeup some excuse and meet me here…”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 33)

Chantal quips “I’ll think about it.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 33)

She thinks of ways and means to fructify this paramour ship:
“It seemed like a large part of her married life had been taken up in pleasing Ranjit and trying to conciliate his mother. She was tired of doing both. From now on, she decided she was going to do whatever she pleased. And if her husband and mother-in-law objected it would be just too bad.”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 33)

The collection of social roles that a person might play, are known as either the social identity or the cultural identity.

“Progressive strength in the ego identity can be charted in terms of a series of stages in which identity is formed in response to increasingly sophisticated challenges.” (Cote and Levin, Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture, 22)

The past six years has not been turbulent ones by her standard. She wonders if her sacrifice would ever be noticed by her husband and mother-in-law and live life in “their country”, at least her mother-in-law should, she mentally amends. She has reached the end of her patience bearing the restrictions put upon her. From now on, she is going to live life according to her terms and if that makes them unhappy, then perhaps it will be a retribution for some of the distress she has to undergo to conform to “their mode of life”. (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 34)
It can be commented here; probably Chantal may have been following this Irish belief:

“Only the Irish think that the quality of relationship is important and now the marriage.”

It is only the USA that is stressing on the values of a family life and wants to keep intact the family and promote marriages. A world super power, as USA is, it has its weakest link in family life and needs to strength it. Italy, the Roman Catholic country, has a few children (9%) born out of wedlock. It is a common sight to see live-in relationships but they tend to marry after the first issue. On analyzing these views of different cultures, it can be stated with surety that all the religions truly believe in the ‘Institution of Marriage’. The growing tendency is unhelpful for social life and individual welfare. It is mainly due to the ego-centric approach to life. More dalliance into materialistic life has made man individualistic. He has started thinking of his own ease and comfort, becoming intolerant of anything that does not suit his mood. Marriage is a social obligation and the modern man is in no mood to fulfill it. Out of personal whims and desires, they want to make a world of free permissive mixing to indulge in relentless lust. This is a blind lane. The quality of mutual relationship does not confine in the two alone but it also depends upon their relationship with the society, which they at present
ignore. This is the reason that the marriages or the unions do not last long unlike the Hindu marriage, which has a religious metaphor, the union with God.

A belief in the union in consequent births till final salvation makes the marriage a lifelong sacrifice. It is true that not all marriages are realized in relation to the goals in all religions, yet the norms stand strong. A belief in these religious norms has made life easier and worth living and the society- a pleasant abode of dedication with love and compassion leading to equanimity.

Family has been considered a very important unit constituting the social structure of mankind. Marriage is the pivot of this institution. It is the most significant event of life. It influences the social and cultural growth of society. Surprisingly, all the world scriptures have expressed similar views on marriage. Hebrew scripture (Genesis: 2-18) says that the institution of marriage is sanctioned by God. The Christians also consider marriage an “honourable state”, instituted by God in the time of man’s innocence.

“What the Lord has thus ordained, Let man not put asunder”

(Genesis: 1)

They believe that the causes of marriage are three:

1. procreation of children and their nurtures,
2. the remedy against sin and social commitment,

3. charity,” (Lahiri, [www.indolink.com](http://www.indolink.com))

In Islam, Quran 30-31 says that though marriage is a civil matter, it is one of the signs of God. “Among His signs is this, which He created for you mates among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquility with them.”

“The Hindus consider that marriage is destined and is made in heaven.” It serves three purposes:

1. Dharma (duty towards family and society),

2. Procreation, progeny,


In Hinduism no ritual can be preformed without wife. Marriage facilitates a representation of woman in rituals. Theologically, the Hindus regard the marriage as a spiritual journey and a quest to be one with the Infinite. Husband and wife are like a single spirit in the two bodies. “Hinduism stresses upon the spiritual equality of man and woman. Shiva says to Parvati, ‘Half of my body is created from half of your body.’ This is Ardhangani; based on equal partnership.”

This renders why Ranjit believes and trusts his wife Chantal, because he is born and brought up in a Hindu family where wife has an important place in the family. The Christians too have the idea. The traditions relating to
marriage and the performance of marriage are more revealing than any other performance. Shakespeare says on marriage:

“Marriage is a matter of more worth than to be dealt with by attorney-ship.” (1 Henry VI 5.5.50-1)

In fact, marriage is a voyage packed with rituals and invocations of deities. It is mostly influenced by pervasive culture and symbolic ethos. In India, it is a special occasion as it is a land of intense heritage, folklore and mystique. Surprisingly, there exist some common threads in this ceremony, with difference of time and place, amongst the marriages of Hindus, Muslims and Christians and the like. These beliefs can lead Ranjit to offer his friend Tom Carter to meet his wife. Now Ranjit bitterly recalls that incident when he has requested Tom to call on his wife whenever he has a spare moment. But only “now and then”, Ranjit never has the faintest idea that Tom’s ‘now and then” will be frequent as the collection of Ramu’s packets of cigarettes indicates. On the other hand, Chantal, who tries hard to assimilate Ranjit’s culture starts losing charm of their married life and unknowingly goes towards an affair with Tom Carter who is sharing the same background as hers-the western one.

The participants in marriage are, thus, inclined to be irritable yet assertive. They try to look reconciled and show no antagonism in bed and yet they
drift towards dissolution of marriage- all an outcome of temperamental selfishness. Ingrained selfishness in Ann Bhalla’s ‘A Season for All Things’ leads Chantal and Ranjit to discord. Chantal finds a new friend but she never bothers herself to tell all this to her husband. She gives preference to Tom over Ranjit is sharing. As shown in following conversation of Rita and Chantal, Rita asks Chantal:

“What happened to the theatre group you were thinking of joining?”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 43)

And she answers,

“...I doubt anything will materialize at all.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 43)

“That’s just as well,” Rita mused, “Ranjit didn’t sound too keen about the idea when I told him you were thinking of joining it.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 43)

“Oh damn, Chantal thought uneasily, I didn’t mention it to him. It was certainly going to upset him, especially after the incident about the shopping trip.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 43)

It happens many a times. The main reasons behind this discord are lack of communication, failure to identify each other’s needs due to irreconcilable and diametrically opposite viewpoints. As portrayed in the novel, Chantal is
a sensitive, self-driven, advanced, Western woman. Ranjit, her husband like Gautama in ‘Cry The Peacock’ (1963) is a prosaic, intelligent, rational and worldly wise who accepts the established norms and values of society. He is cool, curious and comprehending but unimaginative man who lacks farsightedness to understand the strange behaviour of his wife and hence, dismisses her point of view.

In retrospect, Chantal thought the transition could have been facilitated they had been allowed to live independently but it comes as a shock to her when Ranjit says, halfway across the Atlantic, that they will be living with his mother.

“Why?... Chantal asked. “Can’t we get a place of our own?” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 36)

Ranjit’s response scares Chantal as she herself never had a happy life with her parents. Ranjit tries to allay her fears by saying that it is customary for a son to live at home and take care of his parents in their old age. It is one of the basis foundations of Indian culture. Dismayed, Chantal ponders over this. Perhaps, she thinks wistfully, Ranjit is right and “I will at last have a family of my own” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 37) because her own mother had stayed with a French Canadian and over looked the needs of her
daughter to cater to his whims. Her father returned to his native France and gradually lost touch with them.

Being straightforward, he does not understand the foresightedness of his wife Chantal when she conjectures bout her mother-in-law. Later, the cold behaviour of Ranjit infuriates Chantal. And she starts a rock-n-roll on the boat of sentiments and nostalgia when Ranjit comes home from office and setting aside pleasantries, he enquires about the dinner when Chantal was expecting an affectionate greeting:

“A hug if not a kiss… .” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 11)

Such a greeting can be expected by a West woods dolt. The Indian wives are not outspoken and tend to bury their feelings in their heart because they believe in adjustment. Such trivial issues create big hurdles among couples of cross-culture.

Martial breakdown is not a phenomenon which can be detached from the gamut of complex, social and cultural conditions within which it occurs. There is a considerable variation in the degree of marital stability and instability. Generally speaking, the irreconcilable discord is conditioned mostly by social conditions and personal dissatisfaction, disparity in attitudes and values, and the changing status and role of woman in contemporary society. From time to time, people have been attempting to
classify the numerous factors that make for unhappiness and failure in marriage. Had Chantal exercised promiscuity by informing Ranjit, she could have saved a lot of troubles. And when it gets revealed by her mother-in-law, Chantal’s face reddens with Ranjit, watching her:

“…He could see that she was losing her temper… . He wondered briefly why she was getting so upset, but then he could never fathom…” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 27)

Dr. Premala Bali in her research study entitled “Marital Maladjustment and Marriage Counselling” has reported that:

“Ignorance of spouse is one of the major causes of marital disharmony, others being deep-rooted incompatibility between the partners, and difference in the social and cultural background of the spouses.” (4)

These reasons given by Dr. Premala Bali are true here in case of Chantal and Ranjit. As Chantal is a French-Canadian woman and comes to India to settle her life with Ranjit, when they reach India, at the airport itself, “a male hand which had landed squarely on her breast…” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 17) makes her thinking cold about this new country. However, because of this, “her expression was momentarily marred by a look of disgust and distaste that she threw at the milling crowds around her, a look that seemed to include Roopa and Ravi too”. (Bhalla, A Season for
All Things, 17) On the other hand, Roopa has no idea that Chantal’s look of revulsion is resulted from that “groping male hand”. (17) Ray E. Baber mentions in his book ‘Marriage and the Family’ that:

“The conflict in marital relationship is not due to the deterioration of the moral fiber of men and women but due to the rapid change in their mode of living.” (173)

Thus, the factors responsible for breaking marital relationship are varied. Emotional problems prove fatal to blissful togetherness as much as infidelity, considerations of parental prestige and status, differences in the cultural background and philosophy of life, temperament and more personal behaviour patterns and attitudes. But more subtle causes, however, are selfishness and inability to understand the meaning of marriage. In any reckoning, however, temperamental incompatibility rank high as they touch almost the entire range of life:

“Chantal replaced the receiver and thought about ways and means to accomplish this. It seemed like a large part of her married life had been taken up in pleasing Ranjit and trying to conciliate his mother. She was tired of doing both. From now on she decided she was going to do whatever she pleased. And if her husband and mother-in-law objected it would be just too bad.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 33)
By the time passes by Chantal’s feelings of self identity gets stronger. Earlier she was eager to learn everything Indian, but now she has started searching a place for her own. From the vantage point of self-psychology, there are two areas of interest given by Cote and Levine in the book ‘Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture’:

“The processes by which a self is formed (the “I”), and the actual content of the schemata which compose the self-concept (the “Me”). In the latter field, theorists have shown interest in relating the self-concept to self-esteem, the differences between complex and simple ways of organizing self-knowledge, and the links between these organizing principles and the processing of information.” (24)

In India the role of the mother in raising a child is paramount. She provides tremendous physical and emotional contact and closeness to the child. From birth till the age of about four, the mother is all gratifying to the child. The mother is parenting from the ideal of all sacrificing – mother. Mother is not just an individual but often a group of people, who care for the child and symbolize the archetypal mother. But all these characteristics are lacking in the attitude of Chantal and lacking of all these characteristics catalyze to favour the cross cultural relationship.
Chantal’s injustice towards her husband and daughter, Pascal, is quite visible her as she is planning to meet her paramour that too at the cost of her own family. ‘A Season for All Things’ is all about Individuality and Community. These words of protagonist and other characters of the novel, elsewhere, are depicted in this oeuvre of Ann Bhalla. Following occurrence of the oeuvre is much of in favour of above statement:

“Roopa would personally serve her son and the offhandedly push the dishes towards her daughter-in-law.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 39)

The relation between an individual and society has been customarily perceived as inexorably antagonistic, constituting a source of potential, yet turbulent. Consequently, an individual is portrayed as having to come to terms with frequently inconsistent expectations of the community and contradictory, or stereotypical, social roles that the world imposes compulsorily. However, the writings of the philosopher Hannah Arendt remind us that it has not necessarily always been like that. Arendt in his book ‘The Human Condition’ indicates:

“…that during Roman times, the phrases ‘to live’ and ‘to be amongst men’ (inter homines esse) and ‘to die’ or ‘to cease to be amongst men’
(inter hominess esse sinere) were employed interchangeably as verbal equivalents.” (7-8)

In ‘The Human Condition’, Arendt comments on two dimensions that characterize the functioning of an individual in society:

“Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who came or will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.” (175-76)

Bhalla, in the novel ‘A Season for All Things’, has described this twofold character of human plurality in a vivid way, arguing that everyone gleans a common language to describe our affecting facts even though everyone keeps oneself in seeking one’s own identity. Much in the same vein, in the book ‘Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu’, David Swartz claims that:

“Bourdieu’s conceptual formulation does not oppose individual and society as two separate beings – one external to the other – but
constructs them “relationally as if they were two dimensions of the same social entity.” (96)

The question arises, then, why not abandons the limiting individual/society in favour of the

Social reality that exists both inside and outside of individuals, both in our minds and in things.” (96)

And opt for an Arendtian view of human plurality, operating on “the notion of shared differences” (Mary, G. Dietz, Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory, 236), as Ann Bhalla does in her oeuvre. Her oeuvre manifests, how diverse incidents throw light on the diabolical occurrences in the lives of people.

“It was past 5:30 when Ranjit came home.” Why is the house in darkness?” I hope you remembered that it’s Tuesday… .” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 11)

Earlier an ardent young man, Ranjit’s tone now is hectoring towards Chantal, his foreigner wife. The following words of Chantal; reveal her quest for assimilation in the alien field. Chantal was expecting a more affectionate greeting “a hug if not a kiss…” (11). She wondered what had happened to the guy she had met in the States almost seven years back. Further she replies:
“Yes, I remembered” she said wearily. “No meat”. (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 11)

Arendt explains that “what makes the masses difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its magnetism to collect and relate them.” (52-53).

And yet, the speaker knows to weave a web of interconnected relations that everyone is a part of. It functions like an ancient map with one’s genetic code to guide us through our annihilations, to show us who we are and where we are coming from. For no individual is entirely above or outside society. That is why Ann Bhalla calls the chapter “A Time to Gain and a Time to Move”, they could have learned to love each other but they chose to be askance.

Roopa Shergil, Ranjit’s mother, is a tall slim woman with a high aquiline knows and thin unsmiling lips. This is what Roopa look alike, same description is given by Bhalla for Chantal, “As tall as Roopa herself, slim and very beautiful” (17). At their first meeting Roopa greets her new daughter-in-law without enthusiasm. Ranjit oblivious to his mother’s “cold reception” of his wife adds fuel to the fire by throwing his arm protectively around Chantal and steering her through the crowd. Roopa trails after them
all, feeling left out and neglected, a slow anger replacing the earlier dread around her heart. Moreover, she is a window who lives alone and has a pent-up resentment due to the insinuating remarks of the spiteful friends and relatives. It is not an acceptable situation; they say that a widow with a grown-up married son should be allowed to stay by herself. Roopa would listen and silently agree. Long after the whispers has ceased, long after the novelty of her living arrangements has worn off, Roopa remembers the early humiliation she had to endure when her son moved to a house of his own. She does not blame him for his decision or for the resultant gossip. It is his wife who bears the brunt of her displeasure and of her account that she mentally chalks this up; adding it to the rest of the minus points held against her. She has never approved of her daughter-in-law and makes no effort to hide the fact.

Why does Roopa treat Chantal like an outcaste? Well, her son Ranjit’s betrothed hails from a racial group having light skin coloration, not having identical culture, community or religion and the prominent figurative disability – not her choice. The rest is inevitable – Chantal’s work is fraught with flaws from Roopa’s point of view. Consequently, whatever Chantal does, Roopa feels, it is different and not of her type. Accepting others with their peculiar differences is not anybody’s inborn quality but a social skill
and conscious decision that require effort and practice, and very often redefining what we know about ourselves as well. In the book, ‘Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach’, Martha Nussbaum claims:

“…even the emotions of love and care are to a large extent social Abilities, and not simply spontaneous or impulsive feelings” (265)

When Roopa comes to know that Ranjit has been selected for a year’s training programme in the United States, she gets thrilled despite the lurking fear at the back of her mind. What if he should marry an American girl and decide to stay back in America? The thought is too painful to bear. She worries about it for days and finally confronts him a week before his departure:

“Ranjit, beta, promise me one thing...you won’t marry an American girl and decide to stay in the States...Oh, Ma, That’ the last thing you should be concerned about. I have no intention of marrying any one yet-Indian or American...”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 15)

After hearing such words from his son Roopa’s soul rests at east. She is sure about the culture and her upbringing, that her son will always keep the promise he has made to his mother. Thence after Ranjit’s departure for the
states, and with her fears allayed by his assurance, Roopa indulges herself in her favourite pastime of finding a bride for him from her own community in the cream of Delhi society. That is why Roopa is more upset after receiving the so called “good news” of her son’s marriage. After going through the following lines, one can easily guess the wit of the author, through Ranjit’s words, upon culture tradition and religion:

“Ma, I have some good news for you … I got married this morning. And guess what? I kept my promise. She’s not American – she is French-Canadian. I know this is sudden and surprise, Ma. But I do love her and can’t bear to leave her behind”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 16)

These words are remarkable, for Ranjit tries to console his mother that he has not broken his promise by not marrying to an American girl. Simultaneously, he has shown his strong cultural background by not leaving Chantal behind. He keeps his promise to Chantal also and marries her. Unaware of Roopa’s shock and mindful of the long distance bill he will have to pay, he hurries up the call, switching to Hindi and speaking in a hearty tone of voice which is very unlike him. Even Roopa too does not know that he is trying hard to hide his nervousness under a seemingly jovial air. Further Ranjit says:
“Now Ma, you must be nice and accept Chantal. She is looking forward to meeting you and I am sure you are going to get along well. Especially since you have one thing in common – you both love me. I am sure you will become fond of her, Ma, once get to know her.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 16)

After pouring out these words Ranjit ends the call with a hasty goodbye. Roopa slowly replaces the receiver, too distraught for tears and aware of a feeling of deep loss, a feeling that she experienced only one before – at the death of her husband. Here, Roopa is not much concerned about the promise which Ranjit breaks; she is worrying about, now who will follow her family traditions, certainly not a French-Canadian girl. Through the years Roopa, keeps the embers of jealousy and dislike alive, telling her that Chantal has cheated her of what she thinks most precious. For her, “Chantal was a foreigner and could never be anything else” (A Season for All Things, 17). Certainly, she can never be the daughter-in-law she has hoped and prayed for, someone to fill the void left by her own daughter, whose marriage has taken her way to a new life in the home of her husband and in-laws.

Chantal’s departure paves a way for the dream of Roopa to bear fruit, thence materializes the union of Ranjit and Sarika – Roopa’s choice before Ranjit departs for the states. She is everything Roopa fancied for her daughter-in-
law. Hailing from similar background, assimilation will never be a problem. Roopa will have her way whenever it comes to addressing her friends and relatives. Ego – rather a perceived one – will never come in the way of relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Encountering the turbulent events, Sarika feels that Ranjit is the man for her; she should stand by him and be his strength as he should be hers as he is the connection she would have with her proverbial future family.

Here again, Bhalla’s family drama insinuates itself into a wider national narrative. Irish sociologist Tom Inglis cites a recent survey of seventy-four countries by the `Economist’ that examines nine different quality life indicators. Inglis wrote in his book `Global Ireland : Some Difference’ the survey found that Ireland was:

“The best country in the world” to live because it “successfully combines elements of the new (the fourth-highest GDP in the world in 2005, low unemployment, political liberties) with the preservation of certain cosy elements of the old, such as stable family and community life” (17).

Nonetheless, Chantal’s accusations of her husband and Tom Carter suggest that the new and the old are very much in conflict in her version of the new life with Tom, as “native aspirations”, the drive for individual success, and
the delirium of patios wall to wall fuel Anjali’s and Roopa’s anxieties about Ranjit’s social degeneration to the point that she abandons her husband and child. Thus, Ranjit soliloquy implicitly asks, along with Tom Inglis’ monologue:

“What is the nature of social bonding in a world where people increasingly see and understand themselves and relate to each other in terms of consumption and similar/different tastes, preferences and lifestyles? What does this do to families, groups and communities?” (28)

Ranjit still feels furious, when reminds of that day when he thought to clear all the doubts his mother kept mentioning about. He goes up to the theatre meetings and searches for Chantal and doesn’t find. He stands there abruptly, wondering what to do next. Then he remembers where Tom lives and heads to his place. Simultaneously, at Tom’s flat Tom and Chantal are keeping themselves busy into something which is strictly prohibited in Indian Culture.

“Tom had hoped so often that she would succumb to him and had been sorely disappointed … this time he was delighted when she sensuously nibbled hi sear and murmured in a husky whisper, Shall we go to the bedroom?” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 93)
In Chantal’s view she loves Tom and even if he doesn’t love her in return she will grab what she can out of this moment and worry about the consequences later. Here to satisfy her natural instincts she forgets that she is someone’s lawfully wedded wife. Ranjit takes the stairs two at a time. He rings the bell and waits for a while but no one comes to the door.

“Relived, he half turned to go… That’s that, he thought…No one is there… I can go back and tell Ma how wrong she was.”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 93)

To finish it for once and all he turns back and presses on the doorbell again and let is ring continuously on. After ignoring the first ring this time Tom decides to answer it,

“Damn! I’d better go and get rid of whoever it is.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 94)

Tom is shocked to see Ranjit. He enters the living room, looking around for some evidence that his wife has been there. Then he finds Chantal in his bedroom. They stares at each other for a moment, disbelief on her face, pain etches on every feature of his “an expression that would haunt her for the rest of her life” (94). Even after all this Ranjit asks her:

“Get your clothes on; you are coming home with me”

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 94)
Chantal emerges with pale-faced and ready to go with Ranjit. But Tom is by her side in two strides. “You are not going anywhere” (A Season for All Things, 95) and he proposes her “I want you to stay. I love you and want to marry you” (A Season for All Things, 95). Chantal gets confused that “If it was only a matter of wanting to have an upper hand over Ranjit” (A Season for All Things, 95). Instead of feeling apologised, she is finding ways to stay with Tom and not giving a second thought to an adage `An apology is the superglue of life. It can repair just about anything’. But she is startled to see how serious Tom really was. After getting this assurance that Tom is serious about her she utters:

“I have to get Pascal.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 95)

Ranjit looks at them, his nostrils flaring. Even after hearing and seeing all this he decides to give one more chance to Chantal. He is doing so because he understands that she is from another culture and all this is not a big deal in her culture that is why he wants to keep clam and take her back to home and says:

“Pascal is not going anywhere. If you want her, you would better come home with me.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 93)
But Tom convinces her somehow for not to go with him. Ranjit stands there for a moment longer and leaves, “slamming the front door shut behind him”, and with this closed door he shuts the door of their relationship also.

As if in reply to the need to shape actively a social world, Arendt in his book ‘The Human Condition’ coins the “vita activa” (7). In Arendt’s analysis, the “vita activa” is made up of three linked activities: labor, work and action, out of which the last one is given the highest priority. Here in the trio of Ranjit – Pascal-Tom, Chantal gives preference to the last one and elopes with him. Claiming Chantal, she gives preference to Tom over Ranjit for she already knew that the citizens of her OWN COUNTRY – each DEED and EXPRESSION - tell the stories of HER LIFE, stories that constitute the collective “storybook of mankind” of “shared authorship” (184). In “A season for All Things” the “vita active” manifests itself in everyone’s personal expression, the common good and collective memory alike. In each case, however, “vita active” means being “actively engaged in doing something…in a world” (22).

Following extract from the book manifests the same notion in the couple’s life from Ranjit’s point of view. Once Pascal’s teacher Sarika Chawla arranges a Parents-Teacher-Meeting, but on way back home, Chantal says teasingly:
“I do believe that the girl fancies you.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 85)

Ranjit at one time will have made a light-hearted rejoinder but now he flushes angrily:

“Don’t tar every one with the same brush … Indian women still believe in the sanctity of marriage. Their own and everyone else’s.

(Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 85)

The speaker is assuming responsibility for others simply because they occupy the shared social space reveals a vital aspect of an individual or group dynamic: namely an ethical one. Walker in her book `Moral Understanding: A Feminist Study in Ethics’, states:

“The fact that such a mechanism could come to the surface at a gathering where people were not related to one another either by blood or deeper bonds proves that some sort of communal responsibility seems to be an intrinsic component of any social relations.” (238)

Furthermore, it is in politics that “vita activa” (7) becomes accomplished “at its most dignified” as ‘the realization of human plurality’ and “sharing of the world” (Dietz, 236) but only as long as “we can put ourselves in the place of others, in a manner that is open, communicative, and aware of individual differences, opinions, and concerns” (Dietz, 237). Meehan’s
poem “Hunger Strike” signifies an attempt to restore this original, communication sense of “sharing of words and deeds” by means that involve respect for each individual (Arendt, 198).

It is all about our upbringing and the culture in which we brought up. On one side it is Chantal who leaves Ranjit for Tom. She does not bother about all those efforts which Ranjit made to keep her happy and assimilated in an adopted land. On the other side it is Sarika, who even after all these years, keeps loving Ranjit and ready to adopt his proposal by going against her family. She takes the action to go with Ranjit and Pascal. And the novel “A Season for All Things” probes “this special relationship between action and being together” (Arendt, 23). Quoting Arendt’s claim that “in distinction to strength, which is the gift and the possession of every man in his isolation against all other men, power comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action; and it will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse and desert one another.” (Arendt, 24) In her book ‘The Power of Feminist theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity’, Amy Allen argues that power and action have not only collective but also relational character (Allen, 100). Allen points out rightly that “action is constitutive of the public, political realm and… power is the result of the collective efforts of actors.” (101) That is why the female
speaker of “A Season for All Things”, Sarika does not locate herself on the margins of the family; she assumes the collective voice of her and herself in unison of Ranjit and Pascal, as if feeling legitimized to speak on the behalf of others. It happens because the persona identifies with the community’s code; she shares its rage and accepts their values as her own. The community gets united around the self-sacrificial act; nonetheless, the reluctance of her father seems to imply a different interpretation, making society responsible for his rejection to marry Ranjit- a divorcee and father of a seven year old girl. The unwillingness of the parents negotiate with Pascal is disapproved by Sarika. Sarika’s uncompromising attitude upsets her parents, but she manages somehow to marry her lover Ranjit. Arendt claims that acting together for the common good is the utmost expression of the human condition (Arendt, 7). Such humane act of Sarika resonates loudly: the sound of the dustbin lid tinkling signifies the social code of the whole community but also parents’ disobedience. But all is fair in love and war so Sarika is.

Drawing upon Amartya Sen, he once argued that “political rights are important”. But being societal the words of Nussbaum in her book ‘Women and Human Development’ are worth to mention here:
“Social rights are important as well – not only for the fulfillment of needs, they are crucial also for the formulation of needs. And this idea relates, in the end, to the respect that we owe each other as fellow human beings.” (Nussbaum, 96)

In the context of this novel, human rights become the visible and social manifestations of humanity that define the whole community – that is Hindu culture in this reference – and from which people can draw their collective empowerment, as Sarika does for the sake of her choice and to give better guardianship to the little girl Pascal.

Sarika’s character operates on syntactically parallel, repeated structures to imitate the monotonous sound of the drums and the regular pace of steps during marches. Then she undertakes her own personal strike that is an extension of the fulfillment of the choice. In doing so, she decides to turn her back on life. And say yes to Ranjit.

The women characters of the novel are very sensitive; they are able to sense the things happening around. Like Roopa noticed at once that her foreigner daughter-in-law is going steady with someone other than her son. The old woman comes to rescue her daughter-in-law from her withdrawal from the life in this house like negligence of everyday chores etc… The wise woman recognizes the symptoms of what the other wise woman defines as
“worldlessness” or “the loss of world” (Arendt, 115). She reminds the speaker that:

“A dignified free being… shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others… by… human powers of practical reason and socialbility” (Nussbaum, 72).

Here after it can easily be noticed the alienated feelings of Chantal in a foreign land. Chantal, has accepted her extra marital affair with Tom in front of her husband and mother-in-law. And just elopes with Tom Carter, the man she loves, moreover, a man from her own community. In wild desperation of her lovemaking with her lover Tom, she has to loose her daughter Pascal. It is not that Chantal does not love her daughter. She suffers from guilt and loneliness and realizes that she had lost her daughter by her mistake. Her longing for her daughter is clearly revealed in the incident where she stood in the garden for a moment, near the stone bench that Pascal used to sit on, then stooped and ran her hand over it as if she is some way communicates with her daughter by doing so. Her basic feminine instinct of a mother is clearly brought out in this incident. She made all possible efforts to reach out her daughter including numerous calls to Pascal, going to Pascal’s school to meet her. Before leaving India with Tom, she went to meet Pascal for last time but Roopa tells her that Pascal had been very upset
because Chantal had left her to fulfill her own desires. Not wanting to cause any more distress to her daughter she leaves home before Pascal returns. She tells Roopa:

“I will still try and explain things to her in a letter. She must never think that I have abandoned her without putting up a fight.” (Bhalla, A Season for All Things, 147)

After so many years when she comes to know about her ex-husband’s arrival in the same city she is dwelling now. She has called up him to meet him for knowing about his life and especially about her daughter Pascal. But his silence makes her crash through the windshields of her trauma. In her comatose state, Chantal floats between Time Past and Time Present. The narrative meanders through Chantal’s life, throwing up startling facts about her immediate family, and her past family. It brings to the fore of her anguish, her love – hate relationship with her mother-in-law and her failed relationship with her ex-husband.

Had they both been in the know of these remedies of relationship problems or emotional infidelity then they could have back tracked their follies, and could have helped each other in saving their marriage. After analysis of Ann Bhalla’s oeuvre following are the Causes of Infidelity or Extra-Martial Affairs:
• Inability to cope with cultural or ethnic differences.

• Disappointment that one partner hasn’t grown in the same way.

• Unrealistic expectations about marriage.

• Curiosity.

• Lost sense of fun and excitement in the marriage.

• Addiction to physical intimacy.

• Inability to accommodate partners’ needs, interests or expectations.

• Inability to communicate one’s own interests, needs or desires.

• Boredom with the marriage, work, life, the relationship, or the routine.

• Lack of verbal skills or motivation to solve relationship problems together.

• Taken for granted attitude.

Concluding, men and women have different reasons to go for infidelity. Writes Dr. Lusterman in ‘Infidelity: A Survival Guide’: “…women are more likely to link sex with love”, as Chantal does.

“Men and women often seek different things when they become involved in extramarital activity.” (6)

While “men’s involvements are more often primarily sexual”, as in the case of Ramesh. Dr. Lusterman in his book ‘Infidelity: A Survey Guide’ says:
“This is not true for all men and women. In other words, not all women are looking for emotional attachments. And, the cause of infidelity for men isn’t always to satisfy a physical need.” (14)

Life certainly has its challenges, but little compares to the monumental task of healing from infidelity. Ranjit tries it hard but does not succeed. And because affairs shatter trust, many seriously contemplate ending their marriages. So is here.
Works Cited


