Chapter Three

East-West Connection: Fusion and Conflict

The clash between two cultures, religions and hearts is natural due to their time, space, climate and outlook. Can an American know the heart of an Indian? Can a pauper know the heart of a landlord? In a town meeting, can the former speak on behalf of the latter? Or vice versa? This question of representation plagues minority writers everywhere. For whom do they speak? Whenever they produce a written word, they are presumed to be doing so on behalf of someone, representing someone. Simply by virtue of their position, they are endowed with such responsibility and power. One need not be of the postcolonial heritage to encounter this phenomenon, however. A recent magazine article describes Toni Morrison's situation:

People honoured for making up stories or poems or plays are then expected to make pronouncements, in front of packed houses, on public issues. As an African-American woman, Morrison has faced such expectations constantly. "Most of the questions I get after readings or talks," she says "are anthropological or sociological or political. They are not about literary concerns." (Gray 65)1

Thus, these writers face daunting decisions: With all this sociological influence potentially at their disposal, what should be their role? Indian writers living and writing abroad do not escape such questioning. Should they portray India as they—now departed for decades—see it, or should they try to strip themselves of the Western influence that must necessarily have entered their
sensibility? Is it their duty to speak on behalf of their native compatriots—or should they write only for the literary value—with never an eye towards ethnicity? Invariably, post-colonial writers find themselves at the centre of such controversies. And no wonder. As writers, they occupy a much-ballyhooed position, where they hold the audience of not only their countrymen, but also their hosts. Because they are minority writers in the Occident, their voices ring out from the corners as if they were the elected spokespersons for their cultural groups. The fallout is easily anticipated. The authors are generally judged on the basis of one major criterion: their success at representing the old country and their readers. For the critics of these writers, literary concerns fall secondary to sociological ones. And at least, at a cursory glance, compared to Mukherjee's performance, Markandaya achieves stellar success at this venture. While the former condemns some Indian practices, the latter glorifies the Indian life. While the former is faulted for selling out to the Western mentality, the other is praised for a sympathetic depiction of her subject. A closer study reveals, however, that neither artist writes from a purely Indian or Western perspective. Both writers defy the immigrant's expectations of representation.

The reason for the expectations is understandable. For the entire colonial period, and usually through the post-colonial, these groups have been objectified. They have been observed, interpreted, and analyzed by their colonizers. For centuries, the world heard the white man's observations of their lives. In Western eyes, India became a land of ancient mystics and Indians a people of ridiculous
superstitions. The Indian people were thought amusing, but not necessarily intelligent. Their creations, like the Khajuraho temples, were deemed exotic for all the acrobatic, erotic sculptures, but the architectural achievements of those same temples went largely unnoticed. Thus, Indians were (and would be for centuries since) perceived as a spiritual, but not scientific, people. India became known as a place with a luminous past, but a dark present and an even gloomier future. Here, an occasional wise man in a loin cloth would be seen standing importantly above the dirty, poor, masses, but that was really the extent of the positive recognition Indians were to receive. The old India was a home of jungles, maharajas, and holy men. In a more modern setting, it becomes a land of lepers, a chaotic, corrupt government and, somehow, deep spirituality. Like a patient lying on a table, India found herself thus objectified, time and again, observed from without. Often, these premature conclusions led to stereotypes that to this day breed racial tension, misunderstandings, or worse, political subversion. Thus, when a writer of Indian origin speaks, and is heard, she breaks a millennium of silence and objectification. Finally, the writer defines herself. No longer merely a character in someone else's story, she tells her own story.

The complication arises when the author's audience assume that instead of her own, she tells their stories, as well judging from much of the published criticism, the assumption among the critics is that as the most outspoken and influential members of their ilk, the writers should function as their representatives. Finally, they can set the record straight. Through them, the entire
group can gain validity; they can become subjects instead of objects, and achieve a far more dignified status. These writers can help them "represent" themselves. While it is not difficult to see how the authors can be expected to become the ambassadors for the community, this notion of "representation" is most problematic. Whose India, whose immigration experience, and whose America should they represent? Should it be the experiences of the largest number of Indian immigrants? Or, should it be simply the India the author has known, even if it does not reflect the India of the masses? Perhaps, since this is their big chance, they should focus on salvaging India's image, or on de-orientalizing a much-orientalized India. Further, critics often believe that the goal of de-orientalizing India can only be achieved if the author herself knows India as it really is, and not as the colonizers have portrayed it, as the "other" and the "exotic." This is where the authors themselves come under scrutiny. One wonders, for example, if Markandaya is even capable of representing the real India. After all she hails more from the Western tradition of writing than from the Eastern. Her influences seem to be Wordsworth and Coleridge, rather than Kabir and Kali Das. *Nectar in a Sieve*, for example, begins with a quote from Coleridge, "Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, / And hope without an object cannot live." Critics have wondered if she, immersed in their influence—and thus probably their mentality—could have even known the hearts of the people she wrote about.

The same incredulity is expressed about Mukherjee. How can this highly-
educated, wealthy woman from a prominent upper-class family in Calcutta know anything about the plight of the average Indian immigrant? Like Markandaya, Mukherjee does not seem nearly common enough to represent the common person. The only difference between the two authors is that while Markandaya gets accused of glorifying India, Mukherjee is taken to task for being unfairly critical of it. Markandaya's pastoral landscapes are as troublesome to some as Mukherjee's dreary city-scapes are to others. Ultimately, though, the two stand defensive on the same platform: both are said to reveal minds that are overly colonized. Essentially, both are accused of not portraying (representing) India authentically enough.

We would be hard put to discuss the notion of authenticity without first understanding in detail its most relevant counterpart orientalism. Ever since Edward Said used this term, it has kept the colonizing world on the defensive. For Said, orientalism is a "system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" (Said 133). This is the mechanism with which the West makes sense of the East. Crudely, it is a set of stereotypes which, applied to any new observations, provide a familiar, comfortable way to analyse the subject. For instance, once orientalism deems Hindus (and Hinduism) fatalistic, all practices of Hinduism will be judged within the parameters of that perceived fatalism. What has emerged is a myth almost entirely uncontested and unchallenged:

... there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy,
for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, in theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and rhetorical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and biological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national and religious character.

Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic learned not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections. (Said 134)

But this is not to say that "the Orient," a man-made concept, in reality does not exist. On the contrary, "One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away" (Said 133). Far from "blowing away," this phenomenon of orientalism has given birth to a battery of stereotypes about the East that, divorced from reality, still continue to inform our biases. This body of generalizations—orientalism—became the sole means of making sense of the East. As Said puts it, the orientalising efforts of the colonizing era have created:

a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés or learning about the East, and other schools of thought at large in the culture. Now one of the important developments in nineteenth-century, Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient-its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness-into a separate and unchallenged coherence. (Said 143-44)
Anindo Roy, a critic of Mukherjee's works, asserts that she subconsciously subscribes to orientalism and thus, in spite of her generally good intentions of setting Indians apart from Americans, only succeeds in perpetuating the oriental stereotype. Too many of her observations are laced with the Western perspective, with "orientalism." He finds evidence in Mukherjee's *Days and Nights in Calcutta*:

A Hindu writer who believes that God can be a jolly, potbellied creature with an elephant trunk, and who accepts the Hindu elastic time scheme and reincarnation, must necessarily conceive of heroes, of plot and pacing and even paragraphing in ways distinct from those of the average American. [*Days and Nights* 286]. (Roy 128-29)

Roy contends that anyone who can describe Ganeshji as a "jolly, potbellied creature" and the Indian sense of time as "elastic" is clearly voicing Western thought. Here, Hindu gods once again become silly and amusing, and Indians once again imprecise and inexact. And worst of all, this time it happens through the eyes of an Indian.

But perhaps even more than such minor incidents, Roy objects to the entire construct of the immigrant "epic" experience as it relates to Indian immigrants in part, again, because it promotes "orientalism." This "epic" celebrates the immigrants' escape from an oppressive environment and their adaptation of the new home and culture, and ultimately, a new identity. He writes, "This experience is made possible as fictive construct by circumventing and suppressing the historical exigencies of Third World immigration" (128). He
argues that the post-colonial, immigrant myth succumbs to the same weakness as
the colonial one: both are camouflaged behind gross generalizations and
simplifications of historical truths, and, once committed to this system of beliefs,
must continue to uphold them. Roy notes that Mukherjee tries to form an
ideological alliance with the European immigrant who entered generations ago
through Ellis Island. He argues, however, that it is an uneasy friendship. Their
circumstances are simply too different. While the European's cultural heritage is
greatly admired, even revered, the other must defend his from historic prejudices
of inferiority and weakness.

In Mukherjee's vision, Indians, like any immigrants coming to the United
States, adopt a new nation, adapt to a new culture, and assume a new persona.
They are reborn. Thus, while the immigrants' origin changes from time to time,
the great American vision perseveres. But Roy insists that in lumping Indians
together with European immigrants, Mukherjee not only overlooks the actual
circumstances of an Indian's life and thus fails to speak for real Indians, but in the
process, reinforces the West's "orientalized" image of India. "Mukherjee fails to
question how this freedom to reinvent oneself stems from her own, urban,
English-educated, upper-class, postcolonial background," Roy asserts (131) 7.

Through this scathing critique, Roy fails to point out the particulars in
Mukherjee's works that misrepresent the experience of the common Indian. Nor
does he say why an upper-class person is more likely to have the freedom to
reinvent herself. (“After all, at least this immigrant, a child of two teachers from
India, feels completely transformed by the experience of relocating. Though not entirely conscious, the transformation process was no less dramatic, as the new society offered me, even in early adolescence, new rules of caste and social structure.”) What he does offer, instead, is vague discomfort in uniting with Europeans in this venture. Somehow, it seems to him a betrayal of the cherished Indian past.

One critic who does offer some specifics is Gurleen Grewal. She maintains that Mukherjee's white washing of the Indian experience shows in her lack of acknowledgment of the immigrants' social class. While Mukherjee imagines that all immigrants partake of the same opportunities, Grewal thinks the offerings are graduated, based largely on the immigrant's socio-economic status and education. Mukherjee projects her own privileges of wealth and education on to every immigrant, she thinks, revealing an inexcusable naiveté. Grewal calls this "the violent disjuncture at the heart of the novel:"

the (il)logic by which the identity of Jyoti, a peasant woman who has only just made the transition to an Indian city, yields-- without the benefit of the requisite elite education-- to the identity of the narrator, Jane Ripplemeyer, a middle-class American woman consorting with a white banker. To the extent that the novel does not consider this an anomaly, it is complicitous with the myth of the American Dream: It suppresses the issue of class. (183)

No common village woman who has not had Mukherjee's privileged upbringing could so easily float from one culture to the next, Grewal argues. Grewal calls this "suppress[ion] of the issue of class" disingenuous because, she
says, in reality the immigrants' social class has great impact on how they adapt to the new culture, and on what they bring to it. Ultimately, she finds that Mukherjee, in trying so hard to comply with America's vision of an immigrant nation, completely misrepresents the actual, various immigration experiences. When Mukherjee starts out by so blindly buying into the American mythos, it is inevitable that she would thus orientalize India, Roy argues. In order for the immigration story to work, in order for Mukherjee's voice even to be heard among the American literati with whom she really identifies herself, India must get orientalized. Roy asserts that "the politics of Mukherjee's aesthetics of immigration are evident in [her] selected representations; they are clearly deployed to highlight Jasmine's difference so that she can be constructed as the perfect agent of immigration" (134)⁹.

Roy's cry of disapproval has a chorus of agreement behind it. Critics have often said that Mukherjee exoticizes India just enough to appeal to an American audience without subjecting them to any discomfort. And indeed, there is evidence aplenty-especially in her early novels-to justify their complaints. Mukherjee tends to paint incredibly vivid pictures with the intent to achieve a single effect. At times, as in the following excerpt, that effect comes at the cost of a mimetically accurate representation:

Howrah Station took Tara by surprise…. Coolies in red shirts broke into the compartment and almost knocked her down in an effort to carry her suitcase. The attendant sneezed on her raincoat and offered to wipe up the mess with his dusting rag. A blind beggar who had slipped in and had begun to sing and rattle his cup was thrown bodily out of
the train ... *(The Tiger's Daughter 33)*

As in this passage, beggars and fortune-tellers do tend to make regular appearances in Mukherjee's works. Jasmine's opening sentence, in fact, reeks of orientalism: "Lifetimes ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur, an astrologer cupped his ears—his satellite dish to the stars—and foretold my widowhood and exile" (1). But ironically, all the while that Mukherjee gets the blame for orientalizing, she seems perfectly aware of this phenomenon of orientalism. Her characters understand the discrepancy between the world's perception of the East and the actual East. Time and again, we see *this* understanding filtering through Jasmine's observations and behaviour. Jasmine knows, for instance, that she has little in common with the New Age devotees who try to share with her their admiration of Eastern mysticism. Instead of the real India, they are fascinated with their imagination of things Indian. When Mary Webb, a woman who claims to have out-of-body experiences on a regular basis and to have been reincarnated from an Australian aborigine, tries to find in her a fellow mystic, Jasmine recognizes undiluted orientalism. At one point, Mary asks her if she believes in reincarnation. Yes, she too believes in reincarnation, Jasmine thinks in response to the New Ager, but a reincarnation in the form of the many lives she has lived. Unlike Mary Webb, Jasmine knows that over centuries and across continents, traditional concepts have to be re-defined and re-interpreted. Here she elucidates

[ 87 ]
her updated, more relevant form of reincarnation:

Jyoti of Hasnapur was not Jasmine, Duff's day mummy and Taylor and Wylie's au pair in Manhattan; that Jasmine isn't this Jane Ripplemeyer having lunch with Mary Webb at the University Club today. And which of us is the undetected murderer of a half-faced monster, which of us has held a dying husband, which of us was raped and raped and raped in boats and cars and motel rooms? (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 114)\(^{12}\)

And this is not the only instance of orientalism being laid bare. Just as much as Mary Webb stereotypes the Orient, thinking all who are born of it must be enlightened sadhus, Mukherjee shows that Bud loves Jasmine for what she represents: exoticism. "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom" (*Jasmine* 178)\(^{13}\). Jasmine recognizes this, and ever so shrewdly, capitalizes on it. For dinner, she serves up roast pork with curried potatoes—just enough exoticism to appeal to the mid-western palate. She actually uses orientalism to her advantage. There seem to be few better ways to undermine its effect.

These images, however, have done little to undo the damage done by beggars and fortune tellers. Many critics have also taken great offense at Mukherjee's portrayal of India. She paints Calcutta in incredibly dark hues. Mired in filth, Mukherjee's city pulsates with violence and corruption. Riots form the backdrop to *The Tiger's Daughter*. Once again, the critics say, Mukherjee reinforces the West's patriarchal attitude towards the East. As the West always suspected, Mukherjee’s India, the cumbersome, impoverished nation, cannot
manage its own politics. It must need intervention from without. Grewal suggests that this patriarchy is extended to the people of India as well. She notes that Mukherjee depicts even rugged village women as weak, defenseless creatures who must be protected from natural elements. And she suggests that for those who are strong enough to leave the dark and static India, Mukherjee’s West provides freedom and sanctuary. Here, finally, they can be liberated from third world traditions and poverty. Once in the United States, Jasmine sheds her village mentality, burns her husband's clothes in a trash can (instead of sacrificing herself as "sati") and almost overnight, metamorphosizes into an American. Like Roy, Grewal argues that in trying so hard to realize the American dream, Mukherjee does exactly what the colonizers had done: whitewash over the Indian experience, stereotype them ruthlessly, and thus, do great injustice to the Indian image.

Of course, the reading public loves a starry-eyed immigrant who is "a believer in the American dream," Roy asserts (133). But in providing so obediently, he argues, Mukherjee becomes a vehicle for their patriarchy.

Then he takes this line of argument still further:

In view of these possibilities, one can assert that the novel *Jasmine* is not the work of a single author, but is the product of what Foucault refers to as the "author function" (*Language* 124-26). This function is made possible by the collusion of the institutionized forces of postcoloniality and the West, and the immigrant author, who with her portable imagination can easily suppress her own authorizing position and fabricate the new immigrant's epic of freedom. (133)
We should remember, though, that Foucault has something much larger in mind than Roy assumes. Foucault poses a whole new set of questions for analyzing the persona of the "author":

How, under what conditions, and in what form can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function. (274)\(^{16}\)

And indeed, Foucault defines authorship in almost Marxist terms:

We are accustomed ... to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely. The Truth is quite the contrary.... One can say that the author is an ideological product... (274)\(^{17}\)

Foucault demotes authors to the position of "products," mere "objects." By the forces around them, they are being created as much as they are creating their characters. He shifts the focus from the author being the creator of all signifiers, to his or her conditions being the author's creators. One might say, the creator's creator. In the world of fiction, the environment, not the author would be the prime mover. Foucault would say that Mukherjee does not produce wholly independent ideas—no one does, he would argue. Rather, she serves as a vehicle
for the ideas of her times. For Foucault, the question would be, not "What kind of
person created these fictional works," but rather, "What kind of times and situations created this author?" Foucault would argue that yes, Mukherjee has internalized some Orientalism, but he would continue that she has also internalized her experience of living in India, of immigrating, and of adapting to the United States. Hers is a blend of all these different perspectives, all these different lives. When she thinks of arranged marriage, for instance, she cannot possibly think of it in a way unbiased by Western thought. Her views on Indian issues are far more complex and multi-layered than the critics would have it. In Wife, for example, the depiction of arranged marriages as elaborate business deals needs to be noted. In this passage, the Dasguptas, Dimple's father and mother, wheel-deal with Mrs. Basu's, the would-be's mother, and Mrs. Ghose, his sister:

Mr. Dasgupta took a month's leave from work to complete the negotiations and pull off the wedding. There were two early hitches: Mrs. Basu objected to the name Dimple, which she considered too frivolous and unBengali, and the candidate's sister, Mrs. Ghose, felt that Dimple was a little darker than the photograph had suggested. With the Basus, Mr. Dasgupta flattered and pleaded, smiling at Dimple and saying, "She is so sweet and docile, I tell you. She well never give a moment's headache." At home, he advised his wife to try more whitening creams and homemade bleaching pastes. After two weeks, Mrs. Basu and Mrs. Ghose conceded it was a satisfactory match. (15)

In another instance, the consummation of an arranged marriage becomes rape:

And after a fire has been lit, and the gods appealed to, and the bridal
couples' clothes joined in a knot amidst applause from witnesses, when the guests have been fed, and the servants tipped and scolded, when the children have fallen asleep in their party dresses, then the groom takes his bride, a total stranger, and rapes her on a brand new, flower-decked bed. (*The Tiger's Daughter* 150)

Clearly, Mukherjee writes under the shadow of the West's take on arranged marriages. Upon the original, Indian meaning of "marriage" (which was assumed to be arranged—neither good nor bad, just arranged, the only type possible) she has piled centuries of Eastern-Western discourse as well as her own experiences with it. Through her experiences, she has lost both the "purely Indian" (the existence of which is dubious in itself) and the "purely American." She has become a hybrid. She could be a spokesperson for the Indian farmer only as much as she could be one for the Iowan. Since Mukherjee is not herself the object of any sole culture, she cannot objectify any culture solely.

While it is understandable that Indian blood can boil at such writing, asking an author to return to a previous mind-set, or a previous "life," as Mukherjee would call it, is futile. Just as words accumulate meaning after meaning and thus become carriers of their own history, so it is with traditions. Each "life" that the author leads, adds layers upon permanent layers of perspective and interpretation. Thus, its significance is forever transformed. In an essay addressing this issue, Gyan Prakash has wondered if the concept of Sati—the practice of burning the widow on her husband's funeral pyre—can ever be traced wholly to its original meaning:
The accumulated sources on sati—whether or not the burning of widows was sanctioned by Hindu codes, did women go willingly or not to the funeral pyre, on what grounds could the immolation of women be abolished—come to us marked by early nineteenth-century colonial and indigenous-patriarchal discourses. And just as the early nineteenth-century encounter between colonial and indigenous elites and textual sources was resonant with colonial-patriarchal voices, the historian's confrontation today with sources on sati cannot escape the echo of that previous rendezvous. In repeating that encounter, how does the historian today not replicate the early nineteen-century staging of sati as a contest between tradition and modernity, between the slavery of women and efforts towards their emancipation, between barbaric Hindu practices and the British civilizing mission? (Prakash 110)

Similarly, how can Mukherjee allude to arranged marriages independently of the repression-independence dichotomy? To condemn arranged marriages, as she does in her works, is apparently to utter the Western view. And to defend the practice would also be to respond to the dialogue initiated by the colonizers. To engage in the dialogue in any way at all, in fact, would be to concede the obvious: that she cannot escape the very atmosphere she lives in and has been brought up in. It would be admitting the influence of colonialism and of the West.

Mukherjee in *The Tiger's Daughter* shows that nostalgia and cultural memory are integral parts of an expatriate’s mental state but as one spends some years in the adopted country, the effectiveness of these things gradually wear out. One, then, finds it difficult to adjust to the ways of life and habits in the home country one has left years ago, particularly when the country goes through a serious socio-political crisis. Similarly Tara Banerjee Cartwright is in an
intermediate stage when she is unable to negotiate the cultural terrain of Calcutta she has left behind seven years ago and is looking forward to overcome the loneliness she feels in the alien space and to be part of the nation. As “each atom of newness bombarded her” at Vassar, she longed for her usual life in Calcutta (Mukherjee 13). Her attempts to communicate with fellow students were largely futile. There was an invisible wall between Tara and the White students. As the narrative claims, her privileged Bengali upper-class background and an effective training by the nuns at St. Blaise School in Calcutta helped her survive initial problems of cultural adjustments. She clung to the religious icons and old cultural habits which comforted her in small ways. Later, socializing with fellow Indians through gatherings in Indian Students’ Association helped her to ward off loneliness to a certain extent. She kept contact with her parents, relatives and friends through correspondences, which at the initial stage was of great emotional help.

Her visit to Calcutta is designed to highlight her expatriate sensibility and to show the extent of psychological distance created as a result of physical separation from her home country and its culture. As the novel demonstrates, she no longer feels at ease with the Indian way of life, not even when she is in the midst of friends and relatives. This sets the stage ready for her eventual acceptance of the socio-cultural values of the new nation. As Rani says, “Assimilation and acceptance in the new culture appear impossible if the past is not forgotten” (83)\(^2\). Tara has no more an Indian identity and is always in clash
with the culture of her native soil. The clash is deeply felt in the psyche of Tara who finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India; and sometimes with the traditions of her own family.

Tara’s psyche is always tragic as a result of the tension created in the mind between the two socio-cultural environments, between the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia. She feels both trapped and abandoned at the same time. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. This difficulty of choosing lies in her refusal to totally condemn any one world. It might have been easier for Tara to leave her past untouched if she could find her old home contemptible, but she does not. She does not fit in any longer. The outcome of this confrontation is her split personality:

The heroine finds it difficult to relate, since her marriage to an American and her Western education brand her as an alienated woman. Since Tara is exposed to the West and has absorbed its values, she must be necessarily alienated and, therefore, even if she tries to voice her continued attachment for, and identity with India, the voice does not carry conviction because it is at variance with the usual stance of indifference and arrogance as these are associated with the Westernized Indian. (Tandon 32).  

At first glance, it seems that Markandaya, with her unassuming treatment of such issues, escapes this Catch 22. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, for instance, Rukmani finds as much love in her arranged marriage as one could hope to find in any relationship. In fact, at times, this marriage remains the only source of stability in her life. When she looks back at her early marriage, we hear some of the negotiations associated with arranged marriages, but none of the emotional
scarring:

[My parents] ... married me to a tenant farmer who was poor in everything but in love and care for me, his wife, whom he took at the age of twelve. Our relatives, I know, murmured that the match was below me; my mother herself was not happy, but I was without beauty and without dowry and it was the best she could do. “A poor match,” they said, and not always quietly. How little they knew, any of them!” (8)

As a newly married woman, she rejoices over her good fortune:

While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? (12)

In *Nectar in a Sieve* comes Kenny, the American doctor who rages against the stubborn traditions, and what he sees as the natives' "passivity." Here, as he tries to convince Rukmani to take an aggressive stand against poverty, the contrast between their old mentality and his aggressive, self-empowering one is stark:

"Times are better, times are better," he shouts. "Times will not be better for many months. Meanwhile, you will suffer and die, you meek suffering fools. Why do you keep this ghastly silence? Why do you not demand—cry out for hell-do something? There is nothing in this country, oh god, there is nothing!" (*Nectar in a Sieve* 48)

Rukmani, on the other hand, seems to foresee only defeat in taking arms against nature, and thus, declines the fight:
People will never learn! Kenny had said it, and I had not understood. Now here were my own sons saying the same thing, and still I did not understand. What was it we had to learn? To fight against tremendous odds? What was the use? One only lost the little one had. Of what use to fight when the conclusion is known? I asked myself, and got no answer. I went to my husband and he was perplexed twice over. (Nectar in a Sieve 69-70)

Despite such orientalism in her works, Markandaya is rarely faulted for being unfair to Indians. Just as one does with Mukherjee, one could easily argue, for example, that by making these stereotypical portrayals of Indians, Markandaya is perpetuating the Oriental myth. One could say that India still struggles to free herself of the notions of backwardness and passivity that she presents in Nectar in a Sieve. But Markandaya encounters none of these criticisms. In fact, she is usually praised. Just by creating a sympathetic and dignified Indian character, she is breaking the English/Imperial tradition, argues Yasmine Gooneratne in her critique. Gooneratne concedes that Markandaya misrepresents certain details of the village life, citing as example Markandaya's implication that the farmers actually had balanced diets, but she still maintains that Markandaya does what many an author before her had failed to do: present the native Indian life in a complex, sensitive portrayal that attempts to "set the record straight, at establishing a truer perspective than had so far existed, on the nature of the Indian character and society" (Gooneratne 123).

The problem with this attitude, as we saw earlier, is multi-layered. After having lived so many lives, after having been born in one world and then
uprooted to live in another, which "self" does one recreate? The village self or the city self? The superstitious self or the scientific self? Can the two even be untangled? In her essay, "Toward an Investigation of the Subaltern," Alpana Sharma Knippling argues that Mukherjee fails to do precisely that. In a way, she presents both sides at the same time. Knippling asserts that Mukherjee projects her own, privileged position of influence, power, and wealth upon her marginalized, subaltern subjects. Mum like Roy and Grewal, she maintains that a poor person like Jasmine, who has had minimal contact with the world outside Punjab, would not be able to assimilate so naturally, and come out unscathed from the atrocities of her initial experiences in the United States. Knippling argues that under the guise of representing the subaltern, Mukherjee really only represents her own, privileged self. "As a Punjabi member of the Indian peasantry, Jasmine is positioned as subaltern," she writes, "but her subalternity is lost when she becomes a self-willing subject of the West" (Knippling 150)²⁸.

To sum up: Mukherjee is a product of British imperialism (herself the West's Other). It is in this already Western context that we can discern her problematic making the Other accessible to representation by turning the Other into a Self. In the process of doing so, she disguises her own particular position of privilege instead of accounting for it and systematically exploiting it. (Knippling 148)²⁹

There is certainly some merit to Knippling's complaint that Mukherjee homogenizes the immigrant experience. It is also true that the immigration for an upper-class Calcuttan will be different from that for a Punjabi villager. After all, the Calcuttan will be familiar already with some of the western/modern things
the new country has to offer. Presumably, she'll have lived in the fast lane, used the modern amenities, known the disconnectedness of big cities. If from a wealthy family, she will have attended better schools, learned foreign languages, and seen the culture of the upper crust. For her, the transition from the native culture to the host will be, presumably, easier. But the difference is only in degrees, not in kind. Ultimately, all immigrants, everyone on the edges of mainstream society, face discrimination and endure a sense of loss and homelessness. Everyone who finds him/herself at the intersection of two cultures must deal with this transition. Asians immigrating to the United States; country folks going to the city; even Californians moving to New York-all must recreate their worlds. All must redefine their culture.

When Knippling, and to a degree, Roy and Grewal, argue that Mukherjee fails to represent the real subaltern, it is reasonable to suspect that their definition of "subaltern" may be a bit too limiting. In its own way, it may stereotype its subjects as much as "orientalism" does. Knippling claims that for her, "subaltern" has two meanings:

the first derives from Gramsci, who calls the "masses" the subaltern classes and who opposes those to the dominant, hegemonic class in society; the second ... means also an enormous, heterogeneous range of rural groups, including even "the lowest strata of the rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants, and upper middle peasants." (Knippling 149)

This definition of the subaltern neglects a pertinent aspect of
centre/periphery discussion-fluidity. There is constant movement from periphery to centre, and from centre to periphery. At one time on the very fringes of society, entire groups and cultures work their ways toward the centre, ultimately to alienate other groups as they had once been alienated. Given the right conditions, cultural phenomena that once seemed alien can at the next moment seem perfectly familiar. European immigrants, such as Germans and Italians, once as scrutinized for their "foreign ways" as Asian communities are today, are now perceived as the builders of America. On a more frivolous note, salsa, once an "ethnic" food item, now outsells the all-American ketchup (which itself is originally a Malay word). Similarly, borders of cities—especially growing cities—eventually merge into the expanding metropolis, pushing the borders out. This pattern of movement does not escape Mukherjee. She describes Calcutta as a great leviathan that swallows all who come close enough, and then waits for more:

There is, of course, no escape from Calcutta. Even an angel concedes that when pressed. Family after family moves from the provinces to its brutish center, and the center quivers a little, absorbs the bodies, digests them, and waits. (The Tiger's Daughter 4)\textsuperscript{31}

One can argue that the movement of all centers and peripheries works in the same way. All peripheries are in some stage of assimilation. All city borders will eventually be absorbed into the big city. Similarly, all immigrants are in some stage of integration. As Mukherjee writes in The Tiger's Daughter one does not know when the foreign spirit sneaks in on one. Feeling uncomfortable and
out-of-place among her friends after just a few years abroad, the Tiger's daughter also wonders when and how she became a stranger to her own childhood:

How does the foreignness of the spirit begin, Tara wondered. Does it begin right in the centre of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white headdresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun? ...

Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched the New York snow settle over new architecture, blond girls, Protestant matrons, and Johnny Mathis? Or was it not till Madison that she first suspected the faltering of the heart? (The Tiger's Daughter 45-6)

Later, she realizes, that "there was to be no major drama, no sensational excitement. . .. No big crisis that she could later point to and say: that was when I became a totally different person" (The Tiger's Daughter 142). And this is true for all things and all people, not just immigrants. Modernization infiltrates Indian villages one city-person at a time. City folk drink in the spirit one caffè latte at a time. They continue to modernize, while our memories of them remain stagnant. Or worse, the places of the past mutate in our memories into idyllic, never-ever lands, which resemble neither the modern nor the past. Homi. K. Bhabha calls this idealism "the fatality of thinking of 'local' cultures as uncontaminated or self-contained" (Bhabha 167). Instead of being pristine and unadulterated, they are, as Mukherjee's and Markandaya's novels show, in a constant state of flux. They are always being adulterated.

In The Coffer Dams Kamala Markandaya returns to the theme of racial tension by bringing a group of British and Indian technocrats together to build a
dam in a hilly tribal region in the south of India. The British engineers and technicians interact with their Indian counterparts as they have been conditioned. Eager to complete the dam before the monsoons set in, Clinton, the chief engineer, steps up the pace of work that causes tension among his subordinates, mostly Indians. Accidents happen along the way and expose racial disparity in the response they evoke from the British and the Indians. The blatant disregard for the concerns and values of the tribal people by the British fills Helen, Clinton's wife, with disgust. She finds herself drawn to the jungle—"its rampant furious growth affected her in a way that the ordered charm of a restrained civilization would never do" (*The Coffer Dams* 35). Alienated from her husband who knew her "only by night when they lay together and loved," she goes to Bashiam, a hill-man, with whom she finds "a peace that was to do with her mind as consummation had been for her body, the fusion making her whole in a way that she could not recall having achieved before" (*The Coffer Dams* 160). Ironically, her fears about the industrial civilization's onslaught on the traditional values run parallel to her recognition of the inevitability of change. In this dramatization of clashing values, Markandaya seems to suggest that preserving outdated traditions that perpetuate dehumanizing poverty is as futile as jumping on the bandwagon of technological advancement simply for the sake of change.

In *Possession*, Kamala Markandaya depicts the inter-cultural tension and conflict between the materialistically possessive West and the spiritually non-
possessive East and between the secular and divine sources of art. With remarkable penetration and persuasiveness the novelist attempts “to concretize the invincibility of the spiritual power of the East confronted with the glamour of the materialistic society of the West”. The novel also presents “the plight of the artist, Valmiki who, enticed into the glittering world of alien values, experiences the resulting conflict between the licentious freedom and responsible liberalism in a baffling novelty of atmosphere. The novel dramatizes the search for true identity of Valmiki, nature’s own gift to the world of art in the traditional South India.” Valmiki, a born artist, is a “permanent outsider”. He feels alienated as much in his native village as in the urbane London. He is a poor, neglected lad, a simpleton, not able to learn “even the simple skills their living required”. His art has no relevance for his poor family. The members of his family simply reject him.

When Lady Caroline Bell, a rich aristocratic English woman, comes into contact with Val, the latter “is young and no shell has formed to protect him as yet”. She discovers in this illiterate goatherd an extraordinary artistic genius. She realizes that he needs freedom to broaden his artistic talent and to give vent to his artistic expressions in an atmosphere conducive to growth. As an assertive English woman she adopts him forcibly and tries to possess him in order to exploit his artistic genius for commercial purpose. No doubt, Caroline gives him freedom in the beginning and saves him with her money from want, from utter poverty and from the need to back-scratch. But she deliberately restrains his
spontaneous activity. Besides Caroline’s physical and psychological domination, Valmiki’s artistic growth is curtailed by other factors also. After taking him to England Caroline, arrogant and insolent by nature, tries to possess him physically, psychologically, culturally and spiritually too. Since he has been uprooted from his spiritual and cultural heritage to face the onslaught of an alien, dominant white race he obviously suffers from a sense of rootlessness. He feels terribly homesick and finds that he is transplanted into the alien milieu where he receives acclaim as a painter.

The arrogant and insolent attitude of Caroline is not helpful to reanimate him. He feels that for her, he is not a full-fledged human being to be loved and cared for but “the clay” in her hands to be “moulded and caressed to an image she could love”. Valmiki complaints to Anasuya, “She does not care for me… when I do nothing I am nothing to her, no more than a small insect in a small crack…” This awareness is much worse than being a neglected goatherd. Although Valmiki was living in a squalid condition in his village before his departure to England, he found adequate compensation in the spiritual company of the Swamy and in the latent and the throbbing affection of his mother. But in London, being uprooted from his native soil, feeling rootless, this sensitive artist “experiences emotional isolation and is over-powered by alienation” (Possession 137).
The period which Valmiki spends in Europe is considered a glorious period materialistically. It is almost a “tempestuous period of worldly glory—money, power, repute, sex and travel”. Leading a bohemian life, Valmiki enjoys life to the maximum with recklessness and adopts the mercenary values of the “gilt-edged society” which alienate him further from his roots. That he is often estranged from his traditional roots is often remarked by Anasuya, the narrator.

*Possession* brings to light the inherent conflict between the two different value systems of the East and the West. Kamala Markandaya seems to follow the dictum of Kipling’s famous line of “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet. She feels that the cultural chasm is so wide that there is almost no meeting point between the two. Hence, Markandaya underscores the cultural hiatus repeatedly in the novel: “Undiluted East had always been too much for the West; and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right”. This novel *Possession* may be described as an allegory of the direction independent India has to take on its onward march to progress. The story of Valmiki and Caroline Bell suggests that India has to draw sustenance from life-giving springs of its own culture. Valmiki is a rustic Indian artist; he is a symbol of the raw independent India for the possession of whose soul, Caroline Bell, symbolizing the Western civilization, makes an all-out effort. Alienated from the spiritual roots of the country, Valmiki’s artistic talents wither and smother. His final return to the Swami is suggestive of the reality that while a brief contact with the Western culture is
useful, finally India’s fulfillment lies in its own nourishing spiritual power. The adaption of the alien culture has been proved very difficult. Kamala Markandaya has succeeded in showing the immigrant sensibility in *Possession* through the character Valmiki who positions himself in search of identity when he is estranged in foreign land.

Immigration accelerates this process of change. Bhabha writes, "The people have taken with them only a part of the total culture…. The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture" (167). These authors write about this new culture, from their new perspective. Their views can be held to be neither Indian, nor British or American. They represent, if anything, the internal dialogue in which the individual author engages, about the duality of the lives she has known. Bhabha quotes Mikhail Bakhtin:

The… hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented…. but is also double-language; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs… that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance… It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms… such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with "internal forms" for perceiving the world in words. (qtd. in Bhabha 212)

Instead of bemoaning an untraditional viewpoint, Bakhtin celebrates the envisioning of new worlds. He sees these worlds in not only the writers' views,
but also in their words. He provides the post-colonial reader with a new way to view and appreciate this outlook. His is a vision where there is a place for tiger/lion, White/Black, pauper/landlord hybrids. There is also a place for Indian/Americans.
REFERENCES


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.


15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.


24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

* * * * *