CHAPTER II
MULTICULTURE CREATING ROOTLESSNESS

“Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living.”

(Eliot 13)

Culture is an elemental part of a nation. It is the heart and soul of the people in the nation. It refers to the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development of an individual, group or society. Culture is generally understood as constituting the way of life of an entire society and includes codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, social customs and folklore of a nation. Every nation has a distinct culture of its own. But when an independent country becomes a colony, the native culture undergoes a radical change. Nations are defined by their boundaries and boundaries are geographical, but there is more in it. The people, born under a particular national boundary, acquire distinct genetic features, colours and food habits and become the sons and daughters of the soil. They are born with the features and mindsets of the nation.

Culture is generally known as the socially sanctioned behavior of a people. It is a way of life of a people. One of the best early definitions of culture was given by E.B.Tylor, who described culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Ramakrishna 61 ). A change in this complex system is initiated, when countries come to contact with alien culture and this change, in course of time, destroyed their traditional cultures. T.S. Eliot in his Notes towards the Definition of Culture observes:
Culture is too vast and baffling a term to be precisely defined. Culture is a quest for good but it is not good if the quest is not free choice. The quest and choice are, therefore, the two ingredients of culture and the tradition is formed by the culmination of centuries of history, or a tradition may be defined as a passage, in which there is both persistence and renewal. (21)

The unparalleled changes in the nature of the material reality have immense impact on the life of an individual. The quick urbanization of the Indian society in recent times, the speedy growth of the means of communication and developments in the field of technology have resulted in the emergence of an altogether different kind of cultural set-up. These developments have undermined the earlier concepts of home, nation, native, alien on the one hand and on the other they have challenged the concept of the purity of races and cultures. They have also caused demographic uncertainties and disturbed the traditional Indian social fabric almost beyond recognition. This breakdown of the accepted social and cultural values has resulted in increased inwardness, in an increased withdrawal of the individual within his own shell. This inwardness leads to alienation which in turn creates the atmosphere of perplexity, confusion and anxiety. The sense of rootlessness arises in the minds of an individual and he feels utterly frustrated. So man considers himself to be an outsider with no sense of belonging to his community.

Man sees himself estranged from the society as he cannot identify himself with the contemporary society. This situation prevails because of the lack of harmonious relationship between the personal and social self, between what a man feels inside and what is known about him from the outside. Self and society are interconnected and this link is a kind of web, the construction of which is partly under guidance from self and partly from the prevailing social pattern. The individual develops a sense of self
through participation in social interaction and yet possessing a feeling of separation from others is a fundamental social process which perpetuates culture and society. As a collaborative world of ideals, activities, processes, institutions and norms, the culture of a nation helps an individual to recognize, define and affirm his or her own human identity as an integral part of a larger social group or collectivity.

A man who is aware of his identity, continually searches for stability, security and belongingness, on the other hand, the person who fails to realize his identity in his social setup, becomes withdrawn from society and feels estranged. O.P. Saxena says, “… self alienation, however, means the loss of contact of the individual self with any inclination or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which an individual is forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feels incapable of controlling his actions.” (qtd. in Josan 71)

With the cross currents of globalization sweeping through the world, one of the most leading factors behind alienation is the migration of an individual to a new place. Immigration is a voluntary movement of people of a country to another for the purpose of resettlement. It is a stressful process for the people to adapt themselves to the society. With the world, gradually shrinking into a ‘global village’ and the movement to the foreign countries having become easier, the contemporary era has witnessed acceleration in the number of immigrants. People migrate either out of choice or sometimes compulsion. “In essence, the causes of emigration are food, freedom and faith – the lack of them at home and the hope for them abroad.” (qtd. in Josan 71)

The migration of a larger number of people to foreign lands for different reasons, and the close and frequent interaction among the people belonging to different cultural backgrounds lead to cultural mix or multicultural environment in a large scale. In this multicultural environment, the immigrants find it difficult to stay in a fixed
attitude towards life. So, when a person settles in a far off place away from the place of origin, he finds himself in a state of dilemma of not finding a home in the adopted land. The different cultural norms and social conditions pose problems for immigrants who lack crucial information about the new society. The difference between the two ways of life subjects him to a cultural shock. An immigrant feels it hard to bridge the gap between the culture of origin and the culture of adoption.

Culture Shock is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. This psychological construct shock has been used to describe the adjustment process in its emotional, psychological, behavioural, cognitive and psychological impact on individuals. In a multicultural context, culture shock is more or less sudden immersion into a nonspecific state of uncertainty where the individuals are not certain what is expected of them or of what they can expect from the persons around them. The term culture shock was first introduced by Kalvero Oberg to describe the anxiety resulting from not knowing what to do in a new culture. The recent literature recognizes that culture shock applies to any new situation, job, relationship, or perspective requiring a role adjustment and a new identity.

The dilemma of ‘identity’ arises when one is not sure where one belongs to or in other words, where to place oneself among others. Immigrants face the problems of cultural identity because they are the members of their place of origin and mainstream culture at the same time. The dilemma in identity produces, in Fanon’s vivid phrase, “individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless – a race of angels” (qtd. in Hall 226). The immigrants initially achieve a standard of living in the New World, they could never have hoped for at home, but soon the situation begins to change, the discrimination against the immigrants is exercised on racial basis in many ways. Hostility and rejection in the host country produce in immigrants a deeper
sense of consciousness about their oppressed condition. Caught between their native
beliefs, culture and values and that of the mainstream societies they develop ‘Double
Consciousness’. The concept, double consciousness in response to minority status, has
been expounded upon most famously by W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois uses this concept to
describe the experience of being alienated from the self or having two halves of a self
each at war with the other, which is a common feeling in the diasporas. In *The Souls of
Black Folk*, Du Bois writes of the “double consciousness” that afflicts the minds of
African-Americans living in the southern United States. “It is a strange thing, this
double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of
others… One ever feels his twoness-an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,
two unreconciled striving; two warring ideals in one dark body…” (Bois 102). This
tension between two seemingly disparate identities is one that has been experienced by
minority communities throughout post-colonial societies all over the world, and it is
especially a salient issue in the multi-cultural environment of the United States.

The expatriates predispose themselves to multiculturalism. Besides adopting the
dominant culture, they continue to stick to their native culture. “Multiculturalism refers
to the development of immigrant populations into ethnic communities that remain
distinguishable from the majority population with regard to language, culture and social
behaviour” (Koser 24). It is by sticking to their originality that, even beyond miles, the
expatriates are able to maintain the nostalgic ties with their nationality and ethnic
identity. According to Stainslaw Baranczak, the words “Emigration, exile, expatriation,
... beginning with an ‘e-’ or ‘ex-’, those sad prefixes of exclusion” (Stainslaw 221),
refer to a psychological journey into the past. Since expatriates cannot allow their
ethnic identity to wither away completely, the alternative way for them is to put the
essential characteristics of the ethnic and dominant cultures side by side for their
survival. The expatriates retain some traits of their original culture and blend them well with the adopted culture to maintain their distinct cultural identities. This multiplicity is a significant plight for the expatriates. As their different consciousnesses contradict each other, they are left uncertain as to the nature of their identities, and not knowing where they fit in American society. Thus the expatriates become rootless in the alien land.

The condition of expatriation is well experienced by the South Asian writers in Canada, especially those from the third world countries. They had been discriminated a lot as Canada was considered to be a white nation, the nation of the French and the British. It’s only after the official acceptance of Canada as a multicultural country, this tension between white and non-white has eased to some extent. However, in their initial stage of writing, writers like Vassanji had to face considerable resistance before accepted by the Canadian Literary milieu. The advent of literary theories like post-colonialism and feminism have provided added advantage to the Third World writers in Canada in charting out their own Cultural Territory.

The Indian expatriates in their writings have reflected upon the expatriate sensibility which has been generated due to cultural diversity. Twentieth Century writers like V.S.Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arun Joshi, Jhumba Lahiri and Gita Mehta have sought to record the manner in which they have chosen and adapted themselves to a new environment and how they experienced nostalgia, identification with their new lands, feeling of loss of their homelands and their rootless condition. The content of their writings has been greatly influenced by the multi-cultural perception, which helps them to write with better understanding. Particularly the women diasporic writers capture the double nature of the marginalized, ‘othered’ female subjects in their works, who are both socially and culturally ‘othered’ and also the protagonists of their own
search for identity. Hence their utterances are double voiced as they result from a clash between the dominant and repressed discourses. This discussion on Indian expatriate writers can be further illuminated with the powerful observation of Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands*. He observes thus “…The Indian writers who write from outside India... are obliged to deal with broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost… (and he) will create fiction, not actual cities or villages, but invisible Imaginary Homeland, India’s of the mind…” (10-11)

The protagonists of these writers move away from their own cultural environment and go to an alien land. But unfortunately, they neither adopt the values of the New World nor do they keep their links intact with their native land. The nostalgic characters in these writers works are the expatriates who “are aware of at least two (homes), and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimension, an awareness (that is) contrapuntal” (Said 186). So the protagonists lose their sense of identity and finally become nowhere men. Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands* says,

> It may be that writers in my position, exile or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back… But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost. (10)

The expatriate sensibility is also well expressed in the writings of the most celebrated diasporic writer Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee depicts the predicament of the expatriates who are confused and desperate by breaking their ties with their native culture. Like many post-colonial writers, Mukherjee too struggles for the identity of
many Asian-American women. She admits that an issue very important to her is “…the finding of a new identity…the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into, and then replanting yourself in another culture” (Nityanandam 63). She exposes the agonies of diasporic women who suffer from owing to the complex issues of racism, violence, high social expectations and pressures, cultural adjustment, and post-traumatic stress disorders related to expatriate experiences. According to Roshni Rustom Ji-Kerns, the women writers of the Indian Diaspora deal with immigrant lives, expatriates and depict “people who are caught in the awkward act of juggling with multiple cultures” (657). As per the words of Roshni, Mukherjee writes about the real condition of her characters in contemporary India and America, which she sees through the sense of nostalgia as it is a quest for identity of an immigrant, and her existential sensibility deeply unravels her characters’ awareness of the bleak part of their lives and their dauntless efforts to discover the bright side of their lives. Thus Mukherjee gave vent to her expatriate experiences through her writings. Mukherjee, in an essay entitled “Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalist” writes,

I was a psychological expatriate, though a naturalized Canadian, for fifteen years, simply because Canada is a country officially hostile to the concept of assimilation (It proclaims the virtue of its multicultural policy). Perceiving myself to be in a comfortable but unwelcoming environment, I struggled to maintain various emblems of my difference. (28)

Later, these experiences are expressed in her novels to expose the condition of expatriates in the alien land. She states that: “Such a complex position induces diasporic women to write their lives. Their literature is generally charged with intense anxiety of dislocation and adaptation. In their endeavour of self-expression, they make fictions out of their lives and as a result, their novels become autobiographical” (qtd. in
Mund 110). In all her novels, non-fiction books and collections of short stories, her protagonists are women who confront a multicultural society in their emigration and evolution.

Mukherjee’s personal history consists of a series of displacement and expatriation. In fact, Mukherjee has also struggled to find her identity in the alien land as she is caught between two conflicting cultures. Mukherjee's first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, written in the phase that Mukherjee labels 'expatriate,' display a comparable attitude of deterministic pessimism concerning the immigrant condition, though they deal with strikingly different protagonists. Mukherjee’s first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* is autobiographical. Mukherjee acknowledges that the character of Tara Banerjee Cartwright is “Very much me, too, so it's obviously a kind of alter ego that I wasn't totally aware of when I embarked on this” (Weich). She says in an article,

The first ten years of marriage, years spent mostly on my husband’s native Canada, I thought of myself as an expatriate Bengali permanently stranded in North America because of destiny or desire. My first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* embodies the loneliness I felt but could not acknowledge, even to myself as I negotiated the no man’s land between the country of my past and the continent of my present. Shaped by memory, textured with nostalgia for a class and culture I had abandoned, this novel quite naturally became an expression of the expatriate consciousness. (“American Dreamer” 34)

*The Tiger’s Daughter* was published in 1971 when Canada was experiencing “visible effects of racism” (Connell, Grearson and Grimes 11). This novel reveals the author’s expatriate sensibility she possessed due to multicultural environment and also the racial prejudice she experienced in Canada. Canada, which was considered as
'home' by the Indian immigrants, is unwilling to accept them as an embodiment of its culture because the immigrants do not conform to the dominant image of white cultural acceptability. Canada “the decolonized nation as the place of ultimate refuge and gratification, the destination of a narrative retour” (Gikandi 196) to which the expatriate can never return. Bharati Mukherjee, in an interview, has clearly affirmed her aim in her novels:

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries which are placed by civil and religious conflicts … when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society … I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country. (qtd. in Sathyakala 185)

This fiction draws upon Mukherjee's own first years of marriage and her return to her place of birth for a visit to a world unlike the one that she preserved in her memory. It is a fine exemplification of cultural transplant. Fakrul Alam sums up Mukherjee's motive: “The Tigers Daughter, then, is designed to capture the predicament of someone returning to her homeland after a period of self imposed exile: to such a person, home will never be home again, and life in exile, bitter draught though it often is, will be preferable to what home has become” (22). According to Roshni Rustom Ji-Kerns, this novel deals with “the emotions of expatriate Indian women responding to a prolonged visit to their country of origin” (657). The novel illustrates the uprooted condition of Tara Banerjee Cartwright, the protagonist of the novel. Tara a “sensitive person, sensitive especially to places” (The Tiger’s Daughter 12) is sent to the United States for higher studies. There she marries David, an
American and settles down in New York. After seven years, she returns to Calcutta to locate her ‘home’, to trace her cultural roots and to retrieve her inherited identity as the daughter of Bengal Tiger and as the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Pachapara. This is similar to Mukherjee’s own trip back to India with her Canadian husband, Clark Blaise. Tara feels more alienated on her return, as this visit makes her aware of the wide gulf between two cultures. Socio-cultural mores and values of her native land miserably fail to enthuse her. The returning immigrants like Tara discover that she is no more “at home” in India than she was in the racist New York. Tara jolts between Calcutta and New York, straddling Indian and American cultures. In the process she is caught between two cultures, two countries, two homes and two men.

Aparajita Ray rightly comments: “The protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright makes a trip home to India to soothe her ruffled feathers but becomes painfully aware that her memories of a genteel Brahmin lifestyle are usurped by her westernization” (84). Spanning Indian and American cultures, Tara feels rootless. Therefore in the end, she decides to return to her husband David in America.

While Tara is pursuing higher studies in America, she feels insecure and longs for the warmth and love of family and friends, as she cannot find it in her American colleagues. The strength and support, needed in moments of crisis, is not available amongst foreigners. So life in America is not easy for Tara. She cannot share her Camac street thoughts with the pale, dry skinned girls in the same way as she shared with her friends in Calcutta. When this young Indian girl comes to terms with the American life, her reactions are one of fear and anger:

For Tara, Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake. If she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise’s to remain
composed and ladylike in all emergencies, she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week. (TD 10)

Tara senses discrimination when her roommate refuses to share her bottle of mango chutney. She safeguards her family, her country and friends fervently, at the remarks of these foreigners who cannot understand the bond she shares with her family, country, and friends “She prayed to Kali for strength so she would not break down before these Americans.” (41)

Tara is in a dispossessed exile in both India and America. Though she has lived in the United States for seven years, she is not that much interested to belong to America. Her days in the United States exhibit her uprooted condition. She finds discrimination even in trivial things. “Each atom of newness” (10) bombards her at Vassar. She complains of homesickness in her letter to her parents. The same homesickness is experienced by Salim in V.S.Naipaul’s A Bend in the River. He says “I was homesick, had been homesick for months. But home was hardly a place I could return to. Home was something in my head. It was something I had lost” (107). Many years later, sitting by the window in a sophisticated apartment in 120th street, New York, Tara dreams of Hari Lal, her great grandfather and wonders at the gap that separates her from him. As an expatriate she cannot consider her New York apartment as her ‘home’. On certain days she shakes out all her silk scarves, irons them and hangs them “to make her apartment more ‘Indian’” and “burned incense scent from home” (TD 34) to ward off the “despair” and “homesickness” (13). This incident clearly exhibits the expatriate obsession. Tara creates a ‘little India’ physically and psychologically. Choudhury observes in this connection: “She had been desperately homesick, lonely, and desperate to belong - in fact she was in the typical position of an
immigrant... She had to adjust to things which had been outside the purview of her previous idea of life as a whole.” (82)

But sometimes, in order to come out of all the pains and nostalgia, Tara tries to be an American by discussing birth control with her dormitory neighbours. She remembers that at St.Blaise School, in Calcutta, nobody is permitted even to think of sex. But in America it is totally different. Amidst this confusion, as an expatriate, Tara idealizes her home country and enjoys nostalgic memory of it. Here Mukherjee portrays the mental conflicts in Tara and how she struggles between the two cultures. The cultural, racial and communal conflict in Tara takes place as a result of her immigration and her subsequent marriage to an American.

The expatriates like Tara are able to get acculturated in the new country, espousing its socio-cultural values, simultaneously having a sense of nostalgia for the home land and its traditions and culture. They grow up in America, marry foreigners but cannot escape the memories of family traditions. These marriages between Indian Bengali man/woman and American woman/man create a ‘hybrid culture’ a new form of culture where both of them negotiate at various fronts of life. During this process of adjustment and accommodation the migrants are transplanted and relocated. Culture plays an important role in the growth and behaviour of an individual. It gives not only a sense of belonging but also provides a set of norms. Passing the cultural aspects of life from one generation to other is done by a mother, wife, daughter and sister. The displaced people try to preserve their native culture in the adopted country. Longing for the homeland, the near and dear ones, culture, tradition helps the displaced to form small social circles. The encounter between two cultures i.e. eastern and western constructs a hybrid culture where both the parties interact to reframe and restructure ethnic essentialism, nationalism and fundamentalism.
Tara’s husband David Cartwright is totally western and she is always worried of the fact. She cannot communicate with him the significant details of her family background and of life in Calcutta. Nagendra Kumar comments, “Her failure to do so is rooted in their cultural differences. In India a marriage is not simply a union of two individuals, it is a coming together of two families as well. But in western countries like America, a marriage is simply a contract between two individuals” (30). David is hostile to genealogies and often mistakes her love for family for over-dependence. He asks naïve questions about Indian customs and traditions and she feels completely insecure in an alien atmosphere because, for Tara, Madison Square was agonizing and David was after all a foreigner. Roshni Rustomji Kerns describes her constant feeling of restlessness regarding her role as a Bengali wife of an American: “Tara's petulance and constant nervousness regarding her role as the Bengali wife of an American, visiting her family in Calcutta; overshadows her well intentioned efforts to understand her world of diverse cultures.” (657)

The alien western culture, which had almost become a second half to Tara, is persistently in clash with her native culture on her trip to India. Tara nostalgically plans a trip to India. According to Sigmund Freud’s Classical Psychoanalytic Theory, Tara’s longing to return to India is considered as one of Defense Mechanisms, which is termed as Regression.

Regression, one type of defense mechanism. In this case, a person who encounters traumatic experiences retreats to an earlier stage of development. Eg: A young married woman who has difficulties with her husband may return to the security of her parent’s home. The path of regression is usually determined by the earlier fixations of the person. That is, people tend to regress to a stage upon which they have been previously fixated. If they were overly
dependent as children, they will be likely to become overly dependent again when their anxiety increases to an unbearable level.” (qtd. in Calvin, Lindzey and Campbell 52)

But she is shocked to discover that she has come back to a land of poverty and chaos. She expected that her return to India would remove her solitude and discomfort of life.”For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta” (TD 25). The new Americanized Tara fails to bring back her old sense of perception and views India with the keenness of a foreigner. Her entire perspective has changed. Jasbir Jain argues: “Tara's consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India a new it is not through her childhood association or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David. Her reactions are those of a tourist, of a foreigner” (13). When Tara comes to confront the changed and strange circumstances of her home country, all her expectations crumble down. She realizes that she has lost her childhood memories in the crowd of America.

On landing at Bombay airport, she is greeted warmly by her relatives but her response is very cold and dispassionate. When her relatives address her as ‘Tultul,’ a nickname which they always used for her, it sounds strange to her Americanized ears, “No one had called her Tultul in years… It was difficult to listen to these strangers” (TD 17). Seven years ago while on her way to Vassar “she had admired the house on Marine Drive, had thought them fashionable, but now their shabbiness appalled her” (18). Her reaction towards the Bombay railway station is also one of despises. She “thought the station was more like a hospital; there were so many sick and deformed men sitting listlessly on bundles and trunks” (19). Her train journey with a tiny
Marwari who is very ugly and a flat-nosed Nepali is equally disgusting. She thinks that both will “ruin her journey to Calcutta” (20). She can’t help but murmur to herself: “I have returned to dry holes by the sides of railway tracks, she thought, to brown fields like excavations for a thousand homes. I have returned to India” (21). In New York, she had dreamt of coming back to Calcutta, but “the return had brought only wounds” (25). Everywhere, the inventory of decay bears witness, the text suggests, to the flux and change taking place in the heart of a country in which Tara had expected to find life at its most constant, as the stable embodiment of her Indianness.

Tara feels alienated due to a sense of not belonging to her native country where she was born and bred. She thinks that her trip to India was pointless and it was a mistake to come without her husband. Shilpa Shukla and Niroj Banerji in the article, “The theme of “alienation” and “assimilation” in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri: A Socio-Literary Perspective” comment:

While it is difficult for an Asian person to assimilate into American culture, it is similarly difficult for an Asian-American to assimilate back to his native country. In a paradoxical situation, Tara Banerjee in The Tiger’s Daughter is alienated in her American set of connections and then alienated from her roots of pedigree. She suffers the spasm of estrangement which is awfully unfortunate. Her pain of alienation is evident not only in ... and America but even in her indigenous terrain of Bengal and wonders “how does the foreignness of spirit begin? ... when she returns to India after seven years. It is at that moment she excruciatingly realizes that she is neither an Indian nor an American. (21)

With coming back to India, America looks like a dreamland to her. Just a few days have passed since she left America but it seems to her that she had never been out
of India, her old sense of pride comes back to her. “She had not thought that seven years in another country, a husband, a new blue passport could be so easily blotted out” (TD 25). To her, her husband David “seemed far less real than the flat-faced Nepali with extrasensory perception. She watched David’s healthy face disappear into the fleshy folds of the Nepali’s neck and the spider’s body” (26). As soon as she reaches Howrah Station, she is outraged by “the squalor and confusion of Howrah station” (27). At the station, though surrounded by the army of relatives and by vendors ringing bells, beggars pulling at sleeves, children coughing on tracks, Tara feels herself completely estranged. Nothing seems familiar to her: “For a moment she thought she was going mad... Calcutta had already begun to exert its darkness over her, she thought” (30). Everything looks her unreal except Bengal Tiger, her father. Even her father “seemed to have become a symbol for the outside world. He had become a pillar supporting a balcony that had long outlived its beauty and its function” (29). When she reaches home she feels momentary peace of mind:

After seven years abroad, after extraordinary turns of destiny that had swept her from Calcutta to Poughkeepsie, and Madison, and finally to a two-room apartment within walking distance of Columbia, strange turns that had taught her to worry over a dissertation on Katherine Mansfield, the plight of women and racial minorities, Tara was grateful to call this (her father’s) restful house home. (33)

Staying in her own house she documents her impression of New York:

New York, she thought now, had been exotic. Not because it had Laundromats and subways. But, because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. Because students were
rioting about campus recruiters and far-away wars rather than the price of rice or the stiffness of final exams. Because people were agitated over pollution…New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair … (34)

It is astounding to note that New York is not enthralling to its resident, Tara, whereas to her friends in Calcutta, it is a fantastic place. They are not ready to believe that there are ghettos and demonstrations in America. Tara’s friends glamorize New York as an appealing place but Tara romanticizes India, only to be disillusioned at the end when she faces harsh Indian reality. There seems to be no point where these two incurable romantics can meet.

Mukherjee manages to present the decay of Calcutta, the corrupt life of its upper class with considerable skill. The city seems to be coming apart at its cons because of a number of factors: endemic violence, persistent political turbulence, economic stagnation, disease, over population and class conflicts. The opening page description of the street scene outside the Catelli-Continental, a luxury hotel that was once one of the glories of Calcutta, is an indicative of the extent of the city’s decline: the entrance now seems “small, almost shabby,” the walls “are patterned with rust and mold;” the sidewalks “along the hotel are painted with obscenities and political slogans” (3). On them is “colony of beggars” and “shriveled women” selling their wares. And yet the hotel could once be described as “the navel of the universe,” (3) for there was a time when Calcutta was the imperial city of British India, the center of commercial and political power, and the hotel, the place where powerful people would assemble for tea and talk. Now the Calcutta elite still meet here and go through “their daily ritual of espresso or tea” (4) but they are people who talk without conviction and are increasingly under siege from people full of passionate intensity, ready to mob and
brutalize them. Thus, the Catelli-continental, the place of pride once has lost its charm and deteriorated.

Tara has come across many terrible scenes one by one which she never thought of in her home town. In the slums of Calcutta, Tara sees a girl whose arms are covered with muddy bandages. Tara sees “blood spreading on the bandage. There were sores on the little girl's legs, sores that oozed bloody pus with each shiver of hatred. How horrible, thought Tara, the kid's got leprosy, she's being eaten away!” (122). Tara's visit gives exposure to “[...] ugliness and danger, to viruses that stalked the street, to dogs and cows scrapping in garbage dumps” (115). In India Tara finds nothing to her liking. For Tara, Calcutta appears to be a city with riots, political upheaval, buses burning, and workers surrounding the warehouses. Aparajita Ray remarks: “She discovers she is more an outsider than a native, having an objective concern with the complex and confusing web of politics, privilege and the hierarchies of power and class in India” (84). To her dismay, Tara understands that Calcutta, the city that she loved so much, is slowly becoming a nightmare. The streets were crowded with people shouting slogans, looting shops, breaking windowpanes, and assaulting of upper class people. Even though she lived in crowded New York, the crowded Calcutta seemed very different.

Furthermore, Tara has lost touch with her native tongue, ‘Bengali’. She has also forgotten some English words and the common idiom of her friends. This results in break in communication. So, Tara does not belong to India also, as she cannot share their language. In fact, one acquires a language through one’s communication with the outside world. In the process of learning a language, one absorbs the culture also, because culture is transmitted through language. So when Tara loses her language, she loses her culture too.
Tara’s mind is constantly at conflict with the two consciousness – one of an Indian and the other of an American. In the deepest core of her heart, Tara has an intense desire to behave like an ordinary Indian but her re-rooted self in America made the common rituals alien to her. She has ceased to be a Brahmin after her marriage to a mleccha. She feels guilty every time she enters the pooja room and also thinks that she is an unwelcomed person like the Australian visitor to their house who wanted to enter the pooja room. Even while sitting before the rows of gods and goddesses, she is not filled with piety. She thinks only about her husband. She even fails to recall bhajans. Tara remembers that “as a child, she had sung bhajans in that house. She had sat on a love seat beside a very holy man with a limp and had sung ‘Raghupati Raghava Rajaram’. But that had been a very long time ago, before some invisible spirit or darkness had covered her like skin” (TD 54). Caught in the gulf between the two contrasting worlds, Tara identifies that she has forgotten many of her Hindu rituals of worshipping idols she had seen her mother performing since her childhood. “When the sandalwood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It was not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was a little death, a hardening of the heart, a cracking of axis and center” (51). She is completely devoid of spiritual intensity. She feels rootless and is utterly frustrated as she is not able to perform her own religious rituals. The dominance of American culture makes her lose her own culture. According to Ananda Prabha Barat “she is forced to look at her inner world consisting of two cultures and the two different ideologies which are the two worlds wide apart.” (53)

Tara's return to India is marked by a number of dramatic changes. Not just the place, but people, religious rituals, cultural and social activities also appear alien to her.
She seems to have outgrown her earlier identity. The seven years in America with her American husband have given way to new preferences, new attitudes - in fact a totally new identity. The novel traps Tara in a crisis phase. She is constantly troubled by the search for her real self.

Tara’s changed personality made her an oddball everywhere. She grows nervous when she feels the changed attitude of her mother towards her: “Perhaps her mother, sitting serenely before God on a tiny rug, no longer loved her either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow.” (TD 50)

Tara senses her alienation even in the company of her close circle of “Camac Street friends” (10), the Westernized elite of Calcutta with whom she shares her caste and class affiliations. Like Tara’s white American husband, they appear to her to possess the confidence of people who lived in a “world that was more stable, more predictable than hers” (109). Untroubled by the sort of contradictions that beset her, they are, Tara discovers, not the people she can talk to about her feelings of being annoyed by Calcutta. In fact it is in their company and in her increasing awareness of “their tone, their omissions, their aristocratic oneness” (43) that Tara’s alienation is intensified. Her old Calcutta friends make it clear to her that it is her being away in America that had “eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (55). In fact, Tara’s sense of being an alien and outcaste among family and friends assumes hideous proportions when her friends accuse her of abandoning her Brahmin caste by marrying an American, who is construed, a mleccha, an outcaste. She had expected that her friends would consider her marriage as a sign of liberation and admire her for her
bold feat but she is aghast at their conservative attitude. From fashion to food they
loved all things foreign but did not approve of a foreign partner.

They were racial purists, thought Tara desperately. They liked foreigners in
movie magazines Nat Wood and Bob Wagner in faded photoplays. They loved
Englishmen like Worthington at the British Council. But they did not approve
of foreign marriage patterns. So much for the glamour of her own marriage. She
had expected admiration from these friends. She had wanted them to consider
her marriage an emancipated gesture. But emancipation was suspicious it
presupposed bondage. (86)

Tara finds herself reacting to the events very differently from others. The matter
that surprises or shocks her in Calcutta appears to be quite routine to her friends.
Similarly, what she considers sensible and decorous seems silly and outrageous to
others. For instance, her suggestion that women participating in a beauty contest should
wear swimsuits leads to rebuke from an Indian physician: “I think your years abroad
have robbed you of feminine propriety or you are joking with us” (187). Tara herself
wonders at the foreignness of her spirit, which does not permit her to establish an
emotional kinship with her old relatives and friends:

How does the foreignness of spirit begin? …Does it begin right in the center of
Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under
starched white head-dresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the
Indian sun? Or did it drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar, as she watched
the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls…? (37)

These untoward incidents make Tara realizes that her stay in India is not an easy
one. To her dismay her visit to Aunt Jharna’s house ends on a terrible note. Tara is torn
between mutually contradictory emotions on seeing Aunt Jharna since she cannot
sympathize with her aunt’s religious attempts to heal the child, and also, she does not hate them all. Tara innocently and seriously suggests for Jharna’s clubfooted daughter as, “Have you tried plaster casts and special shoes, aunt Jharna?” (36). This caring suggestion is mistaken and the aunt is stung to the quick and her rage boils over: “You think you are too educated for this, don’t you?” Aunt Jharna laughed with a quiet violence. “You have come back to make fun of us, haven’t you? What gives you the right? Your American money? Your mleccha husband?” (36). Tara’s Americanness is exposed in her native land. She finds herself a total stranger in the inherited milieu. Tara is confused because “her old milieu, her family, her ideas of yore seems to confront the American. Tara as it were.” (Choudhury 82)

Tara’s American life changed her angle of vision and she feels miserable whatever she sees. Tara visits a funeral pyre at the riverbank with Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, the owner of tea estates in Assam and runs at the sight of the ‘tantric’ who stretches his hands for her palms. She fails to read his intentions and thinks that the man needs ‘bakshees’. It seems she does not want to show palms to the tantric because she is conscious of her sin of marrying an American without matching her horoscopes. Again her visit with Joyonto Roy to his Tollygunge compound turns out to be painful. When Joyonto Roy proposes to show her the place and says that it’s a ‘bustee’. Tara is all ecstatic like Western tourists: “It is a ‘bustee’? asked Tara. She recalled frustrating moments at Vassar, when idealistic dormitory neighbours had asked her to describe the slums of India.” (TD 113)

The meandering and uneven road to Tollygunge troubles her a lot. She cannot bear the dust and foul smell of squalor: “Had Tara visualized at the start of the journey this exposure to ugliness and danger, to viruses that stalked the street, to dogs and cows scraping in garbage dumps, she would have refused Joyonto’s invitation.” (115)
Joyonto shows her his vast compound, which is now occupied by refugees and quite sentimentally tells her how he proposed his garden, etc. But Tara is hardly interested in these details:

Tara was bewildered by her first view of the large and dusty compound. She thought if she had been David she would have taken out notebook and pen and entered important little observations. All she saw was the obvious. Goats and cows grazing in the dust, dogs chasing the friskier children, men sleeping on string beds under a banyan tree. Children playing with mud beside a cracked tube well. Rows of hovels and huts. (116)

Tara loses her balance of mind when she sees the worst part of Calcutta. Actually “Tara has never been a part of the crowd. She has always been sheltered, as child, young adult, and woman. Each excursion traumatizes her by bringing her closer to the touch of the masses” (Sharma 12). In fact, disease, suffering, and poverty are part of existence and a common Indian ignores it or rather accepts it as an integral part of life. Tara herself once overlooked all these things but her life in America has made her differentiate the lives of the poor and those of the rich in her own country. Like the people of the West now she has started looking at India as a land of poor people living in hostile, unhygienic conditions and suffering from starvation, decay and disease.

Tara’s troubled mind gets consolation by visiting Kananbala Mata Devi ashram at the request of her devout mother. She feels her soul uplifted by the “darshan” (TD 172) of Mata, forgetting all the hatred and wickedness for the time being. She experiences a sort of trance in the temple which is a typical religious experience: “Warm and persistent tears rose in Tara’s heart. She forgot her instinctive suspicions, her fears of misunderstandings, and she forgot her guardedness and atrophy in that religious moment. ‘Ma, Ma, Mata!’ she shouted with the rest” (173). Tara thus finds
comfort and strength in her conscious returning to the rites and traditions of her religious faith. But soon she realizes that relief is temporary, not permanent.

Another dreadful incident makes Tara a victim and she takes a decision to leave for America. That is Tara’s meeting with the politician Tuntunwala. He is the same ugly Marwari fellow with whom she had journeyed in the train from Bombay to Calcutta. Tara has come across Mr. Tuntunwala several times. She has always felt a kind of strange attraction towards Tuntunwala and so when he proposes to show Nayapur, she does not decline his proposal. Finally this meeting ends with her claustrophobic rape by this wretched politician. Tara has faced this disgraceful incident not in America, but on her own native soil.

Tara senses the deterioration of Indian culture when she falls a prey to the lust of the lecherous politician. Tara is unaware of the changes that have taken place in Calcutta as the author says:

In another Calcutta such a scene would not have happened. Tara would not have walked into the suite of a gentleman for medicine, and a gentleman would not have dared to make such improper suggestions to her. But except for Camac Street, Calcutta had changed greatly; and even Camac Street had felt the first stirrings of death. With new dreams like Nayapur Tara’s Calcutta was disappearing. New dramas occurred with each new bulldozer incision in the green and romantic hills. Slow learners like Tara were merely victims. (199) By being ignorant of her native place, she becomes a victim of the degrading culture in India. She does not even tell her friends about this incident for the fear of dishonor.

Tara’s first reaction had been to complain to Sanjay and Pronob, to tell them Tuntunwala was a parasite who would survive only at their expense. But the outrage soon subsided, leaving a residue of unforgiving bitterness. She realized
she could not share her knowledge of Tuntunwala with any of her friends. In a land where a friendly smile, an accidents brush of fingers, can ignite rumours – even lawsuits- how is one to speak of Tuntunwala’s violence? (190)

In this way Tara’s dilemma is enlarged and she realizes that her feeling of insecurity on the alien soil is an expression of her homesickness.

Inspite of her seven years stay abroad, Tara has retained her innocence. She does not possess the strength required to protect herself from people like Tuntunwala. Her experience with him shatters her. She decides to return to David like a child running back into the protective arms of an adult. Unlike other protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee, Tara is certainly not one of the emergent women of modern fiction. To her, a father in childhood and a husband in later life are essential as protectors. Tara remains after all, the traditional daughter and wife.

The safe and predictable Calcutta that Tara had envisioned for herself in New York has now become “the deadliest city in the world” (168). Though America always reminds her of her rootlessness, seven years later, her own country, India is no better. Tara becomes ‘foreign’ to her native culture and is once again filled with the sense of alienation and rootlessness. She begins to question her own identity. She is totally confused. Tara cannot share her feelings with her friends and relatives, and she fails to express her feelings for her foreign husband. For David she is a foreigner and for her Indian friends and relatives she is a sinner who has polluted herself by marrying a mleccha. As M.Sivaramkrishna comments:

Tara in The Tiger’s Daughter finds it difficult to relate herself to the family, city, culture in general since her marriage to an American, her western education are enough signs to brand her as an ‘alienated’ westernized woman.

The implicit logic is that since she is exposed to the West and has absorbed its
values she must be necessarily alienated. Therefore even when she tries to ‘voice’ her continuing attachment for identity with India, the voice does not carry conviction ... of indifference and arrogance – one generally associates with the ‘westernized’ (exiled) Indian.” (74)

Tara’s western education and American husband cause the feeling of rootlessness and sense of not belonging to either India or America. Tara legitimately feels, like Spivak, that “I am bicultural, but my biculturality is that I’m not at home in either of the places” (qtd.in Bose 53). Tara’s double consciousness makes her a nowhere woman.

America has certainly transformed Tara, for she has now come to realize the gulf between her old sense of perception and outlook while in India and her changed outlook after her sojourn to America. Commenting upon this situation, Mukherjee in an interview stated about this novel: “It is the wisest of my novels in the sense that I was between two worlds. I was detached enough from India so that I could look back with affection and irony, but I didn’t know America enough to feel any conflict. I was like a bridge poised between two worlds” (Steinberg 46-47). Though, Mukherjee admits no conflict within her, Tara finds herself sandwiched between two cultures. Tara leads a life of duality and conflict seeking stability through her marriage which lacks confidence and mutual understanding and put her in an acute traumatic dilemma. Brinda Bose comments appropriately as,

Duality and conflict are not merely a feature of immigrant life in America: Mukherjee’s women are brought up in a culture that presents them with such ambiguities from childhood. The breaking of identities and the discarding of languages actually begin early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich cultural and religious traditions, on the one hand, and the “new learning” imposed by British colonialism in India, on the other. These different influences
involve them in tortured processes of self-recognition and self-assimilation right from the start; the confusion is doubled upon coming to America. (TD 50)

Ananda Prabha Barat comments on Tara’s double consciousness that, “There is a strange fusion of the Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of Tara. Neither can she take refuge in her old Indian self nor in the newly discovered American self. The outcome of this confrontation is her split up psyche.” (55)

Mukherjee has clearly presented the cultural conflict of the East and the West in *The Tiger’s Daughter*. Tara’s attempt at assimilation in America ends in failure due to her unbelongingness. She breaks her family tradition by marrying an American to find security in an alien land. But her marriage also proves a failure since she always suffers from nervousness and apprehension that her husband is a foreigner, and doubts his understanding of her and her Indian tradition. While in India, she feels alienated due to her changed viewpoint on Indian life after her seven years stay in America. From the beginning to the end of the novel, Tara has been shown as shuttling between the world of alienation and the world of belonging—the Western world and the Indian world. She understands that she is neither Indian nor American. Tara is “rejecting India and her Indianess unable to grasp its meaning, and equally unable to understand the America she is going back to” (Jain 15). She is utterly perplexed and lost. “Throughout the novel she is shown as torn apart by the feeling of nostalgia and rootlessness. She has to pass through the intense cataclysmic feelings of alienation and yearning for belongingness” (Siroha 113). Tara is caught between two contrasting cultures, and realizing that the gap between the two worlds cannot be bridged together. Maya Manju Comments:

When Tara/Bharati goes west, she undergoes a new birth in the womb of Vassar and growth in graduate school. The new-birthed consciousness birthed in dormitories and classrooms by a Western curriculum and consciousness—
seeks to hold its history at its center where the knowledge is visionless. Like Henry James’ heroine, Isabel Archer, who goes to Europe/Britain, the source of her tradition, for vision in knowledge, so Tara/ Bharati must come to the source-the omphalos of all vision-the Catelli-Continental. Thanks to Joyonto Roy Chowdhury, and her years away, Tara begins to exchange vision for insight. At the end of the novel, as she sits shivering in the Fiat, surrounded by a mob, wondering whether she will ever see her husband again, she sees the vision twinkling, pinching, pulling, slapping through the crowd that surrounds the hotel. Bharati Mukherjee is refusing to state what it is, invites a reader response in decoding the vision. (13-14)

The last pages of the novel are full of rapid and forceful incidents. Bharati Mukherjee brings the novel to a sensational close like some Indian Hindi movie. Every nook and cranny of Calcutta is with aggressive demonstrations and riots. The labourers rising against their masters. The entire city is losing its memories in a bonfire of effigies, buses and trams: “Tragedy, of course, was not uncommon in Calcutta. The newspapers were full of epidemics, collisions, fatal quarrels and starvation. Even murders, beheadings of landlords in front of their families…” (TD 97). Amidst this violent situation Tara cannot be a person who “longed for the Bengal of Satyajit Ray, children running through cool green spaces, aristocrats despairing in music rooms of empty palaces” (105). Out of bewilderment, Tara calls her friends at Catelli Continental to let them know about her decision of leaving for America. In the mean time, the troop of protestors heads towards Catelli and Tara with her company gets surrounded by the mob. In an attempt to escape, Joyonto Roy Chowdry is caught in the messy crowd. Pronob attempts to save Joyonto but is regrettably killed by the multitude. Mukherjee ends the novel with: “Tara, still locked in a car across the street from the Catelli –
Continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she did not, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely” (210). It is not known whether Tara meets her husband or not as the novel ends with Tara caught in the midst of a riotous Calcutta. Nagendra Kumar in his book *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee: A Cultural Perspective*, remarks: “In a sense the turmoil outside is but an external manifestation of Tara’s inner state of mind and by leaving her amidst that turmoil, perhaps, Mukherjee hints at the irreconcilability of such conflicts.” (42)

Through *The Tiger’s Daughter*, Mukherjee shows that the country of origin is a mirage to which the immigrant can never return. Once the culture and the tradition is denaturalized it loses its meaning, and naturalness is impossible to recover. Hence, Tara is not able to balance both the cultures- American and Indian. Till the final day of her stay in India, Tara’s double consciousness makes her feel rootless and doesn’t allow her to find her identity in her native soil. So, Tara’s quest for self in the place of origin is frustrating and slowly leads her to disillusion, depression and alienation ending in a tragedy.

Bharati Mukherjee’s novels deal with the attempts of the Indian and other Third World immigrants to tackle the problem of loss of culture and their endeavour to assume a new identity in the United States. *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife* consist of many similarities. In both the novels, Mukherjee uses general terms or kinship terms like the daughter of Bengal Tiger or wife of Amit Basu to refer to the protagonists, which show the dependent nature of both the protagonists. The narrative technique used in both these novels is omniscient narration. However, there are dissimilarities between the two protagonists as well. Tara and Dimple move in opposite directions. As Jasbir Jain states, “Dimple’s journey-unlike Tara’s is undertaken in search of fulfillment and self-expression. *Wife* does not begin where *The Tiger’s Daughter* ends, but it
progresses in the opposite direction” (15). Tara returns to Calcutta, her homeland after seven years stay in the United States to reclaim her roots and to overcome her doubts and fears she experienced in the alien land. On the contrary, Dimple migrates to the United States in search of her future.

*Wife* is an excellent example of the encounter between different cultures. In this novel, Mukherjee focuses on cultural displacement or dislocation which attests new identities but of course, through a rigorous path. In *Wife*, Mukherjee brings the hardships of an immigrant to light in the multicultural environment. She situates the novel in the United States to disclose the constraints in multiculturalism and the inconsistencies between a policy of cultural difference and the American dream of Individualism and Opportunity. The protagonist, Dimple, is newlywed, immigrates to the United States and fails to cope with different cultural setup and at the end becomes neurotic. Mukherjee depicts a fixed American culture that invalidates individual identity in favor of communal identities found in foreign culture. In turn, it restricts the liberty and success of its mythological promises.

When writing *Wife*, Mukherjee herself was going through a dark, neurotic phase. When she married Clark Blaise, she gave up her cultural identity and personal comfort for the sake of this white man and her only role was that of a wife. In spite of belonging to an upper middle class family, having liberal parents, and received elitist education, she was bound to the duties of a wife, almost in the way defined by conservative Indian society. Role fulfillment as Clark's wife had the same stress, tensions and burdens as it did for any conservative Hindu Bengali girl from Calcutta married into a Hindu Bengali family.

Mukherjee's anger at the predicament of Bengali wives in Calcutta merged with her own frustrations as an Indian immigrant in Canada gave *Wife* the feel of a book
with a tone of bitterness tinged with violence. “Wife was a very painful book” (Connell, Grearson and Grimes 23) for her to write.

Further, in Days and Nights in Calcutta she says that Wife is about “a young Bengali wife who was sensitive enough to feel the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and break out.” (268)

The Protagonist, Dimple is an instance of the forlorn and ill-accommodated self of an Indian wife “finding herself out of depths in a foreign country with an alien milieu-this situation of ‘culture shock’ is too trite to need analysis-but essentially it is the agony of a voice struggling for identity and getting stifled repeatedly” (Sivaramakrishna 80). In Wife, Mukherjee used Dimple as a tool to inform Americans that this is how the Indian wives suffer. Dimple is held suspended between two worlds. Asnani comments: “Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be submissive and self-effacing” (42). The character, Dimple, is endowed with some symbolic dimensions. The name Dimple is a deliberate choice of the author where she quotes the Oxford English Dictionary meaning of “Dimple” as “any slight surface depression” (Wife 1) at the beginning of the novel. The word “depression” present in the meaning of her name never allows Dimple to get rid of the various stages of frustrations caused by the multicultural environment.

The Central character, Dimple, in the process of becoming an American, tries to mimic the West. This Mimicry leads her to the state of disillusioned, disintegrated and fractured identity and she becomes neurotic. ‘Mimicry’ as defined by Homi Bhabha is a complex phenomenon. He borrows his concept of “mimicry” from Jacques Lacan and writes: “The effect of mimicry is camouflage…. It is not a question of
harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare” (qtd. in Bhabha 85). Bhabha defines “mimicry” and says, “… colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (86). Mimicry is not merely the imitation of the human behavior but the attitude and temperament come into play. It does not inculcate a positive and creative approach in the mind of the immigrant instead it hinders his growth. It suppresses one’s own cultural identity and leaves the person to an ambivalent and confused state. Bhabha says that “…discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence” (86). The immigrant desires for something that he lacks and he keeps on learning the new strategies of imitation to achieve the desired goal. Bhabha says that this imitation never completes, and there is always something that the immigrant lacks. There are always cultural, historical, and racial differences which hinder one’s complete transformation into something new. This desire of the immigrant for the total metamorphosis and to acquire the attitude of the host never gets fulfilled.

From the very beginning of the novel, Dimple seems to be different from normal girls. Dimple has nothing to do except thinking about marriage because she thinks that marriage is a blessing in disguise, which will bring her freedom, fortune and happiness: “She fantasized about young men with mustaches, dressed in spotless white, peering into opened skulls. Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love” (Wife 3). She is awaiting for a smart, handsome husband, preferably a Neurosurgeon, who will provide her everything in life. The desire of Dimple is exhibited clearly as, “She wanted a different life- an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris- so she placed her faith
in neurosurgeons and architects” (3). After a desperate waiting which makes Dimple
disgust and despair, she is finally married to Amit Kumar Basu, a young engineer, who
has intended to go to America to make a great fortune and to lead a comfortable, rich
retired life in Calcutta.

Dimple’s life at her in law’s house is frustrating. Despite her effort to please
them, she is not accepted whole heartedly. Dimple attempts to live up to the
expectations of her in law’s are futile which makes her feel isolated in her own house.
Though newly married, she is not happy. She talks to herself, “Happy people did not
talk to themselves and happy people did not pretend that they had not been talking to
themselves” (21). Her unpleasant stay with them makes her realize the difference
between the premarital dreams and the marital realities. But Dimple tolerates
everything by consoling herself that a new life awaits her in a foreign country. She feels
that the immigration to America will provide her an opportunity to get rid off her
monotonous, disgusting middle class life in Calcutta. But to her dismay,
disappointment alone awaits her in America as well. Dimple experiences immigration
only as expatriation as she fails to adapt to American Culture and maintains Duality.

The house where she lives in doesn’t provide her any happiness. She felt her flat
is ‘horrid’ (18). The “lace doilies are for her so degrading that she wishes she were
back in her own room in Rash Behari Avenue” (30). She does not even love Amit, her
husband. She felt he is not a man of her dreams. “She wanted to dream of Amit but she
knew she would not. Amit did not feed her fantasy life; he was merely the provider of
small material comforts. In bitter moments she ranked husband, blender, colour T.V.,
cassette tape recorder, stereo in their order of convenience” (113). She obsessively
measures her husband against her ideal man who has “a forehead from an aspirin ad,
the lips, eyes and chin from a body builder and shoulder ads, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad.” (23)

Becoming a mother is the greatest joy that a woman can have in the married life. But for Dimple, the contemplation of her pregnancy infuriates her. Despite knowing the significance of motherhood, she feels that the comfortable life which she would get in foreign country would be prevented by her pregnancy. Hence, she unsympathetically aborts her baby: “she had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last drop of the blood washed off her legs; then she collapsed” (42). She justifies her merciless act that she cannot afford to take any remnants from her old life to America. It symbolizes that she tries to liberate herself from the traditional role of a Hindu wife and asserting her will. She strongly believes that she will embark on a new life in the new world. “I want everything to be nice and a new, she informs her friend, Pixie on the phone” (41). But, all her dreams and expectations are crushed, after going to America.

As Maya Manju Sharma observes, unlike Tara Cartwright of The Tiger’s Daughter, who “returns to India to recover her roots, Dimple Basu does everything she can to obliterate hers,” inducing a miscarriage “so that she does not have to bring a child conceived in India into the New World,” and adopting abortion as “a sacrament of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood.” (15)

The epics, Vedas and Puranas envision marriage not as a mere social instrument, but also as a moral weapon both to stabilize and promote the moral stature of an individual. But unfortunately, it is an irony of fate that in a post-modernistic world, such esteemed institutions are currently subject to doubt, cynicism and erosion. Dimple, who is never taught of significance of married life, started hating her married
life for trivial reasons. For her, marriage has not “provided all the glittery things she had imagined, had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies and three A.M. drives to dingy restaurants where they sold divine ‘kababs’ rolled in ‘roti’” (Wife 101-2). Life with Amit, both in India and America, is a big disappointment for her. In the moments of utter frustration she thinks that life has been cruel to her: “Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries; he was unreal. She was furious, desperate; she felt sick.” (156)

Bereft of Indian values, Dimple lands in America with her dreams and goals. Instead of having an adventurous spirit, Dimple gets confused by exposure to American culture. This pathetic condition of an immigrant in the New land is well exposed by Uma Parameswaran in the article “Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too!” as “When one arrives in a new land, one has a sense of wonder and adventure at the sight and feel of a landscape so different from what one has been accustomed to; there is also a sense of isolation and fear; and intense nostalgia is a buffer to which many retreat” (31). Nina, in Manju Kapur’s fiction The Immigrant (2008), is one such character who symbolises a maladjusted migrant. The instant when she lands at the Toronto Airport, she feels completely estranged. She expresses her dejection to her husband as, “This is not your country. You are deceived, and you have deceived me. You made it out to be a liberal haven where everybody loved you... I am the wrong colour, I came from the wrong place. See me in the Airport, of all the passengers the only one not allowed to sail through immigration, made to feel like an illegal alien” (108). In the same way, Dimple’s confused state is well expressed by Nagendra Kumar as, “Hoe boorish, an innocent Indian wife can keep her nerves in a country where murder was like flapping the bugs?” (49)
In America, Dimple encounters both her own and foreign cultures: the self-sufficient domestic world of Indians in Queens and the “sophisticated” parties of the more amiable and “Americanized” Indians in Manhattan (*Wife* 60-61). The discussions always stick invariably to the Indians’ individual and collective expectations of “making it in America” and on the downsides in living in the U.S.: the high crime in the streets of New York, the cost of buying groceries, the reasons for not getting to know Americans—“… who needs Sahebs? There must be a thousand Indians in just this neighborhood” (54). Dimple, who had believed that she would be “free” to experience a life different and distanced from that which she had left behind in India, finds her existence in a vague, undefined social space that, paradoxically, reinforces her indigenous cultural set up: she is most reminded of her “Indian-ness” among the “Americanized Indians” (77). Marginalized by the patriarchy of Indian culture, Dimple is equally at sea in her adopted culture. This in-between condition makes Dimple feel rootless and leads her to develop neurosis.

Meeting their Indian friends, Dimple is struck by their fancy talk and social behavior, too different from the Indians she knew in Calcutta. Leaving an Indian party, Jyoti said, “wasn’t it wonderful that Indians abroad were so outgoing and open minded. They didn’t give a damn about communalism and petty feelings. They [Jyoti and his wife] personally counted a number of Punjabis, Gujaratis and some South Indians among their friends. Jyoti told Dimple not to restrict herself to Bengalis, or else she’d miss a lot of the experience of being abroad” (67). There will always be the comparison between Indian and American whenever the circle of Indians meets. The drive to comparison starkly separates both cultures and allows the Indian immigrants to boast their inherent Indianness, a duality they feel compelled to display and perform. Introduced to Ina Mullick, a liberated housewife who is “more American than
According to Nagendra Kumar, “Indian society is a patriarchal society and it hardly permits a woman to talk of liberation and equality. Here male members decide the fate of their female counterpart” (50). As per the Sens warning to keep Dimple out of friendship with Ina, who would otherwise corrupt Dimple with her crazy ideas, Amit restrains Dimple from accepting Ina’s drink: “She does not like alcoholic beverages”, Amit said, “She does not even drink coke.” (Wife 77)

Dimple’s sense of her own identity (and marginality) frames all of her responses to her new environment, which consists generally of Indians, mostly Bengalis. That the ethnography of Indians, including “Americanized” Bengalis, is one of the many reversals of ideological positioning Mukherjee employs in Wife. When Jyoti and Amit discuss “guns and licenses” over dinner, Dimple “thought she had never really been friends with anyone before this, never stayed with someone for weeks and discussed important things like love and death. That’s what America meant to her.” (84-85)
Dimple misses ample chances of experiencing life on the outside that would shape her view of American society, as misunderstood the social circle of Indians for “cultural experience”. However, Dimple’s analysis of her earliest encounter with American society is from the standpoint of her own culture. Dimple’s effort to buy a cheese cake for dessert, (what she considers “a very American thing to do” (58) in a Jewish delicatessen, made her utter frustrated and alienated. Encouraged by Meena, she goes to the shop alone and glances one by one, the glass cake, pickles, salads, pink roast beef etc. She asks for cheesecake but the shopkeeper starts staring at her. When she repeats the sentence, the shopkeeper asks her whether she does not know the law and searches for something in his drawer. She is afraid, she thinks that the man is taking out his gun and she is left with no option but to be killed without crying. Here she realises the difference between Calcutta and New York. This very first exposure to America leaves a traumatic effect on her mind. She fails to understand the reason why a man selling beef cannot sell cheese cake. Dimple, in her effort to be “American”, innocently tries to buy cheesecake and is terrified by the owner’s irritable response and certain that she will pay for her imperfect English and cultural ignorance by being shot on the spot. She perceives her venturing into America as being met with the penalty of death, as warned by Meena. She thought: “She was caught in the crossfire of an American communalism. She could not understand. She felt she’d come very close to getting killed on her third morning in America” (60). This incident highlights Dimple’s alienation because she displaces herself in favor of adopting a culture to replace her own.

The complete estrangement in the displaced women is due to the feeling of inferiority complex, as they lack basic details about the New Land. They begin to feel culturally, linguistically, socially and emotionally estranged, and accept that “There is,
however, no question of comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the other” (Silverman and Elliston 161). Dimple too feels herself completely misfit in the New Land because of her inferiority complex.

Mukherjee depicts the Americanness as a cultural identity which is something immigrants cannot achieve; yet, they endeavor to attain. Before their voyage to America, Amit attempts to acculturate Dimple by taking her out and making her eat with knife and fork. When Meena Sen admits that she suffers from headache when trying to understand native English-speakers, it causes embarrassment to all. At that moment of “inadequacy” (Wife 54), Meena no longer tried to understand them; she experiences the confusion of an immigrant in a new culture with a new language to learn. Thus, Americanization, for these people means replacing of Indian culture with American culture, which uses the logic of assimilation. Ina Mullick, the Indian immigrant, theorizes the “great moral and physical change” of American immigration as the “Before and After”, which formulates immigrant identity in temporal and exclusive terms. Ina represents the After while Dimple remarks, “I’m always a Before …I guess I’ve never been an After” (95). Dimple’s present tense, coupled with the eternal “always”, implies continuity rather than successive stages of identity. Because Dimple affirms her “Before” status in America, she unconsciously breaks down the spatial barriers of India and America and regards her identity as continuous rather than a series of cultural identities, of Befores and Afters. Thus, Dimple has the craving to stick to tradition at the same time the influence of American notion of freedom inculcates in her the desire to protest against the strict norms of traditions. However, she finds herself in a flux because she is unable to determine any clear-cut priority. According to Ina, the immigrant must expel India; completely serve the past from the present, in order to assume an American identity.
Right since childhood through adolescence to adulthood, Dimple has all along felt it impossible to be modern. Coming to America, for her, was a dream came true, but she tells Ina that, “there are some things I can’t do. Wearing pants is one of them. I couldn’t walk down the street in your pants and sweaters” (154) and then she asks, “What’s more normal and graceful than a sari?” (155). Even Amit takes off his western clothes and puts on a pair of loose khadi pajamas and a thin Kurta the moment he comes back from office, for he feels comfortable and at home in them. In fact, Indians try to preserve their cultural relics which makes them all the more nostalgic.

The art of communication between husband and wife is essential to marital happiness. After getting exposed to the alien culture, Amit and Dimple fail to communicate with each other. This has a significant effect upon their relationship. This failure in communication widens the gap between the couple and develops a breach between them and ultimately destroys their relationship. Mukherjee in an interview expressed the condition of the immigrant wives:

When an Asian man comes to America he comes for economic transformation, and he brings a wife who winds up being psychologically changed. This is one of the tragedies you see being played out in all the New Jersey shopping malls these days. The Indian women walking around in the malls with nothing to do all day, while the men are out busily making money. The men have a sense of accomplishment. They have no idea of staying here. The idea is saving money and going. But they don’t realize the women have been transformed. (Connell, Grearson and Grimes 16)

Dimple hates Amit as he fails to fulfill her fantasy. Dejected Dimple takes pleasure by taunting Amit. Inamdar says, “She angers her husband by making fun of his dress, spilling curry on his shirt front. She goes to the extent of condemning the gifts he
brings for her. Her abnormality reaches the climax when she skips her way to abortion.” (69)

In the baffled condition, Dimple leads a lonely life of assisting Meena Sen, watching T.V or reading newspaper. Through media she is introduced to violence. Added to this, she hears about more murder. There were frequent announcements of murders in newspapers, car radio and in casual conversations. She constantly lives in fear of the unknown. She contemplates violence and killing. An American wife divorces her husband for snoring. Even the American cinema displayed only sex and violence. So Mukherjee writes: “The women on television led complicated lives, become pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances, murdered, were brought to trial and released; they suffered through the ping-pong volley of their fates with courage” (Wife 73). This is now, the Indian women, in the flux of race and sexuality turn victims of their own crisis. Evidently, Dimple is caught in a tradition of passivity, female treachery and covert violence. Many more news about American’s barbarous acts of violence, sex and bloodshed do not go without frightening and corrupting Dimple. This, in fact, leads her to murder Amit. Ina rightly says: “our trouble here is that we imitate badly, and we preserve things even worse.” (95)

Dimple starts searching for alternatives in order to cope with her alienation. She mulls over attending and throwing parties and serving food in a glamorous way. She talks to Amit that, “I would read up recipes and make watercress soup. I would do wonders with two carrots and chicken. You know what I mean? Something daring and glamorous. If it were my party, I’d serve drinks indoors and food on the patio or should it be food indoors and drinks in the patio?” (88-89). She is tempted to roam in the markets. She goes out with Ina to the restaurants for Pizza eating. But it is the window shopping which she likes most. She loves having friends dropping in and makes it point
to organize social gatherings at home and be a good host, curious to know, “if the hostess was supposed to provide the cigarettes as well as the coffee” (146). She had watched in the Bengali films what the high class society does. But, all her efforts to be happy went useless. She could not drive out her aloofness and the thought of rootless condition.

Dimple feels that America has outwitted her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. Dimple experiences loneliness at every quarter of her life. It is beyond her understanding “how could she live in a country… where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator?” (112). She is afraid to operate the self-service elevators. She has to live within the four walls of the apartment. TV is all her cosmos where she watches endless violence and murder. She indulges in a sense of nostalgia thinking about her peaceful life at Calcutta with her friends. She finds it difficult to share her inmost heart even to her husband. Dimple thinks that “She had expected pain when she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any new beginning and in the sweet structures of that new life had allotted pain a special place. But she had not expected her mind to be strained like this, beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia, exhaustion, endless indecisiveness” (115). Thus she suffers from abnormality of mind and from the crisis of culture. This psychic development in Dimple has been variously but uncritically viewed as her desperate effort to forget her Indian roots necessitated by the demands of American life and physical and emotional isolation from her overbearing husband. Her fictional world is hovering between two cultures. The two cultures are particularly discussed in the canvas of the novels i.e. Bengali culture, American culture. The situation worsens when Amit gets a job. The couple moves to another flat – a well furnished apartment with all sorts of modern appliances. The living condition of the couple improves, yet Dimple
feels lonely. Vandana Singh points out Dimple’s pathetic condition as, “Hovering between two cultures gives rise to split characters, tends to unbalance personalities. Having no choice, the individual takes a decision. It can be total extreme case of following the emancipated attitude of American culture, or delve into the past and keep hanging on the former culture.” (76)

Dimple finds life impossible with the people who don’t understand Durga Pujah. C.S.Lakshmi pertinently describes Dimple’s state of mind: “We all carry a lot of baggage deep inside. It surfaces when provoked by events, statements or circumstances, and then colours the way we respond” (4). Dimple’s attachment to rituals exhibits the Indianness in her. Further, it is added evidence for Dimple’s failure in getting assimilated to the American culture. Dimple’s failure in assimilation with America is due to the lack of shared-faith. For Indians, religion is an integral part of life. According to C.S.Lakshmi, “…for a woman, religion is not just something linked to God but a cultural practice that she is supposed to preserve” (4). Dimple’s bitter experience with the outside world made her timid. The situations which appeared unfussy in Calcutta, frightens her in America. According to Nagendra Kumar, “An expatriate is tenaciously conscious of preserving his identity even in most trying moments of life. In America, She realises how easy it was to live, to communicate, and to share with people in Calcutta. She never felt frightened at the sight of the policemen whose faces were so friendly, but the scene has changed completely in the new environment” (53). She is scared of policemen, of gadgets and appliances. Dimple’s disgust with America, accentuated even by minute things, is explained by Linda Sandler as her failure to re-root herself. “Dimple emigrates to the electronic age with her traditional values almost intact, only partly modified by the pop culture of modern Calcutta, she is unable to make the transition from Before to After and chooses
violence as a ‘problem-solving device ...’ (75). She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated marginalized and rootless. Dimple is so troubled by this American life that she hurts Amit with a knife when he comes from behind to embrace her. She apologizes to Amit and blames America for making her timid and nervous: “This would not have happened if we had stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home.” (Wife 132)

Dimple’s depression manifests itself in different ways. She is desperately unhappy. She feels “like a star, collapsing inwardly” (109) and is sure that something has gone dead inside her. She is not able to write to Pixie, even though in her mind she begins many a time. She gives up the idea because she thinks: “Friendship was impossible through letters. Conveying New York, Ina Mullick, her nightmares, the “phase” (as Amit calls it) she was going through- all impossible to talk about...” (120). Within the circle of Indian immigrants too, Dimple finds herself a stranger. The Indians in America who have adjusted themselves to the American ways of life make her feel an outsider. In her own community too she fails to relate and experiences rejection. This is apparent at Vinod Khanna’s party where Dimple feels edgy about the food that is prepared. At night, after the party, she could not sleep. She dislikes everything in Meena Sen’s flat where she is staying provisionally. It is very evocative that Dimple and Amit do not find a flat of their own. After leaving Sen’s apartment, they shift to the flat of Pradosh and Marsha Mookerji, who is on a long vacation. If Dimple has to live in America, she has to live in not only in a borrowed flat but also in a borrowed culture. When she fails to relate to the real world, she tries to relate to the fictitious world shown on the T.V. But this provides wrong solutions to the real problems. Linda Sandler aptly comments on her being far from reality: “She is uprooted from her family and her familiar world, and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes
her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustrations and unhooked her further from reality” (75). Dimple’s mind becomes rebellious due to over exposure to the alien culture.

At Queens, Dimple had a confidante in Meena Sen with whom she could share her private feelings but at Mookerji’s she is all alone. The new apartment with all its comfort doesn’t appeal to her and change her mood. Manju Kapur explains the immigrant wife’s lonely condition through, Nina (the protagonist of Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant*), who befit the role of:

The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her, it is in the future, and after much finding of feet. At present all she is, is a wife and a wife is alone for many, many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realises she is an immigrant for life. (124)

Dimple’s sense of loneliness further aggravates when Amit rejected her idea of taking a part time job as a salesgirl in Vinod Khanna’s India Emporium. In an unpleasant mood, Dimple shuts herself in the apartment and abhors going out. She is fully cut off from the external world. She is gripped by inertia which bears within itself the danger of deterioration. It is dangerous, says Horney, because it may affect both thinking and feeling. “Some train of thought may be set in motion by a conversation, but it peters out soon. Some feeling may be stimulated by a visit or a letter, but it likewise fades out soon after. A letter may evoke an impulse to answer it, but it is forgotten” (qtd. in Bande 131). Dimple’s emotional life is choked and she feels paralyzed. She not only avoids responsibility toward Amit, she shirks responsibility for the “self”. She blames others for her ills and thus avoids self-hate. Since there is lack of spontaneous feelings,
she lacks the power of spontaneous integration of the self. Disintegrating forces are let loose and conflicts increase. This is her stage of self-alienation when she loses contact with reality. In *Theories of Personality*, Dimple’s lonely existence is denoted in the neurotic needs for self-sufficiency and independence as, “Having been disappointed in attempts to find warm satisfying relationships with people, the person sets him or herself apart from others and refuses to be tied down to anyone or anything. Such people become ‘loners’ ” (Calvin, Lindzey and Campbell 151). The very thought of aloofness fragments her psychologically. With utmost anxiety, Dimple conceives the idea of violence against herself. As per Sigmund Freud’s Classical Psychoanalytic Theory, “Anxiety is a state of tension; It is a drive like hunger or sex, but instead of arising from internal tissue conditions, it is produced originally by external causes. When anxiety is aroused, it motivates the person to do something. He or she may flee from the threatening region, inhibit the dangerous impulse, or obey the voice of conscience” (47). Dimple, out of anxiety, thinks of seven ways of committing suicide. The author writes: “setting fire to a sari had been one of the seven types of suicide Dimple had recently devised” (*Wife* 115). This idea of suicide is transformed as murder against Amit later. Dimple’s psychological transformation is explained by Blaise in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, that *Wife* is about such a girl “whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed in the madness of emigration to New York into murder.” (141)

In the new environment, Dimple is left to her own strategies of survival. This advancement is evinced in the modulation of her response to the conduct of Marsha’s brother, Milt Glasser, who hugs, cuddles and even lifts Dimple onto the top of the kitchen counter as their acquaintance develops. She is at first embarrassed and uncomfortable with him, but slowly she discovers in him a source of emotional support and even a recognition of her identity, what she had missed in Amit. He too senses her
discontent, but makes no sincere effort to understand or help her out of her melancholy. This prolonged unconcern of Amit, to her predicament, makes Dimple turn Milt as lover and seduce him one afternoon in their flat. She is unworried by any sense of guilt at her infidelity, an evidence of her drifting away from her inherited culture and its values, and the distance her psyche has travelled. She, thus, turns a rebellion and violates all typical behaviour of Indian Womanhood. Even after her intimate relationship with Milt Glasser, her isolation and despair become even more acute. Dimple has committed the ultimate desecration, the treachery of her gendered Indian culture: “She was so much worse off than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians, left only with borrowed disguises … [living] like a shadow without feelings.” (Wife 200)

Dimple’s dalliance with Milt, however, works as a symbol for multiculturalism, for it requires substituting her Indian marriage with an American relationship, to supplement one culture for the other and therefore maintain the difference between the two. She identifies Milt as the quintessential American with whom she can engage meaningless small talk - “He was, to her, America” (175). If Milt is America to Dimple, then she hopes she can allay her anguish by sleeping with him, there by adopting his culture and rejecting her own. However, Dimple’s deep rooted Indianness doesn’t allow her to assimilate to American culture. She attempts pathetically to merge herself into the new culture by wearing the borrowed outfit of Marsha and by flirting with Milt Glasser. Even after this, she experiences total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. The author writes: “Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne” (117). All her sincere efforts to fit into the alien culture fail miserably. Dimple remains isolated and rootless in her dreamland. She has traveled as far as she could, in her
quest, to gain a new identity and yet is no closer to her goal of achieving self-fulfillment in America. Her desire to unite with an American has taken her to a dead end, while she has experienced enough of expatriate life to know that she cannot stand it anymore.

The clash in Dimple’s feminist and American desire to be assertive and outgoing and traditional requirement to be submissive, leads to her emotional cracking-up, and she begins to depict schizophrenic traits:

She was furious, desperate; she felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster, some monster had overtaken her body, a creature with serpentine curls and heaving bosom that would erupt indiscreetly through one of Dimple’s orifices, leaving her, Dimple Basu, splattered like a bug on the living-room wall and rug. The cataclysm embraced her. (156)

Amit could observe only the external changes in Dimple’s behaviour and he thinks that it may be due to culture shock. He even promises to take her to Calcutta, but that does not help either. The influence of the media brings out the violence in Dimple as she starts contemplating the murder of her husband. The idea of murdering her husband enthralls her. She thinks, “She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American, somehow, almost like a character in a T.V. series” (195). This idea makes her reconcile herself to the culture shock that Amit thinks of happening to Indian wives all the time. The problem with Amit is that he fails to understand the emotional breakdown of Dimple. “He never thought of such things, never thought of how hard it was for her to keep quiet and smile though she was falling apart like a very old toy…” (212)

According to S.Indira, “Dimple experiences total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. Torn by the conflict between her fantasy world and the reality
of her situation, she allows her mind to be totally conditioned by the commercials on
T.V. and magazines so much so she loses the ability to distinguish them from the world
of reality” (141-142). She longs to live like the glamorous T.V. characters. She loses
her sleep and in a agonized intensity, she ultimately kills Amit without even thinking
about its consequences:

She sneaked up on him and chose a spot, her favourite spot just under the
hairline, where the mole was getting larger and browner, … she touched the
mole very lightly and let her fingers draw a delectable spot, then she brought
her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle, once, twice,
seven times, each time a little harder, until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a
pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any
advertiser, and then she saw the head fall off...Women on television got away
with murder. (Wife 212-213)

The vast difference between the uprooting of Dimple from one culture and putting in of
another culture has created a sense of instability and insecurity in her, which prompted
her to commit such a dreadful act.

Some critics are of the view that Dimple’s terrible murder of her husband is not
out of cultural shock. “She is not a victim of “expatriation” but a “victim of her own
neurotic sensibility fed on popular advertisement fantasies” ” (qtd. in Kumar 58). It is
probable that if Dimple had stayed back in India she would have had her family’s
support during times of her emotional breakdown, not ended up as a murderer. The
violence that is passively seen in her mind gets intensified on coming to America where
“talking about murder is like talking about the weather” (Wife 161). Dimple has never
been able to relate herself to her tradition, or to understand it. Jasbir Jain remarks: “All
her actions are geared toward the future and this bespeaks of the main problem, the
utter rootlessness of her life” (17). Dimple’s alienation is rooted not alone in loneliness and isolation but also in cultural differences, estrangement from her own past and her own inner being.

Mukherjee's first novel The Tiger’s Daughter was written during a difficult phase of life when Mukherjee was struggling to determine her own identity against the Indian heritage. With this novel, Mukherjee examines the recognition of the Indian expatriate Tara who returns home after seven years of stay in America. Tara becomes foreign to her native values and is once again filled with the sense of alienation in her native country. In Wife, Mukherjee explores the violence in America which actually intensifies the confusion and violence within the protagonist Dimple turning her into a neurotic and a murderer of her husband. Both Tara and Dimple are shown as expatriates in India and America in a multicultural set up and their quandary due to their rootlessness in life. Jasbir Jain remarks that in The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife, “The main concern is, no matter how we approach these novels, the relationship of the protagonists towards India. The attempt to understand India is clouded by the desire to interpret for foreigners, to judge India by their standards and value system and this results in a kind of vacuum surrounding the protagonists. They belong nowhere.” (18-19)

In both The Tiger’s Daughter and Wife, expatriation is not only a major theme, but it also becomes a metaphor for deeper levels of alienation. This is revealed in some significant images in the two novels. As Christine Gomez points out:

In The Tiger’s Daughter, Hotel Catelli-Continental, described as the “navel of the universe,” (3) becomes an important symbol of a rootless existence, a symbol of Tara’s expatriate sensibility. In Wife, the cage is an important symbol. It stands for a comfortable but restricted existence, for isolation and a
denial of freedom. It is significant that Dimple kills her husband after watching a T.V. programme in which a birdcage figured prominently. (74)

Thus Mukherjee’s two novels *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife* reflect a world which refuses to hold together both at the individual level and at the cultural level. Though there are innumerable characters in both the novels, the protagonists do not relate to the others and are involved in discovering the nature of their identities. As M. Sivaramkrishna comments about Tara and Dimple:

Mrs. Mukherjee’s protagonists … victims of life which is visionless because they are voiceless. Therefore, these protagonists are neither typically Indian or exotically westernized: they are essentially human, basically feminine in their sensibility struggling to find modes of authentic communication. And their problem correspondingly is that since both are exposed to the West, through absorption, mainly of its language and mores, they find it difficult to dissociate the language from culture, their primary emotions from language. In other words, the retention of their identity as Indians is in constant tension with the need for its renunciation if they have a new identity as immigrants. (73-74)

Thus Tara’s return to her native country has made her realize that she can no longer belong to her homeland due to her changed view. Dimple, on the other hand, is disillusioned with her immigrant experience in the alien land, because the adopted homeland has not fulfilled her longing for liberation, rather it intensifies her neurotic problem. Both Tara and Dimple do not want to belong to the traditional womanhood or to be more liberated like the women of the West. They are neither rooted to their own tradition nor assimilated to the culture of the adopted homeland. Hence both of them exist as rootless beings and met with the tragic end.