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**Diasporic Female Identities in Bharati
Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and Idris Ali's
*Dongola***

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By

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To my parents

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to explore the development of female identities in two contemporary diasporic novels Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and Idris Ali's *Dongola* (1993) that tackle the notion of diaspora differently. *Desirable Daughters* portrays the modern type of diaspora, that of immigration, while *Dongola* portrays the Nubian diaspora as a typical classical diaspora. The main goal of the thesis is to examine the different implications of diaspora on the protagonists' identity formation as females in order to know where they fit in the diasporic spectrum. Tara and Halima share some major factors such as being members of ethnic minorities, and being brought up in oppressive patriarchal societies. Each has a different notable experience in terms of individual and social identity transformation due to physical or metaphorical displacement. The thesis will read their different diasporic experiences through intersectionality feminism which is a paradigm of interlocking systems of oppression based on race, class, and gender. The identities of both characters are analyzed against the three factors which are integral to the idea of diaspora. Each of these factors may be looked upon differently after the character's displacement resulting in the character's identity development. The three axes of the intersectionality theory pave the way for understanding the similarities and differences between Tara and Halima in relation to their diasporic situation. Tara discovers her true self and accepts her dual identity after returning to India, while Halima's total loss of her homeland, Nubia, and her husband results in her violent revenge at the end.

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Introduction

The term 'Diaspora' is a complex term that is not easy to define. It generally refers to the "dispersal of a people from their original homeland" (Butler 189). Robin Cohen maintains that the word 'diaspora' has its roots in the Greek translation of the Bible meaning "to sow widely" (507). It is originally derived from the Greek word 'diaspeiro' meaning dispersion or scattering (Dufoix 4); referring to dispersed religious groups and congregations (Dufoix 1). Therefore, the term 'Diaspora' was associated with religion and the three classical diasporas: Jewish, Greek and Armenian. It is a difficult matter to provide a fixed typology of diaspora. Some scholars divide it into religious (Jewish diaspora), nation-based (Indian diaspora), ethnic or cultural (Sikh), regional (Caribbean) or continent-based (African) (Butler 197). Others provide a different typology of diasporas. Robin Cohen, for example, identifies five different categories "victim, labor, trade, imperial and cultural" (Butler 197). This typology is based on the causes of dispersal as well as the status that the immigrants hold in their hostlands (Butler 197-98). Butler also suggests other categories such as captivity, state-eradication exile, forced and voluntary exile, emigration, migration, and imperial diaspora (200-02).

Any diaspora has three main elements: a homeland (whether real or imagined) defined in national or regional terms, a hostland (destination), and finally the diasporic state (Butler 196). The most important of these three elements is the homeland since it "anchors diasporic identity. This connection to place is the hallmark of diasporan identity...it is the existence of the issue of return, and the related sense of connection to the homeland that is intrinsic to the diasporan experience, rather than a specific

orientation toward physical return” (Butler 204). Maintaining a connection with the homeland becomes a means of dealing with the feeling of displacement. This homeland could be a real or an imagined homeland (Dufoix 2-3). Therefore in order to study any diaspora, certain elements have to be examined: “reasons for relocation, relationship with the homeland and the hostland and the interrelationships within the diasporan group” (Butler 209). Moreover, a very important aspect in diaspora is the notion of the border. Borders are “arbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others...are stalked out, contested, defended and fought over”(Brah 625). Therefore, a border complicates the matter of belonging because it implies a definitive break between wanting to belong to the hostland, yet being excluded from it (Brah 632).

Up until the 1950s, the term ‘Diaspora’ generally was used in reference to the Jewish experience of exile and dispersion (Dufoix 17). The Jewish diasporic experience has become the example of the classical diaspora or the religious diaspora and the basis for the theory of Diaspora, “a theory of homeland as a centre that can either be reconstituted (in case of Israel) or imaginatively offered as the point of origin” (Mishra 6). William Safran outlines a set of characteristics that explain the diasporic condition. First, the diasporic group is dispersed to two or more places. Second, the group maintains a certain vision of their homeland. Third, they experience a sense of isolation in the hostland, not being fully accepted. Fourth, they desire to return to their homeland. Fifth, they maintain a relationship with their homeland. Sixth, their consciousness is always linked to their relationship with their homeland (n.pag). While these characteristics may

seem applicable to the classical diaspora, they do not necessarily fit the modern concept of a diaspora.

Kim Butler explains that since the 1960s, the “diasporan populations proliferated, communities that scholars had once labeled as immigrant, nomadic, or exile also began to be called diasporas” (190). Martin Baumann states that the term ‘diaspora’ has expanded to include other segments of people: “national, cultural or religious group living in a foreign land” (22). Nowadays, the term is used as a metaphor for several categories of people such as “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities” (Safran n.pag.). Therefore, it is no longer limited to religious history or the Jewish exile, but it includes any dispersed ethnic minority group that lives in another country such as the African Diaspora, Asian Diaspora,...etc.

George Shepperson introduced the term ‘African diaspora’ in 1965 in his paper “The African Abroad or the African diaspora” at the International Congress of African Historians at University College, Dar es Salaam (Edwards 51). Shepperson expands diaspora in temporal and special spheres. He believes that the African diaspora is similar to the classical diasporas in the sense that Africans have been driven out of their homelands or continent and dispersed to a lot of countries. They all share a painful history of being forced to leave their homelands, and they all maintain real or imagined relationship with their homelands (Edwards 52). Joseph Harris in his introduction to *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* defines African diaspora or the Black diaspora as “the global dispersion of Africans throughout history, the emergence of cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition, and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa” (3). The ‘African diaspora’ is reminiscent of the

slave trade, since Africa has always been regarded as a source of slaves throughout history. The African Diaspora is usually associated with Africans who have experienced the Atlantic slave trade: those who were shipped across the Atlantic to North America to work as slaves. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza believes that “our understanding of the African diaspora remains limited by both the conceptual difficulties of defining what we mean by the diaspora in general and African diaspora in particular, and the analytical tendency to privilege the Atlantic or rather the Anglophone, indeed the American branch of the African diaspora” (36). According to Zeleza, there are four dominant dimensions of the African global diaspora: Intra-Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic diasporas (36). Intra-African diaspora is the migration or displacement of Africans within the geographical boundaries of Africa. This type of diaspora, which entails movement within the same continent, is the least considered within the broader definition of diaspora.

The Nubian diaspora fits under Zeleza’s definition of diaspora. It exemplifies Intra-African Diaspora or the Nubians’ movement within the same continent. It is reminiscent of the classical diaspora-even though it is not based on religious factors- in the sense that the Nubians share a traumatic history, they were forced to leave their homeland, Nubia, yet they still maintain an imagined relationship with their land even after its submersion.ⁱⁱ

On the other hand, James Clifford maintains that modern Diasporas do not necessarily share the characteristics of classical diasporas. Therefore, a diaspora is possible to be the result of a voluntary act, not necessarily a result of mass trauma, does not have to entail returning to the homeland and does not have a physical center to which

it is linked (321). Therefore, classical diasporas are associated with negative issues such as powerlessness, longing and exile; modern diasporas do not necessarily entail forced movement and its accompanying feelings of isolation and despair, but instead a sense of empowerment which leaves its mark on both one's homeland and hostland. The postcolonial Indian diaspora is an example of a modern diaspora. The Indian Diaspora can be classified into three phases: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The pre-colonial and colonial phases can be included under the rubric of involuntary migration as Indians were taken as captives to work for sovereign countries (Sharma 55), while the post-colonial phase is more of voluntary emigration. The post-colonial period or the twentieth century phase, which started after the independence of India in 1947, entails the Indians' emigration to industrially developed countries (Jayaram 18), immigrants were mostly of middle and upper-middle class backgrounds (Sharma 56).ⁱⁱⁱ

There are different modes of adaptation which vary from one community to the other. A displaced person, whether involuntary or voluntary, may cling to his/her culture and values to atone for the issue of displacement and feelings of insecurity. Displaced people may also assimilate in the culture of the hostland conforming to their beliefs and values in order to fit in mainstream society. Others may adjust to the new society while still maintaining their traditions which constitutes a great dilemma as they live between two cultures.

Diasporic literature reflects these issues. It is the literature of ethnic and minority groups who suffer displacement, homesickness and alienation as a result of displacement. Minority discourse is defined as "a theoretical articulation of the political and cultural structures that connect different minority cultures in their subjugation and opposition to

the dominant culture” (Lloyd ix). Diasporic or minority discourse deals with themes such as nostalgia, lamentation, trauma, memory, etc... as minority groups feel uprooted from their native lands and exposed to socio-cultural differences. Rogers Brubaker argues that diasporic writing has undergone a shift of perspective regarding themes and the perception of the diasporic state by the characters. The traditional perspective “took nation states as units of analysis and assumed that immigrants made a sharp and definitive break with their homelands...The new perspective transcend the old assimilationist immigrationist paradigm” (7-8). Therefore, diasporic literature does not only portray the tragedies of people living outside their native countries, but may also include those who try to adapt to the hostland culture. In this case, their positive diasporic experience may include themes of assimilation and hybridity. Diasporic writing highlights ethnic issues like the background of minority groups, emphasizing the distinctive features that identify them as a group like culture, language, religion,...etc. It poses the question of belonging since displaced minority groups may identify with their homelands, their hostlands or both. It tackles the issue of transnational identities and the perception of the homeland and hostland.

Both Bharati Mukherjee and Idris Ali suffered from displacement but in different ways. Mukherjee is an Indian born American writer whose personal life is a series of displacements. However, her dislocation and settling in America is a result of her voluntary migration which makes her see displacement as a process of self discovery. On the other hand, Ali is an Egyptian writer of Nubian origin. He belongs to a group which suffered from forced migration. In his writings, Ali condemns the displacement which

resulted in the calamity of the Nubian people. Both writers' perception of diaspora are portrayed in their novels *Desirable Daughters* and *Dongola*.

Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* portrays a modern diaspora, it embodies the idea of voluntary migration where a person chooses to leave his/her homeland and settle in another country for a number of reasons whether political, social, or economic trying to assimilate in the hostland. Mukherjee's perception of diaspora is a complex one because her characters encounter culture conflict after displacement; however, most of her characters overcome these conflicts and discover themselves in America. In *Dongola*, Idris Ali highlights an unconventional type of Diaspora: the Intra-African. The novel presents the Nubian experience as a typical example of classical diaspora where people have suffered from the consequences of involuntary migration such as nostalgia for the past, lost self and feeling uncomfortable after displacement.

This thesis explores the diasporic identities of the two protagonists, Tara in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and Halima in Idris Ali's *Dongola*. Both female characters experience a different type of diaspora and, therefore, they deal differently with its dimensions. In order to read their different diasporic experiences and trace their identity development, I rely upon intersectionality theory. Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought* believes that intersectionality is "a paradigm of race, class, and gender, as interlocking systems of oppression" (222). Therefore, intersectionality combines the three factors of race, gender and class. The three factors are important when it comes to understanding the diasporic condition because the three factors are looked upon differently after displacement. In other words, the characters may adopt different notions of race, gender and class as a result of their displacement

(physical or metaphorical) and culture clash. Also, these three factors could aggravate the characters' diasporic state of loneliness. The characters are looked upon differently by hostland people because they belong to a different culture and by their homeland people as well because they have experienced displacement.

I will examine the implications of diaspora on the identity formation of the two female characters, Tara and Halima, in an attempt to know where they fit in the diasporic spectrum. How do they view themselves as women in their homelands and hostlands? Does their gender aggravate their diasporic suffering? How are their female identities affected by dislocation? Tara and Halima share some characteristics which contribute to their identity formation such as their displacement (physical or metaphorical) from their native homelands, being members of ethnic minorities, and being brought up in oppressive patriarchal societies. Their gender roles are affected by the patriarchal societies in which they grew up, and which imposed upon them certain traditions and norms of behavior.

Both Tara and Halima embody the three elements of intersectionality theory: race, class and gender. The three elements influence their identity formation. Both are female members of a dislocated minority group. Both are perceived as coloured, Tara because of her Indian origin, and Halima being a Nubian, is seen as Black in the eyes of Egyptians. However, the fact that they both suffer because of their displacement, ethnic backgrounds and gender does not imply that they have the same experience. Each has a different notable experience, their reaction towards their native lands and hostlands are different, and so is the process of their identity formation. Both share a complex identity,

undergoing individual and social transformation due to displacement but in a different manner.

The thesis will explore both characters' multidimensional identities and the multiple forms of discrimination they experience due to displacement, race, class and gender. Their different diasporic experiences will be read in light of intersectionality theory. Both suffer due to displacement, race, class and gender but in different ways. On the one hand, Tara discovers new aspects of her identity in America despite her physical displacement which shows how diaspora has helped her in discovering her true self. She also accepts her dual identity after returning to India which shows the importance of a homeland, and of reconciling with the past to reach a future. On the other hand, Halima's displacement is metaphorical as she is representative of the Nubian diaspora. The total loss of her homeland, Nubia, her husband, the displacement of her people and the constant feeling of isolation increases her suffering and makes it difficult for her to adjust to her new situation in life, consequently leading to her violent revenge at the end. Unlike Tara, Halima is deprived of the opportunity of reconciling with the past as Dongola is lost to her forever.

Each chapter discusses the three factors of the intersectionality theory, race, class and gender in relation to the character's diasporic situation and identity development. In chapter one, the three axis of the theory are discussed thoroughly to trace Tara's adaptation and identity development in America. In chapter two, the three elements are used to analyze the development of Halima's character in relation to mainstream Egyptian society. The conclusion brings Tara and Halima together through the character of Padma, Tara's sister in *Desirable Daughters*, and her diasporic experience in

an attempt to understand the difference of the other two experiences, and how they affect the formation and development of the female identity.

Chapter I

Desirable Daughters: Tara and the Reconstruction of Identity

No one behind, no one ahead.

The path the ancients cleared has closed.

And the other oath, every one's path,

Easy and wide, goes nowhere.

I am alone and find my way.

Octavio Paz, *The Light of India*

Bharati Mukherjee is a renowned Indian-born American writer who is known for narratives whose protagonists are Indian immigrant female characters. Her writings deal with Indian women who experience culture clash and identity conflict as a result of their displacement, yearning to determine their identities throughout their diasporic journeys (Babu and Kumar 40). She is a writer of an ethnic background who portrays the 'psychological transformation' of women through depicting their displacement and feelings of alienation (Bijalwan1). Mukherjee's personal life itself is a series of displacements: She has travelled from one place to another for different reasons. As a young girl in 1947, she moved with her family first to London and then Switzerland where her father was engaged in research and conducting scientific fieldwork. Her family later returned to Calcutta in 1951 where she lived "the golden years" of her childhood (Alam 2), as she calls it, because she and her two sisters were provided with a luxurious life. As a graduate student in 1961, she travelled to the US to join the University of Iowa's Writer's Workshop and finish her graduate studies. In 1966, after her marriage to the novelist Clark Blaise, she moved with him to Canada where she lead the life of an

exile who resides in a place but lives on the memory of another, her home country (Alam 15): “[t]he first ten years into marriage, years spent mostly in my husband's desh of Canada, I thought myself an expatriate Bengali permanently stranded in North America because of a power surge of destiny or of desire (Mukherjee “Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties” 30).

However, her year-long trip to Calcutta in 1973 changed her perspective of immigration, “Calcutta had been changed by years of political violence...the Calcutta she saw before her seemed unsatisfactory. In some ways, it occurred to her, she could keep alive those images only in voluntary exile” (Alam 15). Her experience back in India urged her to try and assimilate in Canada and embrace her new identity as an Indian expatriate. In the 1970s, the Asian emigration to Canada increased due to scarce employment opportunities in many Asian countries which resulted in discrimination against these communities. Therefore, Mukherjee’s trials to assimilate ended up to no avail because of the racist attitude of Canadians which reshaped her ideas about expatriation and immigration (Alam 9-10). In the beginning, she used to think of expatriates or exiles as of a higher level than immigrants because they are not culturally lost and have a sense of who they are (Alam 9), but her experience of humiliation shaped her perspective towards her ‘self’ as an Indian woman, towards her homeland and multiple hostlands.

In 1980, Mukherjee decided to settle in America to pursue her academic career “upholding the life of an immigrant in the United States” (Alam 10). Her experience of racism in Canada in addition to her 1973 trip to India changed her attitude towards expatriation and immigration leading to the embracing of her identity as an immigrant in

America (Alam 9-10). In other words, the environment of America, in contrast to Canada, helped her to assimilate, “[b]eing in the U.S. was a tremendous relief after Canada...America, with its melting pot theory of immigration, has a healthier attitude toward Indian immigrants than Canada” (Carb 652).

Mukherjee's perspective on diaspora is in fact very interesting. She views diaspora as a process of discovering the self and developing it. In her article “Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties”, she notes that most writers perceive diaspora as the destination of arrival or the point where one uproots him/her self from ethnic culture. However, she believes that diaspora is a “process of self-integration” (34). Mukherjee rejects being hyphenated; she labels herself as an American. This does not mean that she hates India, but it is the desire to define her own identity rather than be defined by others. It’s an attempt to defy the position of being in between or being Othered because people tend to perceive a hyphenated identity as a problem, “[m]y outspoken rejection of hyphenization is my lonely campaign to obliterate categorizing the cultural landscape into a "center" and its "peripheries." To reject hyphenization is to demand that the nation deliver the promises of the American Dream and the American Constitution to all its citizens” (“Beyond Multiculturalism”33).

Mukherjee’s *Desirable Daughters* is a reflection of her diasporic experience and how she perceives immigration as a quest for one’s identity and a process of character development. It tells the story of three sisters from Calcutta: Padma, Parvati and Tara, and their process of emigration and adaptation in a new environment. They all share the same ethnic Indian background but their displacement separates them. Padma and Tara leave to the Unites America while Parvati stays in India. Tara, the protagonist, and

Padma adapt to the culture of the host society in different ways showing the different paths that an Indian immigrant can lead in America. The narrator, Tara, leads a calm life in America till she meets her nephew Chris who invades her privacy, forcing her to investigate her past. She then embarks on a journey to find her true identity. Her Identity can be examined from three perspectives: first how she views her old Indian self and family. Second, how she perceives her new self after her dislocation to a new place and culture, and third how she is perceived from her native people and from the hostland people as well. Despite her attempt to break free from the restrictions imposed upon her by her Indian identity and assimilate in the American culture, she finds out that she will always be linked to her homeland. Through her journey she finally learns to accept both the Indian and American aspects of her identity.

N. Jayaram maintains that the first generation of Indian emigrants carries with them to the host society a “sociocultural baggage” which contains language, religion, traditional dress, etc. (27). They deal with cultural elements differently because of their different diasporic experiences, therefore some of these elements are given up, others remain or are changed (Jayaram 27). In other words, some Indians persist and hold on to their culture while others, despite their love for their home country, adopt the cultural elements of the host country in an attempt to adapt to the conditions of the new environment.

Therefore, there isn't a uniform way of adapting to host countries. It varies from one community to the other depending on many factors. S. L Sharma states that there are at least three modes of adaptation followed by Indian immigrants, “assimilation, cultural preservation with economic integration and ethnic politicization for power cultivation”

which is “merger, adjustment and striving for dominance” (Sharma 50). This means that an Indian immigrant may assimilate in the new culture or adjust him/her self to the new society while still holding on to his/her homeland, or struggle to be dominant through active political participation.

Tara’s diasporic journey shapes and reshapes her identity. Her identity undergoes three phases in America; torn identity, assimilating identity and finally a hybrid one. In the beginning as a result of her displacement, Tara represented the personality type of the marginal man who always feels the tug and pull between the culture of the home society and that of the host society. In other words, she does not know where she belongs, she is confused between retaining her Indian culture in America and assimilating in the American culture by discarding her Indian practices. Later on, Tara tries to assimilate in the American culture letting go of India, but fails to do so. Finally, her aborted attempt of assimilation, along with the burning down of her house makes her go back to India. Her overall diasporic journey leads to reconstructing a new identity, a hybrid one, that comprises aspects of both Indian and American cultures (Upare 3).

Tara’s identity development and reconstruction can be read in light of intersectionality theory, which, according to Patricia Hill Collins, denies that gender is the sole factor for a woman’s oppression. Generally, intersectionality theory examines the ways that race, class, gender and sexuality work to create inequality or “interlocking systems of oppression” for women (Collins 222). The intersection of these factors, according to Collins, is a matrix of domination which intersect and oppress women (225). Tara is doubly oppressed as a result of her displacement, first as a member of an ethnic minority, and second as a woman of colour.

Tara's oppression and struggle with her racial identity started when she was in Calcutta and reached its peak after settling in the United States. Mukherjee explains Indian identity as such:

[o]ne's identity was absolutely fixed, derived from religion, caste, patrimony, and mother tongue. A Hindu Indian's last name was designed to announce his or her forefathers' caste and place of origin. A Mukherjee could only be a Brahmin from Bengal. Indian tradition forbade inter-caste, inter-language, inter-ethnic marriages. Bengali tradition discouraged even emigration; to remove oneself from Bengal was to "pollute" true culture. ("Beyond Multiculturalism" 30)

Tara's racial identity as an Indian is a complex one. The Indian identity comprises "iron-clad identifiers" (*Desirable Daughters* 33)^{iv}; these are different markers such as religion, caste, sub-caste, mother tongue and place of birth. Mukherjee explains "[t]hat dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case, confidently labelled by father's religion (Hindu), caste (Brahmin), sub-caste (Kulin), mother-tongue (Bengali), place of birth (Calcutta)...social attitudes (conservative)" (*DD* 78). Therefore, the word 'Indian' alone does not signify Tara's racial identity; she needs to use other identifiers to clarify her status. Tara feels that her Indian identity is 'dusty' which implies its oldness, and the fact that it is already predetermined. In other words, her racial identity is too fixed which leaves little room for her individual identity. The word 'iron' depicts how her fixed Indian identity troubles her and it also implies how hard it is to get rid of these identifiers even if she wants to, a problem that she will encounter later in America.

A Bengali Brahmin occupies the highest caste or rank among Bengali Hindus (Alam 1). Since Tara belongs to upper class Bengali Brahmins, her notion of race is confined to “hierarchical class system of Indian familial lineage” (Cooppan 71). Any community of non Bengali origin is regarded as strangers who are disrespected. Therefore, Tara’s notion of race is interrelated with class as racial distinction is based on a class system according to her native culture (Cooppan 71). The fact that Tara comes from a high class in Calcutta increases the gap between herself, her sisters and middle-class Calcutta, “[t]o be Calcutta bhadralok, as we Bhattacharjees were, was to share a tradition of leadership, ... and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born, and from which we have made our separate exits” (*DD* 22). In other words, the Bhattacharjee family is among the minority in Calcutta and most of the families do not enjoy the same wealth they do which isolates them all the more from Calcutta and its people, “[e]ven as proud members of the majority community, we were a blessed, elite minority, and we knew it” (*DD* 29). As a result of that, Tara and her sisters were taken extra care of. For example in one incident, Tara mentions how she and her sisters were chauffeured to school with an accompanying bodyguard for their protection, “[w]e had a driver, and the driver had a guard. The world didn’t know it yet but the sight of a fifteen-year-old cover girl like Padma Bhattacharjee could have destroyed the audience for any blondie-blondie bombshell like Brigitte Bardot” (*DD* 29).^v

Tara mainly suffered in India because of gender issues. Her gender identity was suppressed because of the Indian society, “[i]n India, the happiness of the individual is subordinate to the collective good of his/her community. More importantly, the role of

women is to be supportive to their husbands in all circumstances. The individual needs and aspirations of women are not given due importance in what is essentially a patriarchal society” (Ravichandran and Deivasigamani 557). In other words, the Indian society is a communal society, a society that upholds the benefit of the community and regards it as more important than that of the individual. Since it is more concerned with the communal benefit, it is bound by strict standards and criteria that must be followed by its citizens for the sake of the society. Women must abide by these standards as much as men do if not more. For example, although Padma, Tara’s older sister, loves Christian Ronald Dey, she is not allowed to marry him because he comes from a different background, and the Indian culture forbids marriage between different ethnic groups (“Beyond Multiculturalism: Surviving the Nineties” 30), “[t]he Deys, as their name proclaimed, were not only Christian today, but had sprung from a Hindu caste that was not even Brahmin. Friendship, yes; marriage; never” (DD 32).

In India’s strict society, women always come in the second place and are often treated as the oppressed ‘Other’. Patricia Hill Collins explains that “[a]nother basic idea concerns the relationship between notions of differences in either/or dichotomous thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its “other”” (69). This shows the relationship between males and females in India; that which is based on oppositional terms. In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir maintains that “[h]umanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being...She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the

Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (26). In a society where the identity of the individual is predetermined like the Indian society, a woman will no doubt be the absolute Other. Therefore, women must always play the role of obedient daughters and wives expected by the patriarchal society in which they live. Mukherjee explains in her essay “A-Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman”, “I was born into a religion that placed me, a Brahmin, at the top of its hierarchy while condemning me, as a woman, to a role of subservience” (24). Despite the fact that she comes from a high class, she is bound to a secondary role as a woman, which is also the case of Tara in *Desirable Daughters*. The way the novel begins in fact is a good example for gender oppression which females in India encounter. The narrator, Tara, recounts the story of the tree bride, Tara Lata, whom she was named after. Tara’s great grandfather, Jai Krishna, wanted to marry off his daughter, Tara, at a very young age since his “were placid and obedient daughters who would make loving and obedient wives. Tara Lata, his favorite, would be no exception” (DD 10). However, the groom gets bitten by a snake and dies, and Tara is held responsible for his death. The bridegroom’s father tells Jai Krishna “[y]our happiness-wrecking daughter is responsible: may she die as horrible a death” (DD 11). To save her from a fate worse than death, Jai Krishna married her to a tree to save her from being a virgin forever, something that is looked down upon by the traditional Indian society:

[t]he poor child had no idea that already she had been transformed from envied bride about to be married to a suitable husband into the second-worst thing in her society. She was now not quite a widow, which for Bengali Hindu woman, would be the most cursed state, but a woman who brings her family misfortune and death. She was a person to be

avoided. In a community intolerant of unmarried women, his Tara Lata had become an unmarriageable woman. (DD 12)

This quotation does not only highlight the issue of child marriage in India, but also the amount of gender oppression that Indian women suffer from because of the rules of the marriage institution. Hindu society lays the blame on women who constantly have to look up to their husbands as God-like figures. Without a man, a woman is nothing. For example, staying without marriage is not acceptable as seen in the case of Tara Lata, an Indian widow is regarded as a source of evil and, therefore, is cursed by her society. A bride whose groom dies before marriage is a source of death and is deprived of marriage for the rest of her life. On the other hand, a man can get married as many times as he wants to, “since a woman could attain nirvana only through worship of a husband and a Brahmin was permitted as many wives as he could support, his excesses could be interpreted as a form of noblesse oblige”(DD 19). This reveals the amount of oppression Indian women experience due to marriage. However, despite the oppression Tara Lata encounters, she becomes a national fighter and a leading figure in India’s independence movement against Britain. This foreshadows that the later Tara, named after her, will lead a similar path of displacement to find her true identity. In other words, the old Tara Lata’s oppression led her to become a fighter and the modern Tara is a fighter in a different sense as she defies the Indian notion of female identity.

It is clear that the modern Tara does not approve of child marriage as she starts recounting the story by saying “[a] Bengali girl’s happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family

memory fills me with rage and bitterness” (*DD* 4). She condemns the Indian society for marrying off a child, and punishing the poor girl for a crime she has not committed. Therefore, from the beginning of the novel Tara’s disapproval of some of the Indian traditions and practices is clear. This emphasizes that she does not entirely embrace her Indian identity, paving the way to the identity change she will undergo in the US.

Purnima Gupta maintains that in India, women are expected to be “the object of family prestige, so their behaviour should be desirable” (2). In other words, women have to be obedient daughters and wives in order to be ‘Desirable Daughters’ as the title of the novel suggests. To be ‘desirable’ according to the Indian society is to follow the rules by the book since breaking them becomes scandalous. For example, Tara explains how the Indian society looks down upon love marriages, and how a younger sister should not get married before her older one, “[w]e had an older sister, and custom dictated that the first-born had to be the first married, even if she had not expressed interest. Otherwise, we were sending a message to all the families in Calcutta with eligible sons that Dr. Bhattacharjee could not control his daughters” (*DD* 51). Therefore, living in Calcutta implies abiding by the society norms and family rules. Tara believes that it is not possible to defy her family, “[o]ur families existed inside an impenetrable bubble. Anyone entering or exiting was carefully monitored. We honored the proprieties. There was no rebellion, no seeking individual identity” (*DD* 43-44). Her familial life back in Calcutta was not easy; she and her sisters were taken extra care of and watched all the time. Her family rules could not be violated under any circumstances. This resulted in the annihilation of her individual identity. Tara leads a life that she does not want to, she

must adopt a certain identity to become a desirable daughter to her family and society regardless of her own desires.

Collins explains that “[o]bjectification is central to this process of oppositional difference. In either/or dichotomous thinking, one element is objectified as the Other, and is viewed as an object to be manipulated and controlled” (69). Tara’s marriage and her eldest sister, Padma, as well indicate how they are treated as the Other within their family, as objects who do not have an opinion regarding who they are marrying, and must therefore agree to their father’s commands. In other words, Tara and her sister’s arranged marriages show how their identities are predetermined. Their father has the upper hand in everything, so when Padma reaches the age of nineteen, he decides that she will not complete her education, although she wants to, and that it’s time to marry the person that he has chosen for her. Tara faces the same situation when her father decides to marry her off to Bish, “I married a man I had never met, whose picture and biography and bloodlines I approved of, because my father told me it was time to get married and this was the best husband on the market” (*DD* 26). Her marriage in that sense is no more than a bargain according to the rules of her father, “[i]t lured my father into marriage negotiations, and it earned my not unenthusiastic acceptance of him as husband. A very predictable, very successful marriage negotiation” (*DD* 7). Therefore, Tara while living in India cannot see beyond her father, her dreams and hopes are those of her father’s not her own.

Bell Hooks explains that as objects, a woman's reality “is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one’s history named only in ways that defines one’s relationship to those who are subject” (42). Tara feels that she is an object in the Indian

society. Her racial and gender identity in Calcutta is static and fixed, predetermined by the society and governed by its norms and values. Being Indian implies that the factors of race along with class are interrelated. She is born in Calcutta, her father's religion is Hindu, her caste is Brahmin (she belongs to an elite minority), her sub-caste is Kulin, and finally her mother tongue is Bengali. All this makes her feel that her identity is already set, and that she is bound to live a certain life which she cannot escape as Mukherjee implies: "[i]dentity was viscerally connected with ancestral soil and family origins. I was first a Mukherjee, then a Bengali Brahmin, and only then an Indian" ("Beyond Multiculturalism"³⁰). Moreover, raised up in a patriarchal society implies that she does not voice her opinion and obeys all the rules. She seeks no individual identity as her race, class and gender force her to act in a certain way and to live up to her family and society's expectations.

After her marriage to Bish, Tara moves with him to the United States, and leads the typical life of an Indian wife. Sumana Cooppan maintains that when Tara first arrives to America with her husband, she is busy with home duties. For example, she is seen 'serving pakoras and freshening drinks' while Bish and his friends are watching football. Cooppan adds that Bish is busy showing how Tara is a dedicated wife, mother and a good daughter-in-law to his parents (65). Therefore in America, Tara leads the same life she would lead back in India which highlights her torn identity because she does not know where she belongs, in India or in America. Ashish Kumar Gupta explains that "[t]he problem with immigrant is if he strictly follows his native culture, he will be scoffed by the host countrymen and appreciated by the only rigid compatriot and if pursues immigrant culture he becomes a despicable creature in the eyes of austere fellow

countrymen” (3). In other words, Tara thought that living with Bish in America was the kind of life she was waiting for “[t]his is the life I’ve been waiting for, I thought, the liberating promise of marriage and travel and the wider world” (*DD* 81). She thought that travelling to America will bring her freedom, however she soon realizes that it is a lie and that she will end up living in a marginal community in Atherton, provided after by her husband. She comes to the realization that she will lead the same life she led back in India but in America, with no significant change. In other words, she will continue performing the role of a traditional Indian wife who has to care for her husband and children. So, she will end up having no individual identity, neither as a wife nor within the larger community of Atherton because as Helenice Nolasco Queiroz explains that the families in Atherton live in iron-gated houses with guards to protect themselves against Americans (129-30). This explains that Tara then will have no future if she stays in Atherton as she will be doubly oppressed first because she is a member of a minority group and second because she is a woman of colour.

Tara then is set to embark on her diasporic journey on her own. She tries throughout the novel to reconstruct her own life and identity through the construction of Tara Lata’s story. Claire Alexander explains that metaphorical diaspora is concerned with the present moment and the future, but the past is remembered to situate the present and picture the future (115-16). This is what Tara does, constructing her present through recalling the story of Tara Lata. She needs the past to come to terms with her present identity even if she tries to assimilate in her new environment. Furthermore, she resists the idea of having a predetermined story as she wants to construct her own. Bell Hooks explains that “[o]ppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining

their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story”(43). Therefore, the traditional Tara Lata is a symbol of the past which the modern Tara identifies with, yet rebels against. She believes that her identity is the very opposite of her great grandmother’s, “Tara Lata Gangooly had turned the tragedy of her husband’s death and a lifetime’s virginity into a model of selfless saintliness. My story was different, perhaps even an inversion” (*DD* 280). The elder Tara abides by the traditions of her Indian culture while the younger Tara rebels against these traditions in an attempt to assimilate in America. She becomes self-centered, gets a divorce and enjoys the feeling of leading a liberated life, “I understood better why Didi had condemned me for going through with divorce. According to her, I had become “American, meaning self-engrossed” (*DD* 134). Moreover, Helenice Nolasco Queiroz maintains that the notion of home is different for both of them as the tree bride identifies herself with only one home while the younger Tara cannot identify herself with a single home (135). In other words, the tree bride never left India while Tara detaches herself physically from India and tries to repress its memory after immigration (76). However, although the two characters are different, they both defy the Indian society’s expectations, Tara Lata by becoming a national fighter and the modern Tara by constructing a new hybrid identity. Both Tara Lata and the modern Tara experience displacement and embark on journeys on their own, as a result both succeed in discovering their mission in life and their true identities. Through the character of Tara Lata, Mukherjee paves the way for the modern Tara to lead a similar journey of displacement, oppression and resistance.

In an attempt to create an individual identity, Tara tries to assimilate in American society and embrace its culture, so she distances herself from her husband and all that is

Indian. Therefore, Tara adopts Sharma's first mode of adaptation which is assimilation. Her attempt at assimilation can be read from Collins's perspectives of race, class and gender which characterized her Indian identity. The three perspectives hinder her attempt of total assimilation resulting in her hybrid identity. Referring to African women, Collins explains: "Race, class and gender represent the three systems of oppression that most heavily affect African American women...they certainly affect many more groups than African American women. Other people of color, Jews, the poor, white women and gays and lesbians have all had similar ideological justifications offered for their subordination" (225). Tara undergoes a different kind of oppression in America. She herself has a different understanding of race, class and gender than most Americans. The fact that Tara belongs to a different race places her among an Othered minority which makes her feel uncomfortable and unable to express herself, once she leaves the Indian community in Atherton. Tara's static Indian identity is a complex one that detaches her all the more from assimilating in the American culture. She tries to make her American friends understand how predetermined an Indian identity is:

Bengali culture trains one to claim the father's birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh, her home...When I speak of this to my American friends-the iron-clad identifiers of religion, language, caste, and subcaste-they call me "overdetermined" and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises and feelings of alienation, I of course am right. When everyone knows your business and every name declares your identity, where no landscape fails to contain a plethora of

human figures, even a damaged consciousness, even loneliness,
become privileged commodities. (*DD* 33-34)

Americans perceive Tara's identity as complex, shaped by certain factors such as religion, language and caste. Tara is however tired of her predetermined identity to the extent that she envies Americans for what she perceives as their identity crises. At this point in her life, Tara longs for an identity crisis, or rather she needs to embark on a journey to find her true sense of identity. She thinks this: "women immigrants are isolated from their families, culture, homes, and parents and from the communities in which they live... In their isolation they feel that they are missing something vital to their identities. It is this missing something that defines them" (Bijalwan 41). According to Tara, Americans should appreciate their feelings of alienation and loneliness as these phases are necessary to find one's true identity, a privilege that she is denied in India because of its communal society. She longs for alienation from the Indian society, wanting to break up with her former Indian self and set out on a journey to search for a new self away from India and Calcutta.

Sumana Cooppan explains that Tara's notion of race is shaped by the way India perceives racial differences according to class and caste variables. However, America tends to regard all Indians as one group rather than multiple groups (71). This puts Tara in the situation of always being stereotyped, and this of course hinders her from assimilating in the American culture. For example, at one point an American friend asks her to communicate with an Indian friend of hers as she could not, so Tara says "Nafisa's mother and I don't speak the same dialect. We don't even speak the same language. I am tired of explaining India to Americans. I am sick of feeling an alien" (*DD* 87). This

reveals how Indians are stereotyped in America which results in their feelings of loneliness and a sense of alienation from the white society. Another example which shows how Indians are stereotyped in America is when Tara goes to her son's school. The teacher tells her "I pictured you as sort of a traditional East Indian, and a whole lot older...You'd be all decked out in fancy sari and positively dripping with gold...There's so much in this life for a little Calcutta girl to assimilate" (*DD* 160). This emphasizes the difference between Western and Indian cultures, Indians are perceived as resistant to change, when it comes to their identity, they have to exert more effort than other immigrants to assimilate into the White American society.

The second factor which results in Tara's aborted assimilation in America is that of class. As mentioned above, Tara comes from a very wealthy family in India, but in America she does not enjoy her past luxurious life as in Calcutta especially after her divorce. She cannot work as a teacher because she does not have a certificate, so she does volunteer work in a preschool: "I can't teach, lacking a certificate, but I donate time and money. The little kids are ninety percent Asian, Latino, and African American, the teachers, at least during the two years that I have volunteered here, all European Americans" (*DD* 78). In America, Tara's social class changes; she now belongs to the middle class rather than the higher social class she belongs to in Calcutta.^{vi} The Americans' perception of Calcutta complicates the matter even more as they tend to view Calcutta as a poor place and therefore associate her with the poor rather than a high social class, "[t]hey have no idea of the wealth I came from-they hear only "Calcutta" and immediately feel sorry for me" (*DD* 27). This shows that despite her well-off background in Calcutta, she will always be perceived as coming from a poor class because of her

Indian race. Calcutta for Americans is an exotic poor place and therefore they would never understand its customs and traditions.

Tara at this point feels that she has no self-consciousness and that she is destined to see herself through the eyes of others whether in India or America. In America she will always be looked upon as the Other, or through a line of demarcation as she is a woman of color and therefore is marked differently. Whatever she does, Americans will always perceive her as Indian and not as an American and therefore no matter how hard she tries to fit in the American society, she will always be seen as a person who does not belong. Therefore, Tara feels lonely in America as no one is able to comprehend the complex background that she comes from, “[n]o body pays attention to me other than to ask for spare change or press a handbill into my closed fist...I do not belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I do not want to belong” (*DD* 79).

Despite the hardships Tara encounters in America due to her Indian identity, she decides to take advantage of the multicultural American society that tends to view Indians as one group regardless of their different classes. Therefore, she tries to enjoy her ‘invisibility’ in America, San Francisco in particular, as her predetermined identity seems invisible to the people there. “The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes me invisible. I am not “Asian,” which is reserved for what in outdated textbooks used to be called “oriental”. I am all things” (*DD* 78), she states. In other words, Tara in San Francisco is free to define her own personality: “I thrive on this invisibility. It frees me to make myself over, by the hour” (*DD* 79) because she is “ethnically ambiguous” in the sense that she is not defined anymore as the Bengali Brahmin Tara, but oriental Tara which

gives her the chance as Sumana Cooppan says to “explore the makings of a consciousness instead of simply accepting her consciousness as given” (73).^{vii}

The last factor that complicates Tara’s assimilation in the American society is her gender, and the way it is perceived by both Americans and Indians. “According to the cult of true womanhood, ‘true’ women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Collins 71). Tara in America rebels against the concept of true womanhood or being desirable. Back in India, Tara as well as her sisters Padma and Parvati, just like other girls from Calcutta, were over-sheltered by their parents. Their lives were governed by Indian traditions and values and they led a closed life which they could not escape. However, when Tara goes to America she encounters a different notion of womanhood. Women talk about their familial and sexual problems in a more open manner than in India. Tara, for example, is exposed to magazines which would be considered taboo back in India:

Those magazines encouraged women to talk over their problems, to share their disappointments, to experiment with hair color, sexual positions, and pointedly meaningless one- night stands. We read them with the same guilty pleasure as we’d read movie magazines, in our bedrooms, under the fans, back in India. In America, it seemed to us, every woman was expected to create her own scandal, be the center of her own tangled nest. (*DD* 83)

This shows the culture gap between Indian and American women; Indian women feel shy talking about their personal problems and experimenting with themselves, while in America it is completely normal as the expectations of sexuality are completely different.

Thus for Tara to adopt an American sexual identity is to become selfish, and focus on her personal needs and desires in contrast to the Indian notion of sexuality which is considered “a symbol of disgrace in Indian society” (Cooppan 67-68).

When Tara immigrates to America with her husband, she leads the typical life of an Indian wife. Her love for Bish is part of her gender identity in India, but now she has to come to terms with her new gender identity. Nandini Shah mentions that for Indian women to assert their identity, they must resist or transgress the marriage institution. Defying the patriarchal system and claiming one's individuality can only take place in America (87). Therefore, Tara takes advantage of the American society to get a divorce, move to San Francisco and live on her own, become involved in multiple relationships, and adopt a new lover, Andy. By taking that step, Tara is affirming her quest for a new identity, a new self that is not defined by any boundaries.

Her divorce is an example of how she defies the notion of true womanhood. Madhulika S. Khandelwal maintains that “[m]arriages are considered permanent and should not be altered by either partners' free choice...Divorce was taboo, and considered a sure sign of ~Americanization” (119). Therefore, Tara's decision to get a divorce marks her journey to develop an autonomous independent ‘self’ away from the bound traditions of India. She gets a divorce because she cannot go on living as an Indian in America. She thought her American dream of independence would be fulfilled in America, and that she would acquire an American identity; however, her husband was becoming more Indian which leads to their separation. The fact that divorce is frowned upon by the Indian society makes her hide the news of her divorce from her parents because it would be considered a scandal. Now she is free to choose a partner and make up her own scandal.

Her old gender identity in contrast to her new one can be seen in terms of her two lovers, Bish and Andy. “Love, to Bish, is the residue of providing for parents and family, contributing to good causes and community charities, earning professional respect, and being recognized for hard work and honesty. Love is indistinguishable from status and honors” (*DD 27*), says Tara. Bish identifies love with duty, with parenthood, and with providing for his family. Therefore he loves Tara because she is his wife. However, Tara experiences a different kind of love with Andy, that which is not bound by duty or family but by adventure. “I can’t imagine my carpenter, Andy, bringing anything more complicated to it than, say, ‘fun.’ Love is having fun with someone, more fun with that person than anyone else, over a longer haul” (*DD 27*), she explains.

Shailja Chhabra states that Tara enjoys her relationship with Andy because each of them perceives the other as exotic. She walks away from Indian customs and traditions and becomes involved in a sexual relationship with Andy (231), “[w]e were exotics to each other, no familiar moves or rituals to fall back on. He interpreted my fear as shyness. He was not my first American lover, but he was twice the mass of any man I’d ever known, a bear-man” (*DD 77*). Andy is not Tara's first American lover. In fact it can be argued that in adopting many lovers, Tara attempts to transgress the gender boundaries that were laid upon her in Calcutta, and it is through Andy that she transgresses the shackles of race, gender and class. First of all, he is Hungarian and so she opposes the norm that Indian women should only get married to men of their race. Second, he is not an engineer like her ex-husband, but a carpenter. Therefore, she defies her Brahmin class rigid upbringing. Finally, they are not married, they only live together. He makes her discover a new aspect in her identity which is her sexual identity, that which was

repressed because of her Indian origin. Therefore Andy becomes a symbol for the American adventure that she is leading.

Although Tara tries to create a new gender identity for herself, she still cannot get rid of the negative way Indians perceive her. For example, as mentioned above, she hides the issue of her divorce as she is afraid of a scandal, “[w]e don’t even mention your divorce to friends and relatives here. I don’t mean that we lie, or that we are shamed of anything, but we don’t let the wrong questions come up” (*DD* 97). Moreover, her sisters always criticize her, Parvati perceives her relationship with Andy as an ‘American adventure’, “[t]he brave smells of my “American adventure”; that was Parvati’s wry term for whatever Andy and I had going” (*DD* 91). In another incident, Parvati tells her “I hope you aren’t doing bad things to yourself like taking Prozac and having cosmetic surgery. Please, please, do not become that Americanised” (*DD* 105). This shows how she is doubly stereotyped both in America and in India which increases her sense of oppression.

During her visit to Padma, Tara encounters another form of stereotyping when she gets a lot of compliments from Indian men who tend to see Indian divorced ladies as oversexualized:

[a] divorced young Indian woman, released inside a room of married Indian men was a kitten in a dog pound. I could tell you stories, Didi. I remembered their voices. “You divorced ladies have not lost your charm. You have only grown more desirable. Divorced ladies must be oversexed, isn’t it? For some ladies, one man is not enough. Always

looking for adventure, isn't it...I think about you all the time, even in bed. (*DD* 188)

Being divorced and adopting other lovers causes Tara to become stereotyped as 'more desirable' which shows how she will always be objectified in the Indian society, even after her immigration. She cannot overcome how women are viewed as sex objects in Indian culture even when in America as Cooppan maintains that "Tara is still subject to the traditional cultural perceptions that other men have of her sexuality" (69). Therefore, even when Tara starts to feel comfortable with her newly acquired sense of sexuality, she is put in a situation which only allows her to see her sexuality through the eyes of Indian men who view her as the combination of the "subservient Eastern woman and the sexually free Western woman" (Cooppan 69). This seems like a double combination of negative stereotypes.

Tara tries her best to assimilate in American society, letting go of Indian traditions and beliefs, becoming so Americanized that she, as Queirzo explains, lets Rabi, her son, join the Academy of Atherton rather than Atherton school to improve his art talent, in this way she is redefining the role of a traditional Indian mother (35). She becomes Americanized to the extent that she accepts the fact that Rabi is gay; which would not be welcomed at all in India. Thus in her attempt to assimilate, Tara shatters the traditional role of an Indian mother. She understands Rabi's situation because she can totally relate to the idea of not belonging, of being constantly marginalized whether in India or in America.

Tara describes her evolving identity as, "though I were lost in a Salman Rushdie novel, a one-firm identity smashed by hammer blows, melted down and re-emerging as

something wondrous, or grotesque"(DD 195-96). Tara's identity is evolving in America, an identity that transgresses race, class and gender boundaries. Cooppan maintains that the words 'smashed' and 'melted down' imply the fluidity of her identity, its ongoing change and construction (77). Therefore, the diasporic condition provides Tara with the opportunity to discover who she really is, to come to terms with new perspectives in her personality, but it does not allow her to completely give up her Indian identity.

Tara lives in the illusion that she is now an assimilated immigrant who manages to repress her past and confine her link to India to a couple of phone calls with her sisters. When Chris Dey appears and tells her that he is Padma's son, she finds herself in a situation where she must confront her sisters to find out the truth. Dey's appearance is a moment of epiphany for Tara as she must look into, "the last treasure I'd smuggled out of India and kept untarnished for sixteen years in America, was about to be exposed and auctioned off"(DD 44-45). This means that Tara's perception of India is shaken by such a revelation because she is sure that her sisters would never attempt to violate their Indian traditions and values back in India. Therefore, Padma could never have had an affair with Ronald Dey first because he is not only Indian but also Christian. Chris appears at a very critical moment in her life, "[j]ust when I thought I had lost all my old self-protectiveness and was looking out on the world with trust. Just when I thought I was adjusting so well to being a California girl" (DD 63). In other words, Chris appears when she thought that she was becoming an American citizen, embracing all the change that America has provided her with.

Although Tara tries to repress her Indian identity in America, she is seen maintaining an Indian identity to cope with the problem of Chris Dey. Tara in this

situation exemplifies what Sharma explains about the first generation of Indian immigrants; that they adopt a 'pan-Indian' identity when they deal with non-Indians but they go back to their Indian identities when it comes to dealing with Indians (49). For example, when Chris first appears, she says "[h]e was a handsome young man recently arrived from India, not an Indo-American like my son. Do not ask me how I knew" (*DD* 34). She uses her Indian instinct or 'radar' as she calls it to annihilate the fact that Chris is her nephew, "how dare you call us your mashi, your maternal aunts, how dare you go to my sister or come to me, how dare you an imposter in laughable clothes demand anything of us how dare you invade our homes with your sinister lies about being a part of our family" (*DD* 35). Moreover, Ashish Kumar Gupta maintains that to identify whether Chris is Tara's real nephew or not, she judges his smoking behavior according to her ethnicity (3-4), "[n]o middle-class Bengali man would smoke in front of his elders. Even Parvati's husband in his chain-smoking days didn't dare light up in front of our parents" (*DD* 38). All of the above examples emphasize the fact that Tara cannot get rid of her Indian identity, she still judges people according to her ethnic standards. This proves that she cannot fully assimilate in the American culture and paves the way to her return to India at the end.

When Tara goes to Padma, she comes in contact again with the Indian culture that she misses. Cooppan maintains that Tara is attached to Jackson Heights because of its Indianness (76), "[t]he attraction of Jackson Heights, for me, has always been people pleasures: sidewalks full of Indians, every face is Indian, every shop and storefront features Indian jewelry, Indian clothing, Indian travel, Indian food and spices, Indian sweets and restaurants. The smells and the noises are familiar.. .it's intoxicating" (*DD*

199). This shows that Tara still identifies with her Indian identity. Also at Padma's, Tara comes in contact again with her Indian identity which she has been trying to repress in an attempt to assimilate in her new environment. At one point, she explains how she has come to like the identity she assumes when she speaks her native language, "I liked the person I became when I spoke it. I could detect an adolescent squeal in my voice, something close to delight" (*DD* 176). Tara does not hate being Indian; however she no longer wishes to preserve it in her daily life "I loved my family and culture but had walked away from the struggle to preserve them" (*DD* 180-81). Tara still identifies with her Indian culture, but she believes in change. She thinks that America has provided her with an opportunity for change that she has to embrace.

Padma, Tara's sister, represents another dimension of the diasporic spectrum. She represents the immigrant who shows an unwavering identity, clinging to his/her homeland culture, and resisting any kind of change. Like Tara, she is a Bengali Brahmin and therefore belongs to "a blessed, elite minority" (*DD* 29). They both share a predetermined identity, as explained above, that leaves them no room for self expression or rebellion. In terms of race, Padma has the same problem as Tara, the White American society will always label her as a colored woman or an Indian regardless of her class or caste. In terms of class, unlike Tara, Padma leads the life of a wealthy Indian woman in America. This is clear in the multiple jobs she undertakes. She does not only work as an actress in local schools and community centers, but also owns a TV shopping channel. Moreover, she designs saris. Like Tara, Padma has suffered back in India because of gender issues that she tries to transgress in America. For example, she works as an actress

despite her father's objection to the issue back in India. Another example is her attraction to homosexual men which is not acceptable in India.

Like Tara, America has provided Padma with the chance to discover new aspects in her identity, however she doesn't embrace America the way Tara does. She is seen abiding by the Indian culture in her attempt to recreate India in America. This can be seen in her outfit, she is always dressed in fancy saris and jewelry. Also, she works in the Indian television and resides amongst an Indian community (Coopan 74). Padma here represents the type of immigrant, as Sharma explains, who becomes more Indian abroad than in his/her native country, abiding by the Indian life style and practices in an attempt not to feel displaced and uncomfortable (48-49). However, Padma leads a fake Indian life in America. On the outside, she maintains the appearance of a perfect Indian life in terms of clothes, home,...etc but in reality, she transgresses Indian traditions. For example, she accuses Tara of bringing shame to the family because of her divorce, while she herself does the same thing through her illicit relationships with homosexual men. This makes Padma a hypocrite as she does not practice what she preaches, "sitting just inches away, a firm identity resisting all change,... But under scrutiny, fractured, like cracks under old glaze. Up close, I didn't recognize her. I didn't know who she was. I was following the cracks, fascinated by their complexity, not the simple, shining face refers to my sister, or me" (*DD* 196). Helenice Nolasco Queiroz maintains that Padma clings to her Indianness in America first in order to be respected by her family, and second to make money out of performance. In other words, she sells a Hindu woman's exotic image to gain profit (143). Padma, therefore, clings to the past and tries to create it in America in contrast to Tara who tries to repress it and embrace America, "I don't want to be a perfectly

preserved bug trapped in an amber, Didi. I can't deal with modern India, it's changed too much and too fast, and I don't want to live in a half-India kept on life-support" (*DD* 184).

After Tara's visit to Padma and her return to San Francisco, she discovers that Chris Dey is not her real nephew but an imposter. Tara then comes to the realization that she cannot fully assimilate in America. She will always be haunted by her past. The police officer, Sergeant Jack Sidh, for example, tells her that she will not be able to hide her Indian identity forever, "[i]f you're trying to hide your identity, let me tell you it will not work. It's admirable in a way, and I appreciate your situation, but it's not always realistic. You can't be anonymous" (*DD* 143). Therefore, her dream of 'invisibility' is shattered as she will always be linked to India in the eyes of both Americans and Indians. She will always be regarded as Bish Chatterjee's wife, even after their divorce, which will make her house a target to the Indian mafia. Therefore, even if Tara is accepted by the Americans, she will be rejected by the Indians because they do not want her to become American.

After the explosion of her house, Tara decides to go back to India to discover her true identity, whether she is Indian or American. Tara's return to India means that she is linked to her homeland, and this helps her come to terms with her true identity, an identity that is never complete as it is always changing. Tara at the end understands that her past is inevitable. In other words, she cannot completely give up her Indian identity nor fully cling to it as Padma does. Tara reshapes her past according to the present moment (Shah 89), "[i]nstead of transplanting Indian culture or disposing it off altogether, [Tara] tries to assimilate her Indianness through reinventing her identity, as

experiences keep on turning it into something new over and over again (Ravichandran and Deivasigamani 559). This means that she is shaping or changing her past to fit her present moment or her modern world. In other words, Tara can only come to terms with her identity through the past as it informs the present. Bhagabat Nayak explains that after her multiple travels, Tara realizes that she has multiple selves that accept and reject certain aspects in both Indian and American cultures (23). This shows the modern notion of diaspora. It emphasizes that a single identity in diaspora is an illusion and that the diasporic experience entails multiple identities that are not defined by a certain border (Bijalwan 40-41).

In other words, Tara will never have a single identity, she is both Indian and American, “[s]he does not fight with her multiplicity but rather accepts it as part of her progressive capacity” (Ravichandran and Deivasigamani 559). Tara accepts and rejects things in both the Indian and the American society as well. Therefore, she adopts a hybrid identity: “a process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform and reconfigure this in production of a new hybrid culture or ‘hybrid identities’”(Chambers 50) and accepts being both an Indian and an American at the same time. Tara occupies that liminal space as mentioned in the prelude of the novel: “[n]o one behind, no one ahead. The paths the ancients cleared has closed. And the other path, everyone’s path, easy and wide, goes nowhere. I am alone and find my way”. Cooppan maintains that the action of going nowhere and somewhere at the same time and having multiple paths is the core of the diasporic consciousness (64). Therefore, Tara represents a diasporic identity which is:

defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” that lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (Hall 244)

To conclude, Tara experiences the intersecting factors of oppression in India as well as in America. However, the fact that she comes to terms with her new identity after her diasporic experience proves that the condition of diaspora can be seen in a positive light. Also, ending her diasporic journey in India proves the inevitability of the past. America gives Tara the chance to explore new aspects of identity that she was not aware of. In other words, her diasporic experience enables her to “modify and reconstruct” her world (Sharma 61). It is also through the diasporic experience that Tara learns to embrace her Indianness, and at the same time reject the aspects of race, class and gender that predetermine her identity. Therefore, Mukherjee portrays diaspora as a process of reincarnation, she believes that identity is constructed and then reconstructed through the process of immigration. Tara’s diasporic experience leads to a hybrid identity. This hybrid identity is neither one nor the other but constitutes a third liminal space (Shah 93).

Chapter II

Dongola: Halima in the ‘Land of Waiting’

We want to modernize our houses, but not our values.

A Nubian leader, Komombo 1964 (Fahim ii).

Being a minority group in Egypt, Nubians have always suffered from poor conditions and negligence by Egyptians. Their calamity entailed not only being marginalized within Egyptian society as an ethnic minority, but also being forced to leave their homeland, Nubia^{viii}. Nubians have always been attached to their motherland, Old Nubia, and to the Nile River. Old Nubia was the “corridor of the Nile”, it connects Aswan to North Sudan (Keating 15). The Egyptian-Sudanese border divided Nubia into Upper Nubia, which is known as Egyptian Nubia and Lower Nubia, which is known as Sudanese Nubia^{ix} (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 10). Despite the fact that Nubia is divided into two parts, it is well known for “a single cultural identity” (Keating 15). Nubia was regarded as a homeland for both Egyptian and Sudanese Nubians (*Egyptian Nubians* 15-16). Therefore, despite the political line of demarcation that was drawn between Upper and Lower Nubia, Nubians were able to maintain their identity and identify themselves as one cultural group with common language and traditions (Egyptian Nubians 16).

Nubia’s geographical isolation has made it hard for Nubians to undergo displacement.^x They had no neighbors which made them more dependent upon their land and its resources, and enriched their autonomous identity (Dafalla 90). In other words, their isolation as a group helped them maintain their traditions, customs and distinctive Nubian identity. Despite the fact that their land is poor and has limited natural resources

(Keating 38), their attachment to it was strong which made the matter of relocation and adaptation a difficult task for them.

The Nubians' calamity of displacement is mainly due to the fact that their economy depended solely on agriculture, which suffered greatly from the continuous construction of dams. It is generally believed that the problems of the Nubians started with the construction of the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, but in fact their problems started after the construction of the 1902 Aswan Dam or Reservoir (Nkrumah n.pag.) Their lives changed drastically especially with the heightenings of the dam in 1912 and 1933. This resulted in decreasing the area of agricultural land which made Nubians relocate to urban cities in search of work to provide for their families^{xi} (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 12-13). Labor migration affected Nubian society negatively. It resulted in a population that was mostly women, old men, and children.^{xii}

Although the benefits of the High Dam were great for Egypt, the side effects were unbelievably disastrous to the Nubians. The dam flooded a large area of the land because of the reservoir (Keating 3), “[t]he Nubians were the only victims-the greatest part of their country being doomed to destruction” (Dafalla 89). Nubians were the scapegoat who had to give up their homeland and suffer dislocation for the welfare of the country. The Reservoir lake flooded 500 kms; which is the whole of Egyptian Nubia and 150 kms in Sudan (Dafalla 89). By the year 1971, Nubia was completely flooded (Keating 13). Therefore, as Hussein M. Fahim states, the first dam forced Nubians to leave their homelands and seek work in unwelcoming cities where they felt strangers (*Egyptian Nubians* 31), while the second dam led to the flooding of all the Nubian land in Egypt

and one third of the Nubian valley in Sudan. Nubians in Egypt and Sudan then felt compelled to leave their homeland (*Egyptian Nubians* 30).

The Nubians were destined to cope with a different environment as a result of their forced displacement. Nearly fifty thousand Nubians were displaced (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 3) and resettled in New Nubia.^{xiii} Fahim mentions that resettlement has impacted the Nubians' lifestyle negatively. For example, they changed their isolated, secluded community life to become more open which affected their traditions and practices. Therefore, the Nubians were not only forced to leave their homeland, they also found themselves in a new environment and unfamiliar conditions which they had to adapt to (Dafalla 279).

Nubian literature generally recounts the misery of Nubians, their perpetual sense of marginalization and alienation, their yearning for a lost land and a community that is now dispersed. Fatin Abbas explains that Nubian literature started as oral poetry which was recited in the Nubian language. Later, it was documented and incorporated in written literature around the second half of the twentieth century (150). According to Abbas, Nubian literature can be divided into two periods, pre- and post-construction of the Aswan Dam (151). Pre-dam literature is traditional in the sense that it follows a chronological time line. On the other hand, post-dam writers are experimental as they tend to use non linear narrative structure moving between past and present events (Uddül 36). The inconsistent structure reflects the Nubians' sense of displacement and loss after their relocation (Uddül 38).

Post-dam literature generally reflects the Nubians' displacement and the feelings that accompany their dislocation and resettlement such as marginalization and racism

(Uddūl 38). Unlike pre-dam Nubian writings which did not oppose mainstream Egyptian culture and nationalism, post-dam writings emphasize the notion of a separate Nubian identity in opposition to that of the Egyptian identity, and consider their literature distinct from the corpus of Egyptian and Arab literature (Uddūl 31). They perceive nationalism as a racist ideology that marginalizes them all the more, so they define themselves on separate grounds from the Egyptian Nationalist identity (Uddūl 30). For example, Idris Ali, one of the key writers of the post-dam period, declared in former statements to the media that he, "lived in peace, next to the wall, for five decades, but now they evoked evil inside me and I will write about everything and will expose corruption and all the issues I avoided raising in my previous novels. I was expecting praise and appreciation for my stance on Nubia issues, not this treatment" (Mourad n.pag). Ali's statements show how Nubian literature is looked down upon by Egyptian writers and how Nubian writers struggle to be heard.

Idris Ali is one of the post-dam Nubian writers who always tried to voice his concerns about the Nubian condition. His work reflects the calamity of the Nubians' displacement and their experience of double diaspora as they were forced to leave Old Nubia and also had to leave New Nubia to work in Cairo. Ali, like his fellow post-dam writers, was a great advocate of the Nubian right to maintain an autonomous Nubian identity by raising consciousness of their diasporic state. He was well known for his stance on Nubian issues, always fighting for Nubia and insisting on its belonging to Egypt despite its unique culture. He defended the Nubians' right to lead a better life and receive proper compensation for the loss of their land (Mourad n.pag.). Despite the fact that his life was a series of misfortunes, his writings surpassed those who enjoyed a more

comfortable life (Al- Mawṣilī 5). Like most Nubians, Ali dreamt of going to Cairo to become a well known figure, but he was always prevented by his mother (Al- Mawṣilī 6). After many attempts, he finally came to Cairo and stayed with his father who made him join a governmental school. He was not accepted though because he was younger than the required age. Ali was determined not to end up like his father, a porter or a butler (Al- Mawṣilī 6-7). He worked as a servant for one of the Egyptian middle class families. Even though he describes the job as demeaning, he benefited a lot from the house owner as she used to read a lot, and therefore he borrowed books from her and read a variety of works to Hugo, Balzac, Shakespeare, Hemmingway and Chekhov. Later, he decided to complete his studies while working during the summer to pay the school fees. He worked as a medicine distributor, shop assistant, etc. Unfortunately, his plan came to an end because he could not afford the tuition (Al- Mawṣilī 8-9). Eventually, he gave up his dream of becoming a writer due to his poverty, and joined the border guards for three months during the Yemen war and the 1967 war (Al- Mawṣilī 11). His first publication was a short story entitled “One Bed” and this marked his literary birth (Al- Mawṣilī 11). Then, he started to publish his literary works in many magazines with little financial reward. Moreover, the pension he received was very little to provide for his family’s needs. Therefore, he went back to doing odd jobs and tried to continue his writings at the same time (Al- Mawṣilī 11-12). His life became more complicated after his wife’s mental illness and the death of his only son (Al- Mawṣilī 12). This series of unfortunate events both personally and professionally led to his depression and multiple attempts at committing suicide (Mourad n.pag.).

Ali's masterpiece, *Dongola*, is an outcry against his miserable life and that of his people who have suffered exile and negligence throughout history. It's interesting to note that the novel was negatively received not only by Egyptians but by Nubians as well. Egyptian critics rejected it as an example of "Nubian Literature" because it highlights how Nubians have been neglected and marginalized by Egyptians, and Nubians refused the way the novel reflected the contemporary Nubian reality. Nonetheless, the novel became well known because of the controversy around it. It was translated into English and both Ali and the translator, Peter Theroux, won the first prize from the University of Arkansas in 1997 (Al- Mawṣilī 12-13). Ali was also awarded the Best Egyptian Novel Prize for *Dongola* at the 1999 Cairo International Book Fair; however, he was not financially rewarded as expected, and the country's appreciation for him was in the form of shaking hands with President Mubarak (Mourad n.pag.).

Ali's *Dongola* introduces the issue of diaspora in an unconventional way as it departs from the traditional definition of African diaspora. According to Joseph Harris, the African diaspora is "the global dispersion of Africans throughout history, the emergence of cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition, and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa"(3). Therefore, African diaspora entails movement across the globe. Although African diaspora implies dispersal of Africans worldwide, Ali invokes the idea that the relocation of Nubians can still be labeled as 'diaspora' even though it took place within the same country, shedding light on the fallacies of the African diaspora that tend to ignore to a great extent the displacement of minority groups within the boundaries of the same continent. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza believes that "our understanding of the African diaspora remains limited by both the

conceptual difficulties of defining what we mean by the diaspora in general and African diaspora in particular, and the analytical tendency to privilege the Atlantic or rather the Anglophone, indeed the American branch of the African diaspora” (36). According to him, there are four dominant dimensions of the African global diaspora: Intra-Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic diasporas (36). Intra-African diaspora is the migration or displacement of Africans within the geographical boundaries of Africa. This type of diaspora, which entails movement within the same continent, is the least considered in the broader definition of diaspora. In *Dongola*, Ali sheds light on this type of diaspora.

The fact that the Nubians’ experience of displacement is not regarded as a diaspora highlights their immense suffering and marginalization. The harsh reality of diaspora in *Dongola* is portrayed through the character of Halima, Awad's wife, who has to bear the reality of today's Nubia, the ‘land of waiting’; women wait for their husbands who left to work in cities due to the flooding of the agricultural land. Despite being recently wed, she is left after a couple of days by her husband who travels to Cairo to work. Also, she is forced to stay at home serving her sick mother-in-law with no hope of joining him in Cairo. She is oppressed and taken advantage of by the patriarchal society embodied through her cold husband, abusive father and men who harass her everywhere. Accordingly, she takes revenge at the end by cheating on her husband, an act that leads to the accidental death of her mother in law.

I will focus in this chapter on the character of Halima, examining the implications of diaspora on her identity formation as a female. How does she view herself as a woman in diaspora? Does her gender aggravate her diasporic suffering? How is her female

identity affected by the Nubian experience of dislocation and how does she respond to it? I will seek answers to all of these questions by applying intersectionality theory to the character of Halima, attempting to prove that metaphorical diaspora in her case increases her suffering and sense of loneliness resulting in an identity conflict, and eventually leading to her rebellion against both the Nubian and the Egyptian societies.

Bell Hooks maintains that systems of oppression that include race, gender, and class, share the common ideology of domination, which is a belief in a dichotomy of superior and inferior (29). In other words, the relationship between privileged and marginalized groups is based on difference. This difference is set in oppositional terms or is based upon a binary opposition. Therefore, the relation between the two counterparts is oppositional, the marginalized group is not only different from the other privileged group, but is opposed to it as well (Collins 69). For example, there would be White vs. Black under the rubric of racism, male vs. female under the rubric of gender, high vs. low under that of class. Collins adds that objectification is associated with opposition. In other words, the binary opposition is based on objectification, as one element is objectified as the Other, an object that is manipulated and controlled (69). Therefore, one group is perceived as subordinate or marginal to the other, and so Blacks are subordinate to Whites, women are dominated by men, objects look up to subjects, etc. (Collins 70).

Kimberle Crenshaw explains that there is always an additional factor of oppression that people tend to ignore when it comes to women of color, that of race. She says that women of color experience racism in a different way than men of color because of their gender. Similarly, their experiences of sexism differ from that of white women due to race ("Mapping the Margins"1252). To explain, if Blacks are subordinate to

Whites and women are dominated by men according to the interlocking systems of oppression, then a Black woman is dominated by Black men in terms of gender, by White women in terms of race and by White men because of race and gender. A Black woman's race implies her low class as well because White people tend to perceive them as slaves and this is an additional system of oppression. Therefore, women of color will be oppressed either way, but it's different in the multiple factors of oppression they undergo, "in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks, in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women. This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened" (Crenshaw 23).

As such, Halima in *Dongola* represents women of color who, according to Crenshaw, "occupy positions both physically and culturally marginalized within dominant society" ("Mapping the Margins" 1250). She is treated as the oppressed 'Other' since she belongs to a displaced minority group for being a woman of color, and finally because of her social and economic class. The interlocking systems of oppression or the intersection of these factors increase her diasporic suffering, resulting in her rebellion in the end.

Being a minority population in Egypt, the Nubians are a marginalized group compared to privileged Northern Egyptians. Since early history, they were regarded as a different group that does not belong to Egypt.^{xiv} They were colonized by northern Egyptians for almost fifteen hundred years (Keating 16) because they provided them with slaves^{xv} as they have a darker skin color than Egyptians.^{xvi} Collins maintains that the process of binary opposition relies on using stereotypes or controlling images of race,

class, and gender groups (70). Northern Egyptians have always had preconceptions about Nubians, they associate them with certain demeaning traits. Nubians were regarded as barbaric, lazy and stupid ^{xvii} (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 11). Faysal Al-Mawṣilī states that Idris Ali recounted to him a very memorable incident which explains how Nubians are stereotyped. He was in Zamalek and was engaged with his colleagues in some sort of altercation. Oddly enough, he was the only one caught by the police officer. He was beaten brutally at the police station and the police officer told him “even you, barbarian” (7-8). This example shows how Nubians experience racial discrimination from Northern Egyptians. Ali’s experience with racism is portrayed in the novel through Awad Shalali’s character who advocates the Nubians’ right to their homeland, Dongola (Nubia’s old capital), and who is therefore oppressed by northern Egyptians. For example, the police officer tells him “[t]he government was wrong to give you people schools. If we had left you savages, you’d still be our waiters and doormen” (*Dongola* 16)^{xviii}. Also, when Awad goes to tell the police about his father’s murderer, a Northern Egyptian tells him “[m]y grandfather had ten of these people [as slaves]. . . . I never thought I’d see the day they would turn on their masters” (*D* 18).

Likewise, Nubian women are looked down upon by Northern Egyptians because of their dark color. They are viewed as ugly because of their dark skin and kinky hair. They are also viewed as naive and fragile, dependent on the male figures in their lives, be they their fathers, husbands or brothers, etc. This is reflected in the way Halima's character is portrayed in the novel in contrast to Ruhia. Ali incorporates the character of Ruhia to act as a foil character to Hushia, Awad’s mother, as well as Halima, Awad's wife. Ruhia is portrayed as a “white-skinned, succulent woman with heavy buttocks and

exposed breasts” (*D* 8). Portrayed as beautiful and seductive, Ruhia represents the temptation of the North. She was the reason why Awad’s father abandoned Nubia, his wife, and son as “[h]e had fallen prey to the beastliest of women, a professional man hunter. With her sweet tongue, shiny satin dresses, and elaborate lace, she used desire to chew him up and spit him out, to inspire lust with her lips” (*D* 8). She is materialistic, manipulative, sharp tongued, sneaky and always finds her way out. She marries Awad’s father for his money, cheats on him and uses her charm to get back to him until she kills him in the end, according to Awad’s own interpretation. Therefore, she represents the way Northern Egyptian women are perceived to be sneaky, powerful and corrupt.

Halima, on the other hand, is depicted as the total opposite of Ruhia in terms of looks and character. Though we never get a physical description of Halima, we can imagine how she looks in the eyes of most Northern Egyptian people: a black, thin woman, showing no signs of beauty, and probably malnourished due to the general poor conditions of the Nubians. As for her character, she is naive, fragile, helpless, and sweet-tongued. In one incident after Awad’s father became penniless, Ruhia tells him: “[y]es, brother, you’re all that’s left, you skillet bottom black Get out, then. Go home to your black woman [Awad’s mother]. Is she sitting and waiting for you there with that ugly face of hers?” (*D* 11). In this quotation, Hushia is portrayed as black and ugly, the typical stereotype for all Nubian women. In addition to that, she is depicted as “sitting and waiting”, this shows that Nubian women are expected to await the return of their husbands, no matter how long this takes. The choice of the verbs also reflects the stereotype of the Nubian woman as a passive character. In contrast, the adjectives and

adverbs that describe Ruhia as, for example, ‘professional’, ‘man hunter’, ‘beastliest’, ‘chew him up’ imply experience, and the verbs signify action and brutality.

Halima’s fragility and sense of total helplessness is also conveyed through the act of waiting for the return of Awad, but to no avail: “Halima waited and her waiting grew long because she was like the other forsaken women of Nubia, all of whom were waiting for men who had journeyed far away, to the cities of Egypt, the Arab lands, and overseas” (*D* 92). Ali also describes Nubian women explaining that “[e]ach of them had some experience with treacherous fate, the unruliness of children, the emigration of husbands, a scarcity of food, the meager allowance they were paid, which scarcely could have fed an infant” (*D* 63). The harsh conditions that Nubian women had to endure because of displacement led them to depend on the money that their husbands or male supporters provide them with and so, as Abbas states, “it is ultimately women who are left to contend with poverty and isolation” (162). Abbas also maintains that Halima fills this gap of waiting for her absent husband by wandering through her ‘triangle of hope’(the telegraph, the station and the post office): “[t]he poor woman . . . made the daily rounds of her triangle of hope—the telegraph, the train station, and the post office—before returning to the sorrowful place where she sat by the wall” (*D* 100). She adds that wandering shows how she cannot change her situation; the circular movement of wandering implies her inability to take action or move forward (162-63).

Halima is also depicted as the opposite of Simone, Awad’s French beloved. Before marrying Halima, Awad gets to know Simone and tells his mother that he wants to marry her. Simone is a French professor of oriental history who left her husband because she got bored of him. Simone is the total opposite of Halima. She comes from a

background that empowers women and does not marginalize them. She leaves her husband because she does not want to live with him anymore, unlike Halima who is in love with her husband but is unable to bring him back. Simone is also highly educated in contrast to Halima who is illiterate. Whenever Awad sends her a letter, she asks Haj Ahmad Abbas to read it for her since she cannot read it herself. In another incident she asks Awad about Dongola thinking that it was the name of a woman, which reflects how simple-minded and ignorant of history she is, in contrast to Simone who is very knowledgeable. No wonder Awad's father and Awad marry or want to marry non-Nubian women. Although Halima does not encounter racial discrimination as such, readers can infer the stereotype of the Nubian woman through the two female characters who represent the north, Ruhia and Simone. Both of them come from privileged groups whether Egyptian or French and this implies, according to Collins and Crenshaw, an oppositional difference based on the factor of race. In contrast, Halima is a marginalized Nubian who is stereotyped as a subordinate.

Halima's diasporic identity is shaped by gender as well. Collins maintains that "[s]ex is a biological category attached to the body- humans are born female or male. In contrast, gender is socially constructed" (164). Therefore gender connects biological sex with constructed or assigned gender meanings of being male or female (164). This is reminiscent of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in which she says "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (14). This implies, as Collins maintains, that a woman's subjectivity is not endowed but rather acquired. She is not born as the weak, oppressed and submissive 'Other', but she becomes one through the imposed norms of a society. This is very important in Halima's case because as a female, she is expected to behave in

a certain way according to her society. Therefore, her gender identity is based upon certain societal expectations which eventually she cannot fulfill.

Readers are introduced to Halima on her wedding night, before that, we only get to know about her through Hushia. Hushia was shocked to know that her son would marry a non-Nubian girl and leave her forever. Therefore, she thought of marrying him to a Nubian girl because in that case he will have to return every now and then. Hushia chooses Halima because the latter asks about her and sees to her needs. Halima is therefore perceived as a servant rather than a wife. Moreover, Awad does not love her, he only marries her to be able to leave his mother in her care, “[t]he poor young woman did not know that she represented his one chance to leave, not to stay” (*D* 90). This makes Halima more of an object or a commodity:

[h]is only option was to take Haj Ahmad Abbas’s advice: a bride to serve her, who would cost him nothing but food, clothing and his name, which she would share. These were wretched people who could not provide shelter for their own daughters. Otherwise, what was the explanation for such a strange marriage? (*D* 83-84)

Therefore, Halima is the victim of an arranged marriage or rather a deal. Her father does not mind marrying her off as long as he gets money in return, Hushia has chosen her because she merely needs a servant, and Awad uses her as a means to attain his freedom. Ali summarizes this oppressive arrangement in his description of the marriage consummation: “[n]ow he had to make love and have sex with a woman who was a stranger to him. He knew that she was only an instrument with which he could win his

freedom. It was an unjust solution, and he was burned by the fire of injustice. Should he leave her a virgin or tell her the truth about the details of the bargain?"(D 87). The reader does not see Halima's reaction to this marriage deal. The fact that she does not have a say in choosing her husband shows how passive she is and reflects the patriarchal nature of the Nubian society which marries off girls without their consent. Her voice isn't heard at all till her wedding night when she tells Awad "God forbid" (D 87) when he offers her a glass of arak, and then when she says "[e]at and enjoy" (D 87) passing him a plate of pigeons. Halima "hurried over to him (Awad) with a small, hand-worked fan and sat silently beside him, fanning him...He smiled despite his misery: the prince and his slave" (D 86). Halima's first action on her wedding night is to serve Awad, giving him food and fanning him. Abbas maintains that the adjectives and verbs used imply oppositional difference as he "shouts" and is described as a "prince" whereas she sits "silently" fanning him and acts as a "slave" (163).

However, matters are complicated when Halima develops feelings for Awad,

[h]er misfortune was that she loved him. Life without him was empty. What kind of marriage was this? She had gone from being her father's wife servant to being the servant of this bossy, senile old woman. Before her marriage, she had served and helped her because they were relatives and neighbors, and the old woman thanked her and prayed for her. Now, she gave orders. (D 93)

Halima becomes a servant against her will. When she learns that Awad will leave to Cairo, she “used every feminine trick to spoil his plans to escape. She cast a spell. She made herself beautiful. She gave herself to him with a generosity unknown to girls here. She begged, and pleaded, and then begged and pleaded with Hushia, and with her father. She pretended to be ill, and then she cried and threatened” (*D* 90). Halima is completely helpless; she does not know how to make Awad stay. However, these actions show some initiative at cheating on her husband and taking revenge at the very end. At the train station, Halima could not stop her tears and finally fainted. Then element of dramatic irony here makes us sympathize more with Halima as she does not know the real reason behind her marriage. She tells Hushia “he’s strange. He didn’t cry one tear, and he didn’t tell me goodbye. He was happy to go. That was the first time I’ve ever seen anyone happy to leave. I wish I knew why!” (*D* 91).

Halima puts up with the consequences of her unfair marriage. She waits for her husband's return. Every day she cleans the house, dresses up and goes to the train station to wait for him. However, the patriarchal society in which she lives denies her the right to go out of the house to await the return of her absent husband. Her father tells her “[e]nough scandals Halima!..Stay inside your house..I’ll break your neck. He ran after her with a sickle, cursing her mother, the midwife who had presided at her birth and the bridal assistant who had circumcised her” (*D* 100). Moreover, when she decides to get a divorce and goes to her father, he threatens to kill her because divorce is frowned upon in the Nubian society, “I’ll kill you myself, you little slut. A divorce will get you nowhere but back home” (*D* 94). Halima becomes a moral threat to her father and her Nubian community because she does not conform to social norms. She is at the very margin of

both the Nubian and the Egyptian society. No one felt for Halima's suffering which stands for the suffering of other Nubian women in the 'land of waiting'. She has a father who only cares about money, and an oppressive selfish husband who has forgotten about her. Ultimately, she has no one to confide in.

The gender factor is also clear in the way the village men pursue Halima. For example, Hamad Tawfiq (a seducer who was never punished for his misdeeds) is always watching her as he knows her difficult position, that of a new bride whose husband has left after less than a month. Ali explains that "Hamad Tawfiq, the most shameless man, was behind the murder of a virgin and the divorce of a married lady" (*D* 95). This shows how labor migration immensely affected Nubian women as they were taken advantage of because of the absence of their men. Hamad Tawfiq attempts to take advantage of the absence of Awad. Although he is known for his bad reputation, no action was taken against him, or none of which we are told about, because he is a male. Nubian women are the ones who are always blamed, never men, "[t]he shame was reserved for women-the men were never blamed. Halima was Hamad's anticipated next prey" (*D* 95).

Halima is also pursued by Yazid, the telegram man. She starts to feel lust towards him: "[s]he loved his heat, and her body quivered slightly...She almost fell; her heart pounded with joy and fear" (*D* 99). However, she is bound by her marriage vows and she holds herself back because she does not want to cheat on Awad, "[h]e might be the one she wanted, though, if she became free through a divorce" (*D* 99). The characters of Hamad and Yazid show how Nubian women, after relocation of their men, were taken advantage of. The fact that their husbands, sons or male relatives were absent gives the

chance to other Nubian men to harass them in various ways. Women either give in and endure shame or give up and suffer more.

The fact that Halima always seeks help through men increases her oppression. As mentioned above, she is depicted as illiterate and Haj Ahmad Abbas, custodian of the village's secrets, is the one who reads her the letters that Awad sends. He has the power of education that she lacks, and therefore has control over her. She is incapable of knowing Awad's news, and this emphasizes her inability to take action even if she is determined to. For example, she is unable to get a divorce because her father does not agree, and is convinced that she has to stay married as long as Awad sends her money. While Simone gets a divorce because she is bored with her husband, Halima cannot get her freedom even though she deserves it because of her marriage conditions. When she later goes to the telegram office and asks Yazid to write a letter to Awad, he asks her about the address and she naively replies "[a] Foreign country" (*D* 101). Halima lives in "a man's world. Everything was in their favour. They gave the orders and women had to obey" (*D* 105), the narrator explains.

The sense of shame regarding Nubian women is emphasized throughout the novel. Muhammad Hassan Khalil, the new mayor of Awad's village, asks Awad after he learns that the latter wants to marry a French woman, "[w]hat's wrong with our girls, effendi? Shall we throw them to the crocodiles in Lake Nasser? Or auction them off in slave markets?" (*D* 77-78). Unmarried girls in Nubia have no future and bring shame to their families. A woman who asks for divorce brings shame upon her family as well, this is clear when Halima's father tells her "I'll kill you myself, you little slut. A divorce will get you nowhere but back home" (*D* 94). Shame is also associated with extramarital

affairs, if a woman has an affair with another man, she brings shame upon herself and her family. In fact women within Nubian society are associated with the idea of shame whatever they do, “Halima had become the talk of the gossipy old women of the village, as well as of the lustful young men and busy bodies....if she went to the station, they said, “She’s lost her mind.” If she stopped to talk with a man, they said, “She’s a slut” (*D* 99-100). As a woman, Halima is looked down upon by the Nubian society and treated as the oppressed Other.

Class is also another factor that contributes to Halima’s oppression. Nubians are descendants of a poor social class partly due to the limited economic resources in Nubia which forced them to move to northern cities to provide for their families (Keating 38). The jobs they held as waiters, servants and doormen prove how poor they were. ^{xix} Therefore, Halima in Cairo, being Nubian, is expected to come from a low social and economic class. However, she is portrayed in the novel as the opposite. She lives with her mother-in-law, Hushia, who leads a comfortable life that other Nubians envy, “[t]he rumor was that an envious woman had invoked the evil eye on her (Hushia) because of all the glory she enjoyed: the electricity, her fan, the repairs to her house, and all the money she was able to spend” (*D* 100). In other words, Halima has things that other Nubians lack: electricity, a refrigerator, and a ceiling fan. However, the good life and luxurious items she is supposed to enjoy increase her suffering and her sense of isolation. Enjoying the advantages of a higher social class widens the gap between her and her husband, in addition to widening the gap between her and the Nubian society. Her husband will not return as long as he is sending her money, and the Nubian society does not expect her to complain or ask for a divorce since her husband is providing for her.

Instead, she is expected to join other Nubian women who wait for their husbands in silence.

It can be argued, therefore, that Halima experiences oppression due to the intersection of the three factors: race, gender, and class. The intersection of the three factors intensifies Halima's suffering and reflects the impossibility of changing her situation. For example, if she gets a divorce, she will not be able to survive in a community that looks with shame upon divorced women. If she escapes to the North in an attempt to retrieve her husband, she will be perceived as a dark-skinned Nubian woman, and moreover, she will be stereotyped as a servant or a doorman's wife because of the social and economic class of Nubians. If she stays in Nubia, her suffering will continue. Halima is therefore entrapped in her present situation, and is denied the right to seek a future. Her inability to change her helpless situation drives her mad, "[s]he lived for the whistle of the passing train, the sound of car horns, and even the buzz of an airplane...She rejoiced at the sound of any voice calling out. She waited and waited, but the waiting was destructive and would wear out even the strongest nerves"(D 99).

In the very last scene in *Dongola*, we see Halima committing adultery with a man from Upper Egypt, Maadul. When she is caught by her mother in law, she kills her by mistake, and the man is pursued by the village men. I believe that Halima's adultery reflects her outburst and rebellion against the oppression she experiences as a result of her abandonment. The fact that she is the one who seduces the upper Egyptian man shows that she is well aware of what she is doing, "She puts on perfume, unbraided her hair, and put on her satin. She opened the courtyard door and went back to bed, where she waited in a flirtatious pose" (D 110). The roles are inverted, Halima refuses to be hunted

anymore and decides to perform the role of a man, hunting and seducing Maadul. This is a rebellious act against her circumstances in general since she cannot change her condition. She is entrapped in the present moment as she is denied a future and is unable to undo the past. The final scene is an act of rebellion against tyranny whether it is the men in her village represented by her husband or the Northern Egyptian society, “[s]he would strike a blow where no one expected it. She would insult them as they had insulted her. He was a non-person; all his time was dedicated to work and the drink of water he was asking for so kindly” (*D* 109).

The only power Halima enjoys as a woman is her sexual power, so she uses it against her husband, the Nubian society, and the Egyptian society at large. The narrator says “tonight he was Halima’s dream, and her chosen method was to destroy her people and to wreak vengeance on them” (*D* 109). The act of adultery allows her to finally take action. However, the question that poses itself is why commit adultery with a man from Upper Egypt when she had a chance to do the same thing with any of the Nubian men who pursued her? First of all, a stranger would be safer in the sense that the act of adultery would not become known. Second, Upper Egyptians (Sa’idi) are also looked down upon by Nubians. “Someone like this grimy, dirty, rough Upper Egyptian, who almost never bathed, would be the last to think of a Southern woman” (*D* 109), the narrator says. In that sense, committing adultery with one of them would be demeaning and humiliating to her husband and to the Nubian society at large. Third, the man from Upper Egypt belongs to the people of the north and when the whole village pursues him, she takes her revenge against the people of the north who have taken away her husband, resulted in her metaphorical diaspora and caused her misery. In other words, her act of

adultery accidentally makes her own people chase Maadul in a symbolic act of collective revenge.

The character of Halima depicts the issue of Nubian diaspora in a different manner. Although Halima doesn't encounter physical displacement, she suffers all through the novel from the consequences of her abandonment by her husband. This makes her displacement a metaphorical one as she comes to represent the Nubian diaspora. Her case demonstrates that it is women who bear the real consequences of the Nubian diaspora. Dongola is gone forever, Nubian men will always leave to seek work, and women will always be left behind. Halima stands for all Nubian women who encounter the intersectionality factors of oppression. Halima does not encounter racial oppression directly because at the end she is still living with her community. However, the fact that her husband deserts her for Simone implies that she is seen negatively whether by him or by the Northern society. She also suffers due to gender oppression because of the patriarchal Nubian society, which denies her any opportunity of freedom or self-expression. In addition to that, class adds to her suffering because even though she has money, she cannot enjoy her life because of her husband's absence. This means that she encounters oppression on the three levels of race, gender and class as a result of her metaphorical displacement. So if men have the chance to leave Nubia and start a new life, women do not and, therefore, they become the true victims of the Nubian diaspora. Her oppression on more than one level and her conflict, in the sense that she does not know what to do or who to turn to for help, results in her revenge at the very end. Whether or not it was her intention to seek revenge, her act is a blow against both the Nubian and the Egyptian society as well. However, the act of killing her mother in law accidentally at the

end proves that she is still a victim because by succumbing to her desire, she has become a murderer.

Conclusion

The diasporic spectrum explores various conditions, modes of adaptation and experiences. Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and Idris Ali's *Dongola* present three female characters that differently fit in this spectrum. The protagonists of both novels, Tara and Halima, lie at the very far ends of the diasporic spectrum, while Padma sets a middle ground between the two. The three characters are brought together in the diasporic spectrum through Collins' intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory bridges the apparent gap between the characters through the focus on the three main axes of race, class and gender. The identities of the characters are analyzed against the factors of race, class and gender which are integral to the idea of diaspora. Each of these factors may be looked upon differently after the character's displacement resulting in a different mode of adaptation and consequently a different identity development. The three axes of the intersectionality theory pave the way for understanding the similarities and differences between Tara, Padma and Halima in relation to their diasporic situation in an attempt to analyze their different representations of the diasporic spectrum.

On the one hand, Tara is representative of the modern type of diaspora, that of immigration. America provides Tara with the opportunity to discover new aspects of her identity and examine Collins' axis of oppression, race, class and gender, in a different light. Her experience of displacement enables her to embark on a journey of self discovery informing her identity, and making her come to terms with its hybrid nature. Tara's journey of self discovery reflects Mukherjee's perception of diaspora as a quest for the self.

On the other hand, Halima's abandonment and suffering is representative of the Nubian diaspora which exemplifies classical diaspora. Halima suffers the three axis of oppression as a result of her metaphorical diaspora. She is manipulated and taken advantage of throughout the novel. Her identity has been suppressed by the Nubian community represented in her father, husband, mother-in-law and Nubian men. This oppression leads her to seek revenge at the very end which gives her a momentary sense of empowerment only to be lost when she becomes a killer and, therefore, a mere victim of her society and their displacement. Halima's character is a mere reflection of Ali's condemnation of the Nubian double diaspora: leaving the homeland and leaving New Nubia to work in urban cities.

Tara represents one dimension of the spectrum. She represents physical displacement from the homeland. She thinks that in order to assimilate in America, she has to completely detach herself from her homeland and overcome her Indianness. With time, she discovers that she is unable to do that, and that her identity is a combination of both the Indian and American cultures. Her eventual return to India proves that she will always be linked to her homeland, and that she must reconcile with her past.

Halima represents the opposite dimension of the spectrum. Although, she is not aware of the loss of Nubia, Halima is still affected by its consequences. Unlike Tara, she is not displaced physically, but metaphorically. Her individual abandonment is the result of the Nubian diaspora, and, therefore, she represents Nubian women who are the true victim of the Nubian double diaspora. In other words, Tara is conscious of her displacement from the homeland and tries to take advantage of her new situation, while Halima is unconscious of the Nubians' displacement, however she suffers its

consequences. Padma is the middle ground between both characters. Unlike Halima, Tara and Padma are conscious of their displacement from the homeland, however their modes of adaptation differ. Instead of trying to repress India to be able to assimilate in the White American society like Tara, Padma recreates India in America as a defense mechanism. She is seen becoming more Indian in America, than back in India. In other words, diaspora leads Tara to adopt certain aspects in the American culture, however it leads Padma to become more Indian. The three female characters provide different representations of the homeland leading to the development of diasporic identity. In the case of Tara, the homeland is repressed. In case of Padma, it is faked, and in Halima's case, it is completely lost.

Stephane Dufoix maintains that "diaspora looks both to the past and to the future. It allows dispersion to be thought of as a state of incompleteness or a state of completeness" (34). Dufoix's concept of diaspora describes the diasporic situation of the two protagonists, Tara and Halima. Tara's experience of immigration can be seen as a state of completeness. In other words, Tara was not completely happy in India, America provides her with the opportunity to liberate herself from all the restrictions that were imposed upon her in India. Tara thinks that in order to assimilate in America, she has to overcome her Indianness. With time, she discovers that she is unable to do that, and that her identity is a combination of both the Indian and the American cultures. Her eventual return to India proves that she will always be linked to her home country and that she must reconcile with her past. At the same time, her experience in America informs her identity, making her come to terms with its hybrid nature.

As for Halima, diaspora is a state of incompleteness due to her people's displacement and Awad's absence. Dongola is forever lost to Nubians which implies their never-ending suffering. In other words, it emphasizes the continuous displacement of Nubians and therefore the everlasting absence of Halima's husband. This results in her continuous feeling of incompleteness. The ending of the novel proves that Halima is a true victim of the Nubian diaspora. She has been manipulated and taken advantage of throughout the novel. Even at the very end when she succumbs to her desire, she is caught by her mother in law and accidentally kills her. The depiction of the diasporic experiences and identity development of both Tara and Halima, therefore, represent the two possible meanings of a diaspora, the first being the voluntary migration and self-discovery throughout the journey, while the second shows the suffering of those who are subjected to forced movement as well as those who are left behind.

If Tara and Halima's experiences are at the far ends of the diasporic spectrum, as one's experience can be regarded as complete while the other as incomplete, Padma's experience fits right in the middle of the spectrum. Through recreating India in America, she tries to project her diasporic experience as that of completeness, playing the role of a traditional Bengali Brahmin in India who is resistant to any cultural change. However, her experience is incomplete as she fails to embrace the core of the diasporic experience: change. In that sense, Tara, Padma and Halima, more or less, represent the three main dimensions of the diasporic spectrum.

Endnotes

ⁱ For the American political scientist Daniel Elazar, the Jewish people represent “the classic diaspora phenomenon” as they managed to maintain “integrity as ethno-religious community” despite two thousand years of having no political control over their home country. Jewish migrations during those two millennia are associated with religion as they “shared temporal and religious rhythm rather than on shared land” (Dufoix 8).

ⁱⁱ Nubians have been relocated and forced to leave their homeland, Nubia, due to the construction of two dams across the Nile, the Reservoir or Aswan Dam and Aswan High Dam. According to Hussein M. Fahim, the first dam forced Nubians to leave their homelands and seek work in unfriendly cities where they felt strangers. Labor Migration divided families and resulted in communities in which the number of females exceeded that of males (*Egyptian Nubians* 31). The effect of the construction of the second dam was even more disastrous as it led to the flooding of all the Nubian land in Egypt and one third of the Nubian valley in Sudan. Nubians in Egypt and Sudan then felt compelled to leave their homeland (Fahim 30).

ⁱⁱⁱ The post-colonial phase can be classified into three types: the first is Anglo-Indian emigration to Australia and England. After India won its independence, a lot of Anglo-Indians (intermarriage between Indians and English) were marginalized as they felt that they weren’t racially and ethnically welcomed amongst the English, so they moved to Australia which became later a second homeland to many Anglo Indians. The Second type includes professionals and semi-professionals’ emigration to industrial developed countries such as the United States of America, England and Canada (Jayaram 21-22). Many doctors, engineers, teachers and other less-professionals moved to developed countries after India’s independence especially in the late 1960s and 1970s. This type of emigration is known as ‘brain drain’ and is most importantly voluntary (Jayaram 22). The last type of the post-colonial Indian Diaspora is concerned with the emigration of labourers to West Asia (Jayaram 21). This pattern of emigration took place after the oil boom and is dependent on the labour market. It is also voluntary, but it largely involves males who are in continuous contact with their families in India (Jayaram 22).

^{iv} Reference to the novel will be denoted by *DD*.

^v This echoes Mukherjee’s life in Calcutta after returning from London in 1951, as her family resided in a large house that was separated from the city and she and her sisters were driven to school, although it was too close to their home, along with a bodyguard in case of any violence (Alam 4).

^{vi} Indian immigrants of the post-colonial phase belong to the middle-class in the host countries (Sharma 57).

^{vii} Mukherjee sees immigration in a positive light, however it entails opposing the static or fixed notions of one’s national identity (Subbiah and Phil 40).

^{viii} The word Nubia, as Hussein M. Fahim states, means “land of Gold” and this reflects its richness and its significant role in the ancient Egyptian civilization (*Egyptian Nubians* 23).

^{ix} Old Nubia, according to Fahim, extended from Aswan in Egypt to “Meroe” in central Sudan. Egyptian Nubia extended approximately 300 kms along the Nile from Aswan to Wadi Halfa (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 10), and Sudanese Nubia extended about 170 kms from the Egyptian border in the north till the Dal Cataract south in Sudan (*Egyptian Nubians* 11).

^x Nubia is surrounded by natural barriers that separate it from the rest of the country. To the south, it is separated by ‘Atmur’ desert, to its east and west lies the Sahara desert (Dafalla 45), and the three cataracts block the river to Dongola (the capital of Old Nubia) (Dafalla 45).

^{xi} There are two types of labor migration. According to Fahim, the first temporary migration occurred when Nubians left their homeland temporarily but maintained their identity and contact with their families, and eventually returned to Nubia. They were known as “Mughtarbeen” by the government. The second, permanent migration occurred when migrants bought land with the compensation money they received from the government, and stayed in Cairo (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 13-14).

^{xii} According to the 1960 census, Nubia’s population was 17,785 males and 30,243 females. Some villages had women only and no men at all (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 15).

^{xiii} Resettlement implies “moving people from their old familiar homes to new areas where the physical, climatic, economic, and social conditions are markedly different” (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 1). The Egyptian Nubians were separated from their Sudanese fellows; the Egyptian Nubians were resettled in Komombo, while their Sudanese counterparts were moved to Khasm-el-Griba (Keating 45).

^{xiv} To the ancient Egyptians, Nubians were known by the name “Kushites” which means people with different traditions and attitudes from those of the Northern Egyptians (Keating 15).

^{xv} Fahim states that Nubians are known to the Egyptians as “Barbara” as their land is “Bilad El Barbara”. “Barbara” implies that Nubians are associated with slavery and therefore are savages and are perceived as good for nothing (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 11).

^{xvi} Nubians believe that their blackness goes back to the fact that they were slaves while Egyptians descending from Turks (who ruled Nubia at some point) are lighter in skin color and have straight hair (*The Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* 11).

^{xviii} Reference to the novel will be denoted by *D*.

^{xix} Nubians are best known as domestic servants, butlers, and porters. They are known to be clean, honest, and trustworthy. They started acquiring these jobs during the dynasty of Mohamed Ali as the Turkish Khedives did not trust Egyptians and found Nubians to be more loyal and honest (Dafalla 63).

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