

Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure Seekers*: Exploring Limits of Acculturation

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Abstract

Multiculturalism, as an area of research, has gained importance in these globalized times. In this context, the status of mixed-race children presents an interesting and intractable issue. The novel *The Pleasure Seekers* by Tishani Doshi, an acclaimed Indian poet and novelist, who is herself a biracial child, goes deep into the problem. How the mixed race children fare vis-à-vis their parents, the first generation immigrants, is the focus of this novel. The three main case studies explored in this novel conform to the patterns of temporary acculturation, complete transculturation and failed acculturation respectively. The novelist, with the advantage of her poetic prose probes psychologically the mind of the characters to bring out the interplay between personality and the milieu. That the novel has autobiographical touch lends authenticity to the narrative and the conclusions.

Keywords: Diasporic Studies, Globalization, Indian English Fiction, Multiculturalism, Postmodern Society, Transculturation.

Introduction

India-born Tishani Doshi is a talented poet and novelist besides being a performing artist. She has published three collections of poetry and an equal number of novels so far. Her debut anthology of poems was *Countries of the Body* which won the Forward Poetry Prize in 2006. Her other book *Fountainville* (2013) has as its theme the surrogacy business in which pregnant women are shown cocooned in a house, much like hens waiting to lay eggs, till the time they are ready to give the gift of a baby to a stranger. Doshi's novel *Small Days and Nights* (2019) portrays a narrator of mixed origin who visits her dead mother's house in

Pondicherry where she is called upon to deal with some family skeletons.

Her first novel *The Pleasure Seekers* is indeed special as it has elicited rave reviews from the likes of Salman Rushdie, whose comment -- "A captivating, delightful novel" as also another comment -- "has a grace and gentle comedy of its own" (*Sunday Times*) adorn the back page of the book as blurbs. The novel has a poetic touch about it and reminds one of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*, whose enigmatic and oracular character Tilottama has parallel with Ba in the present novel. Another aspect that makes this novel unique is its autobiographical

character, but still, it has not drawn much the attention of academy that it deserves.

The Pleasure Seekers is a novel that deals with the transculturation or the lack of it of young females with similar, though at a reduced scale, side-shows of two males. The story of the novel starts in the year 1968 when the protagonist Babo Patel belonging to a Gujarati family of Madras (now Chennai) in India arrives in London. This was the time when, as the writer reminds us, Russia and Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia which proved to be a turning point for the Communist Block. Symbolically, the Patel family's deeply conservative character was also set to be shaken, the seeds of which were being sown now.

More than that, the period reminds one of the migration of a wave of Indians, particularly the young professionals to the US and Europe in search of greener pastures, and a little later, of the skilled and unskilled workers from Kerala to the Gulf countries. Also, in the 1970s, Gujaratis from East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, etc.) re-migrated (the first migration from India took place in 1890s) now as Commonwealth citizens to UK after nationalist sentiments rose there following freedom from colonial powers. So, these migrations and re-migrations encouraged the young Babo to aspire to study abroad.

Globalization, as a defining feature of the contemporary postmodern world, has thrown open new vistas in every field of human activity. Crossing seas to work in another part of the world has become so common. But it was not always like this. Remember Mahatma Gandhi who was reluctantly permitted by his mother to go to South Africa after he had undertaken certain vows. So, here too, Babo, the eldest son is allowed to go to England to study

engineering on the condition that he would observe faithfully the Jain code of strictly vegetarian food and abstinence from liquor, which however, he violates at the first available opportunity in London and takes meat as also liquor. So much for the sanctity attached to one's word that has come about since Gandhi's days.

Now, whether it was the first batch of the indentured labourers called *girmitiays*, who were forcibly sent by the British rulers of India to work in far off lands like Guyana, Surinam, Mauritius, etc. or the latest migration of computer professionals to different parts of the world, one thing that emerges as a common feature is that they have to work in a multicultural environment and proper adjustment holds the key to a happy life. One must agree that the environment in alien land is much different from the multicultural environment that one might find in India which is also considered by some as a multicultural country but there are common roots of many a sub-culture here and besides, the common experiences as a nation creates the awareness among people of being part of a single society with common destiny.

In this society is introduced a British *bahu* (bride) who weds her Gujarati beau Babo Patel coming from a Jain family. The Jains form a prosperous trading community which constitutes only 0.4% of India's total population and has much in common with the majority Hindus in terms of religious philosophy and practices. The bride in question is Sian who comes from the rural belt of England, from a village with the queer sounding name Nercwys. Both met in London where Babo was studying for his engineering degree and Sian was working as a temporary staff in an office.

There has been a great outpouring of fiction giving vent to the anxiety, culture

shock, maladjustment, nostalgia, etc. of the 'desi' (native Indian) trying to settle down in any European country or in the US. Surely, the experience of a European settling down in India, and on top of that, as a housewife in a traditional family should arouse the interest of readers. There were earlier accounts of failure of such a settlement as in the case of the German immigrant in India, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the writer of the Booker-winning novel *Heat and Dust*, who, after spending twenty-five years in India assessed India as intolerable because of poverty, backwardness, class-division, etc. (Ghoshal, 2003), but that is an old story. Since then, much water has flowed down the Ganga, as they say, and we have had happier accounts of the union of the East and the West as in the case of the other German-Indian writer Roswitha Joshi, whose autobiographical novel *Indian Dreams*, (2000) speaks of marital bliss enjoyed by Norma with her husband Akash.

That the story of *The Pleasure Seekers* has an autobiographical touch is surely suggested as the writer has a Welsh mother and a Gujarati father, corresponding respectively to the characters Sian and Babo in the novel. Subconsciously, it seems, Doshi has not been able to wean herself away from the real life graph with its myriad vicissitudes, so that the plot of the novel too becomes meandering, sticking at times to incidents she would love to harp upon, like the sibling-rivalry, or taking a long jump at other time when she is rather shy of revealing something, like the gap between the period of childhood of the sisters Mayuri and Bean and the stage when Mayuri starts dating a boyfriend.

Babo's Adaptation

Coming to the acculturation process of different characters, we find that in England, Babo is assigned to the care of Bhupen Jain's family. Bhupen is an old friend of Babo's father Prem Kumar Jain and had been living in London for a long time. He guides Babo well with regard to the do's and don'ts of daily life in London. Despite this patronage, Babo flouts the Jain code of food. This is his first step towards integration with the host society, and the need for integration arose because he got romantically involved with an English girl Sian. For his acculturation in England, which is a stage in the progress towards adaptation of the culture of the host society. Acculturation is a process of learning and imbibing language, mannerism, beliefs, practices, value system, etc. starting with lifestyle components like food, dress, entertainment modes, etc. of the new society to which immigrants have been introduced. These elements bring about the much-needed adjustment with the host society, it is felt. The adjustment, however, can take many forms and the simplest and a rather reductionist view is presented by the four stages outlined by John Berry, which are, moving from the best to the worst: Assimilation, Integration, Separation and Marginalization. (John, 1997). These stages depend on various factors like the inclination, resources, social conditions and mental make-up of the immigrant and the policies formulated by the government of the host country. Babo is here as a temporary migrant, though post-relationship with Sian, he dreams of settling down in England. For the present, he needs to adapt himself to the English way of life and then gradually seek deeper integration or assimilation, as circumstances might call upon him to do.

For his acculturation in English society, which has shades of racial discrimination even though the state policy is of integration, Babo does not need any grounding in English language as he is proficient in it except, of course, for perfect pronunciation, but behavioural acculturation demands change in dietary habits, and of course, in social manners. Again, as psychologists aver: “Language and behavioral acculturation occur immediately after immigrants’ arrival in the new country, as they struggle with communicating in the new language and adapting to behavioral norms and expectations in the new society. However, other aspects of cultural change such as identity or values are thought to come later” (Birman & Poff, 2010: 29). So, Babo’s taking plunge straightaway into western food is in line with this acculturation process.

It may be noted that early research in popular culture has proceeded on the presumption that acculturation travels one-way only – to assimilate the immigrant in host society where he acquires the new culture after shedding his linkage to culture back home. But it stands revised now, as the critics outline the contrast: “Thus, immigrants may either continue to retain their culture in a separatist or traditionalist stance or assimilate into the new society. However, [...] Berry (1980) suggests [...] immigrants may also choose to acculturate to both cultures, resulting in integration or biculturalism; or become disconnected from either culture, resulting in marginality” (Birman and Poff, 2010: 29). After all, we are dealing with human material!

So, while acculturation in terms of social manners is a pragmatic step, in the private space of home, his hosts, the Bhupen Jain family has not been able to shun the Indian cultural mindset, so they intimate Prem

about Babo’s rendezvous with the English girl which alarms the people back home so much so that Babo is summoned home on the pretext of his mother being seriously ill. The charade is off when he reaches home in Madras where he is presented with the fait accompli to marry the Gujarati girl Falguni selected earlier by the family with his consent. Understandably, the parents are shattered because, as is customary in Indian society, the families of both the boy and the girl were involved. The cause of additional concern for Prem Kumar is that Babo wants to settle in England with his English wife.

Sian’s Transculturation

While those who go by the rulebook apply the term ‘acculturation’ to a diasporic community as a whole or a group thereof, the term preferred for the individual entering an alien society through the route of wedlock, is transculturation – a term coined in 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. He first introduced it as a “methodological tool meant to synthesize the extensive and detailed analysis on the development of Cuban society and culture in his book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* published in 1940” (Cote, 2010: 123). The meaning in both cases – acculturation and transculturation is almost similar – to acquaint oneself with the social and cultural mores of the host culture and to adapt oneself to it. The extent of integration in such cases varies from person to person as also the context – how receptive is the host culture; and how adaptive is the immigrant, but whereas acculturation suggests an ongoing process, transculturation suggests transformation. In case of marriage the urgency and inclination

to get assimilated for life becomes a serious concern.

Fearing the addition of a foreigner to their close-knit family, a condition is laid down by Prem Kumar that the couple would have to stay with them in Madras for a minimum two-year period, before they could be allowed to settle wherever they liked. The Indian code of patriarchal family is accepted and followed sincerely by Babo as an obedient son. Sian, after initial doubts, also cooperates and comes over to India to be Babo's bride. As a newly-wed, she has to contend with her husband's family which has besides Prem Kumar, his wife Trishala, two daughters Dolly and Meenal described as 'unibrows', and another son Chotu who remains *chotu* (literally, a younger child) and his real name is not given.

In the extended (from the western viewpoint) family of Babo Patel is also his grandmother, lovingly referred to as Ba, who lives in Ganga Bazar village of Bhuj, Gujarat. It is an interesting character portrayed by Doshi. The wizened old lady has oracular intuition: "Ba could smell the lingering camphor from the marriage pyre, the sickening smell of leftover vegetable oil, dying jasmine. She could smell Dolly's tears and Trishala's sulphuric gunpowder anxiety hanging like a shroud over everything," (167) describes Doshi in her poetic prose. It is here that Babo and Bean's marriage ceremony takes place. Ba is the head of the family, besides her house is like a farmhouse which is convenient for such get-togethers. She provides counselling as well as refuge to Babo and Bean when later, each of them turns up at her door to get advice and spend time away from the humdrum of Madras even though Ganga Bazar is quite far off from Madras. Her words are mysterious as those of a prophet. When her grandson visits her with Sian, she advises them:

"Look to the sky every day – for the sun and the moon signify eternal devotion of husband and wife, look to the sea – for love flows deep and you must be prepared to flow deeper; journey like the fish and the birds – because it is only those who agree to their own return who can participate in the divinity of the world" (80-81). Undoubtedly, Doshi's language outpaces all other fictional elements in this novel.

Sian's transculturation involving several rites of passage that will turn her from a western girl to an Indian *bahu*, but as Sam and Berry's study (2010) observes the process of acculturation is much simpler and easier in case of an immigrant who migrates for marriage or employment as compared to other categories of immigrants where one has to migrate perforce, as for example, refugees. According to these researchers, the comparative ratio of ease of acculturation in these two cases is 2:1. (Sam & Berry, 2010: 480)

Sian's responses can be gleaned from her lived experience in the extended Gujarati family of patriarch Prem Kumar and the neighbourhood. Sian is trained to put on a sari, cut vegetables sitting on kitchen floor like her mother-in-law does. In her room, Jain religious symbols and icons are displayed. She is taken along when the family members visit the local Jain temple. Their children Mayuri and Bean are also initiated into Jain rituals so that at the time of Chotu's death, both sisters are seen counting the prayer beads. Sian is the focus of all sorts of efforts to acculturate her into Indian life. At times, she resents overmuch attention given to her. It is only after Meenal's marriage and her first delivery that the family diverts attention from Sian, who also witnesses with a sense of wonder the hefty Gujarati weddings, when each one of

her sisters-in-law departs from home as a bride with a rich trousseau.

It is not merely the family with which Sian engages herself so well, it is also with the Madras society at large. The children, while riding the car through Madras notice the poor and the sick, but then Sian does not exhibit any Orientalist feelings the way the writer of *Heat and Dust* did. Here, Sian takes her children to Andhra Mahila Sabha school where she teaches free of charge, the children belonging to underprivileged section of society. (140). Sian also takes to charity work through the Overseas Women's Club. Visiting mental patients in hospitals, she is moved over their plight.

In the immediate neighbourhood, Sian makes friends with a Parsi widow, who introduces her to The Garden of Redemption, a spiritual community headed by a spiritualist Manna who helps her come to terms with life whenever she is anxious. Manna too speaks life lessons in a mystical language: "If we understand our own births and deaths, we'll know what to erase and what to put forward" (158). These social and spiritual activities help Sian immensely to understand and be a part of the Indian society.

Now, as Weichold comments, "Moving from one culture to another is a major life transition often accompanied by unique stressors (e.g., disruption of social ties) impacting on individuals' developmental pathways" (Weichold 2010: 1). Sian's anxiety as to whether she is on the right track is set at rest as she is able to compare her notes as a foreigner wedded to an Indian, with Derlene Malhotra nee Adams from Tennessee, USA; or with Janet Krishnamurti nee Miller from Plymouth. Twice-a-week, these three families met at the Madras Gymkhana Club – a remnant of

colonial days – for drinks and discussions. She was warned of the overbearing mother-in-law with whom she would have to put up till one of them died. There was not going to be any respite the Western way – putting the aged people in the Age-care homes! But she had resolved to make her marriage a success and believed that her husband would outlive her. She had even decided what to do if ever in life she was left alone.

A lot of space is given to the rearing up of children who interiorize Indian and western manners (Sian and Babo having "time alone" in bedroom as children waited outside), food (served on the eve of Bean's departure) and entertainment (Gymkhana gatherings of OWC), etc. Of course, there is a kind of competition between sisters as is normal in any family where girls are of almost equal age. Bean gets cues to develop urges and model life from Mayuri just as Chotu gets from elder brother Babo.

Sian's Family

While Sian's married life progresses well in India, her family back in England nourishes puzzlement as they never in their wildest dreams ever thought of having an Indian son-in-law. Sian's mother gets the opportunity to see at first hand how her daughter is braving it out in India, when she visits India on the occasion of marriage of her granddaughter – long after her daughter had migrated to India. For Sian's mother, the world has not globalized, so to say. For her, travel is not that easy and frequent as it is for any youngster. Hence her concern for the welfare of her daughter is more acute, and also let's say, blown up.

We are also given a glimpse of the extended family of Sian – her mother Nerys, father Bryn; her two brothers --Huw and Owen; her paternal aunt El who lives nearby.

Often, the two families meet up on special occasions. The aunt is described in a slang-laden language:

Aunty Eleri, who relished other people's problems like honey in her thumbs, thought Sian was in over her head. Poor Aunty El, who'd come by for a cup of tea with her dog, Gwythur, whose eyes nearly fell out of the back of her head when she saw Sian standing here, pleased as pie. Her brother's last chick who sh'd heard had a place in London and was making big city money, had given all that up and was now saying, "Didn't Mam tell you, Aunty El? I'm going to India to get married." (72).

Sian visits her home in England following her father's death. She remembers him, as would every diasporic; his words to her not to forget the family which she had not abided by and had allowed the concern for her original family to fade. "She had packed it all away in the bottom drawer of her heart and began a beginning halfway across the world" (155). But then, she believed that she had learnt the "secret of surviving in a foreign country. It had something to do with love" (154). Thoughts like these indicate a measure of assimilation in the Indian culture which bespeaks perfect transculturation.

On the other hand, when Babo went to his in-laws' house in England to condole the death of his father-in-law, he expected to be received by the entire village folk at the railway station – something common in an Indian village, however, to his dismay, it was only his brother-in-law Owen who came to receive him. Here he displayed lack of acculturation revealing the Indian trait but this streak helped him win over the village community by being helpful to them on many occasions.

Bean's Failed Acculturation

Sian, though herself a totally acculturated Indian, was concerned about her children, since being of mixed race they might invite derisive or adverse comments in England, even if in India, they were treated as privileged children. The 300 years of colonialism have instituted the "adoration of white skin" (95) in India, as the writer rightly observes. If we consider the situation of the Anglo-Indian community in India, we find that after independence of the country, many people belonging to this category stayed on in India even though most migrated to England or to other Commonwealth nations like Canada and Australia. But it is not merely due to their British links that they have enjoyed privileged status, many Anglo-Indians have distinguished themselves in fields like military, sports, education, literature, etc. India also had a sizeable Portuguese-Goan population. Confining, however for the sake of this study, to the Anglo-Indians, we focus on the sister-duo Mayuri and Bean.

Acculturation or transculturation of youth is surprisingly not so comfortable if they are 'mixed race' children. This term was preferred in a survey conducted in London over others like 'biracial', 'half-breed', 'half-caste', or 'hybrid' which were considered offensive by the young people having parents from different races. (Aspinall, 2008: 5). There are several instances where they face the identity issue. In this case, Mayuri and Bean happen to be Anglo-Indians and the writer uses the term "hybrids" for them. (235). Bean is alarmed when she hears Selvi describe Shyam Malhotra (son of Derlene) as the ugliest child observing that "Sometimes all this

mixing gives bad results” (133)! That is the viewpoint of an ordinary person indeed.

The fact that Part Three of the book captioned “Levisham to Ganga Bazaar 1996-2001)” traces Bean’s journey to England twenty-two years after her father Babo’s, suggests the importance that the author attaches to her life graph which revolves around her period of biological and psychological maturation from adolescence to youth, and her attempt at imbibing, culturally speaking, the totally individualistic western approach to life, that is focused on experiencing pleasure. As to why Bean decided to go to England is unclear to her parents. Her boyfriend Michael Mendoza had gone to Australia with his divorced mother.

Perhaps it’s inevitable, Babo thought, that our children suffer a similar displacement; that in order to understand the pattern of their lives here, they must go elsewhere. [...] Part of it must have had to do with the boredom of college life, where for four years Bean went and came home with a dull look in her eyes, with no new boyfriend or best friend of note, and a degree in English literature which she didn’t know what to do with. (236).

Her restless soul probably yearned for more adventure “like Dick Whittington and his cat, on a quest to conquer the city of London” and more definitely “to find love: the kind of love Babo and Sian had found in London” (238).

Bean goes to England and while staying there, she, for once, is much appreciative of the orderliness, punctuality and decorum in the functioning of public facilities like the trains, “nothing like India with all its abundance of chaos and noise,” she comments (250). But then, the same

Bean was upset with the rules followed in the Bhupen Jain household! The Jain family had indeed absorbed some of the orderliness of English society but it seems, she expected the Indian lifestyle there. This hybrid approach is an indicator of her imperfect acculturation in future in the English society.

Bean’s mental make-up contrasts well with her sister’s. We do not learn about any problem in Mayuri’s wedded life. That shows her adaptability to a multicultural setting as she is wedded to a Parsi boy in India. Bean, on the other hand, tries and for a good period of time, appears to be well-soaked in the western culture. London is a place where identity is re-fashioned or not fashioned at all. When Bean visits Uncle Huw and Auntie Carole in Brighton, her cousins Gareth and Ed “paraded her around town as the exotic cousin visiting from India” (247). In a white village, such a response is understandable, but in metropolitan London, with its large multiracial population, no such reaction is expected. Of course, we hear of episodes of racial discrimination about which Bhupen had cautioned both his Indian guests.

So, Bean takes to the openness of western society as a fish takes to water. While working at Stonewell, she happens to have a glimpse, through the glass wall of her office, of a smart man – a Spanish working in an adjoining architect’s office and is instantly bewitched by him, As luck would have it, she also happens to meet Javier in person one day and their friendly relationship begins which soon leads them to the bedroom. Later, she learns that this man is married and has three children also, but despite the sane advice from her friend Allegra to stop seeing him, she fondly hopes to win him over for ever!

Not only this, she also has physical relations with a number of people – a Brazilian dancer, a Nigerian investment banker, a Greek musician, a Russian scientist, an English actor, a Canadian rock-climber, and so on. (268). But surprisingly, after her failure to win over Javier, she is heartbroken and thinks of returning to India. Bean's failure in case of this relationship shows a lack somewhere. As a child, she was always outwitted by her elder sister Mayuri. So, she had entered into a sort of competition with her. It was in all fields from possessing toys, taking part in school activities or striking friendships. When Mayuri fell for a neighbourhood boy, Bean could not have lagged behind, so coming one up on her, she even got pregnant from her boyfriend! Even though Mayuri helped her with secret abortion, she did not learn any lesson. Instead, she felt as if a door had opened and there was no looking back on sexual adventures. The experience with the Spanish architect revealed to her the other side of physical relationship: it could also hook your heart!

Heart desires stability of home but Bean becomes an eternally rootless person even as wanting home all the time. There is the archetypal Indian grandma waiting for her and only she can help her “separate love from betrayal, anger from abandonment” (284). She had prophesied looking at a cobra coiled in the branches of jamun tree that “this last grandchild would be serious and quiet and would know the failure of flight” (140-41). The prophecy has come true!

Bean's journey to Bhuj to have second abortion does not have any closure. The home she was expected to return to lies in shambles due to the earthquake. She muses: “Is this my real life or is it just a prelude to something before I return... Return to where? Why do I always

feel like I'm visiting wherever I go? [...] One foot in, the other foot out” (248). Home, for a diasporic like Bean – she is a diasporic at heart – is just not there: *There is no such thing as home. Once you've forsaken it and stepped out of the circle, you can't ever re-enter and claim anything as yours.* How could you? When you've portioned yourself in such a way? It was always going to be like this: [...]. Hadn't Bean tried? Hadn't she gone away to recover parts of herself and failed? (278, italics in original).

Bean's ‘parts’ are indeed scattered. She has had behavioural acculturation but identity has not completely metamorphosed into British or European. Hence the pull back. It is also suggested that having trouble fitting in with European peers, she rejects European identity and instead adopts what Birman and Trickett term as “reactive identification” (Birman & Poff, 2010: 32) with her native Indian culture so that she flies back to India and finds solace in Ba's sanctuary.

According to a critic, the expatriate writer upholds family life in India because the writer faces xenophobia in the adopted country and has to glorify her land of birth. (Bhattacharya, 2012: 134), but the critic misses the fact that the writer is herself a biracial child and is settled in Madras and this is an autobiographical novel. Doshi herself remarked in an interview: “This is a novel that comes from life. It is a tender love story of desire, independence, choices...”. We are told that Tishani's father is Gujarati, and mother Welsh and the couple decided to stay in India and make their life here “at a time when most people would go to the West because that was the sensible economic choice” (Raj, 2012).

Conclusion

The novel is a study of different types of acculturation processes. There is the adaptation or partial acculturation of Babo Patel in England; a total transculturation of Sian in India and the failed acculturation of Bean in England. There is the interesting difference in racial background. While Babo is Indian, Sian is British and Bean a bi-racial youth. Again, there are differences in terms of motives in going to another country. Babo goes as a temporary expatriate to study; Sian comes to India for marriage and family; and Bean goes for adventure and love. The comparison of the life graph of Sian with her daughter Bean's brings into focus the difference in terms of acculturation in a different land. While Sian is able to get assimilated in Indian society so well that she does not miss England much, her daughter Bean is a misfit and is always floundering. It has something to do with how much of the alien spirit one is able to imbibe without undergoing the clash with one's innate native sensibility and cultural moorings. After her failed affair with Javier, Bean is just not able to move on like a hard-boiled European. The acculturation is incomplete. Bean's indeed is an ambiguous persona.

The title of the novel provides a signpost to the mindscape of the protagonists in a reductionist manner. It has been taken from the Bible: "In the last days, men would be lovers of themselves [...] lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2Timothy 3: 1-4). All characters, and indeed everybody in the world seeks pleasure. While Babo and Sian had their share of pleasure, they had to contend with myriad other problems which life brings along. They accepted them and so seem contented. Bean is not able to adjust with the

shock of refusal by her lover. In this, "love is reflected upon deeply at the precipice of loss" (Shah). Bean's return is, at quite another plane, reminiscent of Biju's return in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. In both cases, the protagonists return to their Indian moorings and family as the last resort and as losers.

Ba's crystal gazing in her mystical vein, a la oracles, provides a hazy view of things to come: "Mayuri is going to sink her roots deep. She will know what she is and what she wants, always. But this one, this Beena, she will change from earth to water to fire, again and again. She will want to move like water, forever taking a different shape but she will also long to stay still" (117-18). The house in Ganga Bazaar lies in rubble due to the earthquake. The immersion ritual performed earlier at Ba's house when she was bodily lowered into a well is a symbolic act denoting re-birth. Red garoli lizard (common house gecko) become almost a motif. A lizard hibernates for long winter period and then awakens. Also it re-creates its tail when it gets amputated, and so, serves as a symbol of regeneration. There is hope for a new beginning in the end.

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