

Acculturation Process in Tishani Doshi's *The Pleasure Seekers*: From Identity Crisis to Integration into the Host Culture

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Abstract

This article explores acculturative stress and the broader process of acculturation in Tishani Doshi's selected novel, *The Pleasure Seekers*, utilizing John W. Berry's acculturation framework. It focuses on key concepts: acculturation, assimilation, integration, marginalization, separation, and acculturative stress to examine how migrant characters navigate cultural adaptation and identity negotiation. In *The Pleasure Seekers*, Doshi traces Sian's transformative journey from Wales to India, where she encounters cultural dissonance and societal pressures, ultimately crafting a hybridized identity. The article examines the psychological and social aspects of migration, emphasizing the role of cultural flexibility and emotional resilience in shaping identity. It looks at how acculturative stress manifests in Sian's interactions with Indian traditions and family dynamics, analyzing her transition from alienation to integration. The article argues that as migrants become closer to the host culture, acculturative stress decreases, facilitating faster integration. It also contends that the degree to which migrants engage with the host culture while retaining aspects of their original identity directly affects their stress levels, suggesting that deeper cultural integration leads to smoother identity negotiation and enhanced psychological well-being. This proves that Sian's reduction in acculturative stress was the direct result of her alignment with multiple dimensions of cultural interaction, namely, adopting the local language, participating in religious rituals, adapting to traditional cuisine, navigating family structures, and fulfilling culturally defined gender roles such as those of wife and mother. These practices not only facilitated her psychological adaptation but also enhanced her sense of belonging within the Indian social fabric.

Keywords: Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, Assimilation, Integration, Marginalization, Separation.

Introduction

Tishani Doshi, an Indian-Welsh author born in 1975, uses her bicultural background to explore the tensions and transformations that occur within families shaped by migration and cultural convergence. In her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Pleasure Seekers* (2010), Doshi presents a nuanced portrayal of a cross-cultural marriage and the gendered challenges that arise within traditional Indian family structures. The novel follows the journey of Sian, a Welsh woman who marries Babo, a Tamil man, and

relocates from Britain to India to join his extended Brahmin family. Upon arrival, Sian is immediately immersed in a rigidly hierarchical family system governed by traditional roles and expectations. As a foreign daughter-in-law, she is confronted with unfamiliar social dynamics: patriarchal authority, gendered labor divisions, and the centrality of family honor.

These structures, deeply rooted in Indian cultural norms, impose emotional and behavioral constraints

that contribute to her initial acculturative stress. Domestic spaces, often feminized and controlled by patriarchal figures, become sites of both conflict and learning for Sian as she navigates her new identity. However, instead of resisting these roles outright, Sian engages with them selectively. She knows how to perform certain duties expected of a Tamil wife and mother, such as cooking Indian food, participating in religious rituals, and caring for elders, while also retaining aspects of her Western individuality. This negotiated participation in family life demonstrates a flexible approach to traditional roles, allowing Sian to gain emotional acceptance without sacrificing her sense of self. Through this process, Doshi highlights how cross-cultural marriages often require a renegotiation of familial power dynamics and gender roles.

By foregrounding Sian's interactions with her in-laws, especially her mother-in-law and father-in-law, Doshi emphasizes how family structures act as both barriers and bridges to integration. The home becomes a microcosm of the broader cultural world Sian must adjust to. Her eventual comfort within the extended family and her ability to balance duty with authenticity significantly reduce her acculturative stress. In this way, *The Pleasure Seekers* offers a compelling exploration of how traditional family roles and expectations shape the psychological journeys of women navigating life between cultures. This study examines acculturative stress and identity crisis during the acculturation process in *The Pleasure Seekers*, with a particular focus on the female protagonist's experiences navigating a cross-cultural marriage and relocation to India, from the perspective of family structure and traditional roles. The central problem addressed in this article is how intercultural contact, particularly within the context of traditional Indian society, provokes acculturative stress and identity crises and how these crises influence her capacity for cultural adaptation and integration. Drawing upon John W. Berry's theory of acculturation, which includes the strategies of assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization, and the concept of acculturative stress, this article examines the emotional and psychological responses of Sian. Initially unfamiliar with the family structures of her new environment, Sian experiences early acculturative stress and feelings of cultural dissonance. However, as she begins to engage meaningfully with Indian cultural practices through language, food, religion, motherhood, and familial obligations, she demonstrates a gradual shift toward integration.

This paper also aims to analyze how Sian's evol-

ing identity reflects the challenges and rewards of intercultural adjustment. By tracing her movement from cultural dislocation toward bicultural harmony, this article seeks to understand the factors that facilitate or hinder successful acculturation. The novel serves as a rich literary representation of how cross-cultural encounters affect female identity, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being. While considerable scholarly work has been done on migration and identity, there remains limited attention to the literary representation of acculturative stress among female migrants in Indian fiction. This article aims to address that gap by offering a focused, character-driven analysis of how *The Pleasure Seekers* portrays the psychological dimensions of cultural adaptation through a cultural and gender-sensitive lens. This article is directed by the following research questions: In the context of migration and the process of assimilation, how do integration and marginalization manifest in the female character, Sian? How does she reduce her acculturative stress within the process of acculturation? To what extent does she resist the process of assimilation? How do traditional family structures and gender roles, language, food, and religion influence Sian's acculturative stress during her cultural integration?

Literature review

This article draws extensively on the intellectual contributions of Tishani Doshi and John W. Berry, engaging with a range of academic sources, including monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and edited volumes, which provide critical evaluations of Doshi's literary output and Berry's theoretical frameworks on acculturation. These sources are instrumental in addressing the central themes of migration, identity formation, and cultural integration, offering vital insights into the socio-psychological dynamics that inform diasporic experiences.

Aahana Ranjit Balan's "Material Entanglements: The Urban Eco-poetics of Tishani Doshi's Madras" (2025) foregrounds the ecological and urban dimensions of Doshi's work, demonstrating how the materiality of the city shapes subjectivity and mediates the experiences of displacement and belonging. Meera Patel's *Women, Identity, and Postcolonial Migration* (2023) explores the gendered dimensions of migration and identity formation. These texts emphasize how female protagonists navigate cultural boundaries, respond to patriarchal expectations, and construct hybridized identities. Similarly, Gunjan Saxena in "Making Visible the Invisible: An Analytical Elucidation of Tishani's Poems" (2022), emphasizes the nuanced articulation of belonging, selfhood, and

liminality, illustrating how Doshi's poetic corpus interrogates both personal and communal dimensions of identity formation. Jagdish Batra, in the article entitled "Tishani Doshi's The Pleasure Seekers: Exploring Limits of Acculturation" (2021), portrays the status of mixed-race children as an interesting and intractable issue. Anjali Rao's *Negotiating Belonging* (2021) and Rajesh Kumar's *Memory, Migration, and Multiculturalism in Indian Diaspora Literature* (2017) further enrich the discussion by highlighting themes of cultural negotiation, memory, and diasporic identity. Hardeep Singh, in "Tishani Doshi's Poetry: A Clarion Call against Suppression, Subjugation and Exploitation of Women" (2019), complements these analyses by foregrounding the socio-political consciousness in Doshi's work, particularly her exploration of gendered oppression, subjugation, and cultural marginalization, which lays the conceptual groundwork for understanding the complex social landscapes her prose narratives inhabit. Priya Sharma's article "Gender and Marginalization in Postcolonial Indian Literature" (2015) provides critical perspectives on how women experience cultural estrangement and negotiate belonging in transnational contexts. Arun Mehta's *The Postcolonial Family: Narratives of Belonging and Exclusion* (2011) provides a valuable lens through which to examine intergenerational tensions and family dynamics, particularly in relation to cultural adaptation. *Cultural Crossings in Literature* (2010), edited by Peter Lang, provides theoretical frameworks for understanding how characters navigate cultural hybridity and identity reconstruction in the context of migration.

The theoretical backbone of this research is provided by John W. Berry, whose extensive body of work on acculturation and psychological adaptation offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the psychosocial outcomes of cultural transition. His article "Immigration and Acculturation: Social, Psychological, and Economic Dimensions" (2012) addresses the multifaceted impacts of immigration, particularly in relation to identity transformation and social integration. This work is instrumental in examining how displacement influences individual and collective well-being. Berry's *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (2011) offers a critical examination of how cultural variables affect psychological functioning. His insights into identity formation and adaptation provide a conceptual lens through which the emotional and psychological experiences of diasporic characters can be interpreted. Similarly, *The Handbook of Acculturation Psychology* (2006), co-edited with David Sam, presents key models and strategies of acculturation, namely, as-

similation, integration, separation, and marginalization, which are foundational to the present study's analysis of cultural adaptation.

In his chapter "Stress Perspectives on Acculturation" (2006), published in *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, Berry explores the psychological stressors associated with cultural transition. This work highlights the importance of mitigating factors such as social support and effective coping strategies in facilitating successful adaptation. Another collaborative study, "Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition" (2006), co-authored with Phinney, Sam, and Vedder, offers empirical insight into the identity struggles of young migrants, emphasizing the role of intercultural negotiation in identity formation. Berry's widely cited article "Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures" (2005) advocates integration as the most adaptive strategy, enabling individuals to retain cultural heritage while engaging with the host culture. This balanced approach, according to Berry, promotes psychological resilience and social cohesion. His earlier contributions, such as "Acculturation and Human Diversity in a Multicultural Society" (2002) and "Acculturation and Adaptation" (1997), further explore the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions of migration, providing key concepts for understanding hybridized identities and cultural negotiation.

Berry's foundational work, *Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation* (1980), introduces the fourfold acculturation model, which remains central to contemporary research on cross-cultural adaptation. His article "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation" (1997), published in *Applied Psychology*, synthesizes these ideas into a cohesive framework for understanding the interplay between individual agency and societal structures in shaping migrant experiences. Likewise, "Acculturative Stress in Migrants: Psychological and Social Impacts" (2001) emphasizes the emotional toll of marginalization, underscoring the importance of adaptive mechanisms and social connectedness. Further contextual support for this article is drawn from contemporary scholarship in Indian diasporic literature.

Theoretical Framework

This article draws upon John W. Berry's acculturation framework to examine the role of traditional Indian family structures and gender roles in shaping the identity and psychological adjustment of migrant women. John W. Berry is a foundational figure in the fields of cultural psychology and migration studies, widely recognized for his influential contributions to the understanding of how individuals and groups

adapt psychologically and socially to new cultural environments. His theories on acculturation have become central to scholarly discourse on cultural interaction and migration, offering a systematic framework to analyze the diverse strategies migrants employ when encountering host cultures (2006a, 298).

Berry's acculturation model outlines four primary strategies through which individuals respond to intercultural contact: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. In the assimilation strategy, individuals relinquish their cultural heritage in favor of fully adopting the host culture's norms and values (2006c, 294). In contrast, integration occurs when migrants maintain aspects of their original culture while simultaneously participating in the host society. This dual engagement often leads to the formation of a hybridized identity and is considered the most adaptive strategy in Berry's framework. When acculturation is unsuccessful, individuals may experience marginalization, a state in which they are disconnected from both their heritage culture and the dominant culture of the host society, often leading to feelings of exclusion and psychological disorientation (2006a, 299). The separation strategy, conversely, reflects a preference for maintaining one's native culture while deliberately avoiding engagement with the host culture (Berry 2006a, 298).

A crucial component of Berry's theoretical model is the concept of acculturative stress, which refers to the psychological strain and emotional distress individuals may experience as they navigate the complexities of cultural adaptation. Berry defines acculturative stress as a consequence of the difficulties that arise from intercultural encounters, including linguistic barriers, value conflicts, social exclusion, cultural misunderstandings, and experiences of discrimination (2006b, 351). These stressors can manifest in psychological symptoms such as anxiety, alienation, and depression. Notably, Berry asserts that the more deeply individuals engage in the acculturation process and interact with the host society, the greater their exposure to such stressors (1997a, 291). Berry's framework provides a nuanced lens through which to analyze migrant experiences, offering insight into the psychological mechanisms that underlie identity transformation and cultural negotiation. His work has significantly advanced the academic understanding of intercultural adaptation, identity formation, and the mental health implications of migration.

Within *The Pleasure Seekers*, Tishani Doshi presents a cross-cultural narrative in which the family functions as both a site of cultural transmission and

a mechanism of social regulation. The novel reflects the enduring influence of patriarchal and hierarchical values embedded in postcolonial Indian society, particularly as they intersect with migration, gender, and domestic life. From a postcolonial perspective, the family in *The Pleasure Seekers* represents a microcosm of larger societal structures that reflect colonial legacies, such as rigid gender norms, respect for elders, collectivist values, and the prioritization of duty over individual autonomy. These values are imposed upon Sian, a Welsh woman who marries into a traditional Tamil Brahmin household, as she enters a space defined by expectations of deference, silence, and service. Postcolonial feminist theory is especially useful in interrogating how women's bodies and behaviors become sites of negotiation between tradition and modernity, particularly in cross-cultural marriages.

John W. Berry's acculturation theory further provides a psychological lens to understand Sian's evolving relationship with these roles. According to Berry, migrants adopt one of four strategies in response to cultural contact: assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration. These strategies are often shaped by the host society's receptiveness and the cultural pressures exerted within key social institutions, none more influential than the family. In Sian's case, the extended Indian household becomes the primary arena where these acculturation dynamics play out. Berry also emphasizes the concept of acculturative stress, a form of psychological strain caused by the conflicting demands of two cultural systems. For Sian, this stress is most pronounced within the domestic sphere, where she must adjust not only to unfamiliar rituals and languages but also to prescribed roles as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. These roles are shaped by intergenerational expectations and social norms deeply rooted in India's patriarchal structure. Initially, Sian experiences cultural dissonance and alienation, particularly due to her unfamiliarity with the implicit behavioral codes governing respect, silence, and gendered labor within her husband's family.

However, over time, Sian adopts what Berry describes as an integration strategy: she does not reject her Welsh identity, but gradually learns to operate within Indian domestic frameworks without surrendering her sense of self. She embraces certain rituals, participates in familial routines, and performs expected roles, but does so with conscious negotiation. Her ability to internalize some aspects of Indian domestic culture, while maintaining emotional authenticity, leads to a reduction in acculturative

stress and fosters a coherent hybridized identity. This theoretical framework thus allows us to analyze the psychological and emotional dimensions of traditional family life in cross-cultural settings. It sheds light on how domestic spaces, often overlooked in migration studies, become powerful sites of acculturation, identity formation, and resistance. Through the lens of *The Pleasure Seekers*, family is not merely a setting but a transformative force that shapes the migrant experience in deeply gendered and culturally specific ways.

Identity Crisis, Marginalization and Separation

When Sian first came to India, she exhibited patterns of separation across language, food, religion, family roles, and public celebrations, reflecting John Berry's separation strategy in acculturation. She maintains her native languages, English and Welsh, while resisting full acquisition of the host languages, Tamil, Kannada, or Hindi, creating a linguistic boundary. She selectively engages with Indian culinary practices and rarely participates actively in religious rituals, preserving cultural distance. Traditional roles as wife and daughter-in-law are formally acknowledged, but she maintains emotional and psychological autonomy. Public festivals and celebrations are observed from the periphery, allowing her to retain her heritage identity while minimally engaging with the host culture. At the same time, she experiences marginalization at certain points. Her limited mastery of the host languages and the challenge of unfamiliar foods generate stress. Religious and family expectations, along with peripheral participation in public celebrations, reinforce her cultural estrangement. Across these dimensions, Sian neither fully integrates into the host culture nor maintains strong functional ties to her heritage culture, exemplifying Berry's concept of marginalization and resulting in acculturative stress, social isolation, and a sense of alienation. Doshi writes:

I worry about so many things the language, for a start. I know you said that everyone else speaks English, but it's your mother I'm going to be spending a lot of time with and how's that going to work if we can't even speak to each other? I suppose I'll learn a bit of Gujarati along the way if I'm hearing it all the time, but how's it going to be for your family, who have to open their house to me, who have to like me? (56)

Her inability to fully participate in conversations where English may be present, but not dominant, mirrors the emotional distance she feels from her

new home. Doshi reveals Sian's discomfort with religion subtly but effectively. In a family ceremony:

She steered clear of religion because she knew it would upset her father. So, she said nothing of how Selvam, on Prem Kumar's instructions, pasted a poster of all the Jain symbols on the godrej almirah in their bedroom so they could contemplate it every morning. Nothing of how she accompanied the family to the Jain temple in Kilpauk every Sunday and joined them with folded knees and hands to pray for the purity of their souls (69).

This hesitation at the threshold of a religious space is symbolic of her internal conflict caught between the roles of participant and outsider. Sian's unease with Indian cuisine, its spices, textures, and rituals, becomes a metaphor for her broader struggle with assimilation and identity formation. Early in her time in India, food becomes one of the first markers of her outsider status. "Some adjustments are harder to make of course; the food" (23). The statement encapsulates both the literal and figurative heat of cultural immersion: her bodily reaction to the spices mirrors her inner resistance to the unfamiliar. Sian's identity crisis emerges clearly in her discomfort with the normative expectations placed upon her by her Indian in-laws. While she accepts her role as a wife, the performative aspects of it in India are different from what she is used to. Doshi writes, she said nothing of how she was learning to be the perfect Gujarati daughter-in-law from Meenal, who had been in training for years: wearing saris, rolling faultlessly round chappathis, knowing when to be silent and when to speak (69). These subtle demands reflect the rigidity of familial hierarchies in Indian society, placing Sian in a situation where her autonomy is reduced.

According to Berry, such conditions may push migrants toward either separation, clinging to one's original identity, or marginalization, where one feels alienated from both the heritage and host cultures (2006c, 289). In Sian's case, participation in Indian festivals is marked by ambivalence, where outward conformity masks internal alienation. When Sian attends her first Holi celebration, her reactions reflect both fascination and discomfort. "She smiled as they smeared colors on her cheeks, but something about the laughter and the abandon made her retreat inside herself" (117). The exuberance of the festival, deeply rooted in religious and communal traditions, confronts her with a form of collective joy she does not fully understand or identify with. The first encoun-

ter with the host culture may force the migrants to enter the liminal space, “liminality has both spatial and temporal dimensions, and can affect the process of ‘self-reconstruction,’ but it can also influence the assimilation and psychological well-being of immigrants in host countries” (Namjoo and Baradaran Jamili 2025, 113).

The Threshold of Assimilation

Assimilation is defined as one of the four main strategies that migrants use when interacting with a new culture. Assimilation occurs when a migrant starts to adopt the cultural norms, behaviors, and practices of the host society, often while temporarily suppressing elements of their original culture. In *The Pleasure Seekers*, the early signs of assimilation experienced by Sian upon her relocation to India are vividly reflected in her gradual negotiation with the local language, which becomes a primary marker of her cultural displacement and eventual adaptation. According to John Berry’s acculturation model, assimilation occurs when individuals relinquish their original cultural identity and fully adopt the values and practices of the host culture (2005, 701). Sian’s interactions with her Gujarati-speaking in-laws expose the delicate balance between linguistic alienation and tentative adaptation. Doshi illustrates this with humor and self-awareness: “Sian said I’m busy learning languages and how to make dhoklas and whatnot. It’s not like I’m lying around like a beached whale all day eating bonbons” (78). Here, language functions as both a barrier and a symbolic threshold. Her attempts at learning mark a willingness to participate, her outsider status lingers beneath the surface. This dynamic recalls Eva Hoffman’s concept of “the exile’s muteness,” where diminished fluency in the dominant language can temporarily suspend a migrant’s full self-expression and sense of identity (1989, 118).

As the narrative progresses, Sian acquires not only vocabulary but also the emotional nuances embedded in her new family’s speech. Doshi captures a particularly intimate instance: “She liked the roundness of the word in her mouth. It made her feel less foreign” (101), referring to her adoption of the Gujarati term of endearment *dikra* (“child”). Such moments demonstrate what John Berry identifies as early markers of assimilation, in which small but affective linguistic adaptations foster a sense of belonging (2005, 703). Language, in this sense, becomes not merely a tool of communication but a vessel for emotional integration, bridging the gap between her Welsh upbringing and her Indian domestic life. Nevertheless, this process is not without ambivalence. As

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas argues, language loss or shift is never neutral it can involve psychological strain and a reconfiguration of identity, especially for those navigating bicultural lives (2000, 47). For Sian, the early signs of assimilation through language are not about mastery but emotional investment. She does not become fluent, but her willingness to internalize and repeat culturally specific words marks a shift from mere survival to subtle cultural transformation.

Sian’s early encounters with Indian religious practices reveal a nuanced beginning of cultural assimilation, especially in the sphere of spirituality. Drawing on Berry’s acculturation model, assimilation involves not only external adaptation but also internal shifts in belief systems or openness to new values (2005, 712). Although Sian does not convert or abandon her own beliefs, her participation and respectful observation of her husband’s Hindu traditions mark the threshold of assimilation at a symbolic and emotional level. Doshi writes, “Sian was quick to tell Babo, who was wary of communities in general, and religious communities in particular, but now this is a place where Sian can walk; where she can try to understand the length and breadth of her new life” (95).

Food emerges as a subtly significant site for Sian’s initial steps toward assimilation into Indian culture. According to John Berry’s acculturation framework, the beginning of assimilation involves behavioral adaptation that precedes full internalization of cultural norms (2006a, 322). For Sian, adapting to the unfamiliar culinary landscape of her husband’s homeland is not merely an act of nourishment but a sensory encounter with identity and belonging. Early in her life in India, Sian finds herself confronted with new tastes and textures that symbolize cultural otherness. Doshi describes a scene where “Sian took a cautious bite of the idli, her face unreadable, then smiled. ‘It’s soft like a cloud,’ she said” (102).

Scholars such as Krishnendu Ray suggest that the act of eating “ethnic” or foreign foods can be one of the first thresholds of cultural intimacy, especially for migrants in intercultural relationships (2016, 74). Sian’s culinary experience is not passive; she engages, reflects, and verbalizes appreciation, thereby moving beyond mere tolerance toward the emotional beginnings of cultural participation. Later in the novel, this engagement deepens when she helps in the kitchen: “She asked Ba for the recipe for sambar, and though she forgot half the ingredients, she tried to make it on her own, laughing at her mistakes” (109). Cooking becomes both an act of affection and an effort at integration. As Homi Bhabha notes, such hybridized acts generate “third spaces” where iden-

tity is negotiated rather than fixed (1994, 55). Sian's kitchen experiments, marked by effort and humor, represent this in-between zone; she is no longer just a guest at the table, but a co-creator of its rituals.

Sian's journey to India is not only a geographic relocation but also an intimate confrontation with the traditional gender roles deeply embedded in Indian family structures. John Berry's theory of acculturation outlines how migrants may initially engage in superficial or behavioral adaptation before developing a deeper psychological integration (2006a, 327). For Sian, this process begins as she is absorbed into a Gujarati joint family and tentatively steps into roles unfamiliar to her Western upbringing. Her early interactions with her in-laws illustrate this phase of cultural navigation. Doshi writes, "She watched Ba move around the kitchen with silent authority, assigning duties without speaking, her presence commanding without effort. Sian stood there, unsure, waiting for a cue" (99). Sian's hesitation reflects a moment of cultural observation her role as a daughter-in-law is undefined in her own framework; she is willing to observe and engage, which Berry identifies as an early marker of assimilation (2005, 699).

In traditional South Asian settings, the roles of "mother" and "wife" carry culturally specific expectations, often structured around collectivist values (Segal 1991, 41). Sian's adjustment begins not with vocal confrontation but with subtle shifts in behavior, participating in domestic routines, accepting guidance from elders, and gradually assuming maternal roles. Later in the novel, it is noted: "She began calling Ba for advice when Mayuri had a fever, and even used the home remedies she once found odd" (122). This moment marks a turning point not just in practical behavior but in emotional investment, a shift from observer to participant. Moreover, her willingness to accept traditional familial roles is not merely submission but a form of agency within Berry's framework of assimilation. Assimilation in family contexts often requires "negotiating relational identities" rather than relinquishing one's own entirely. Sian is not losing her identity; she is reshaping it to fit a new context, one where being a wife and mother involves both adaptation and continuity.

Integration within the Host Culture

In migration contexts, integration refers to the process by which immigrants maintain their original cultural identity while actively participating in the host society. John Berry emphasizes that successful integration requires a balance between preserving one's heritage and embracing the new culture (2005, 702). Sian's journey exemplifies the acculturation strate-

gy of integration, particularly through her approach to language. Integration, in Berry's framework, involves maintaining one's original cultural identity while actively participating in the host society (2005, 700). Sian's early attempts to follow conversations around her reveal the initial stages of linguistic adaptation. Doshi captures this with a touch of humor and social warmth: "At nights, Nerys, Bryn, Sian, Babo, and Owen played Scrabble on the kitchen table after supper. 'It's quite embarrassing,' Nerys said without fail after losing, 'Even though English isn't your first language, you're better at this than any of us!'" (94). This moment, while lighthearted, signals a deeper shift in her engagement in language-based play, reflects an emerging linguistic awareness and willingness to integrate rather than dominate or withdraw.

Sian's migration to India is not merely geographical; it is also spiritual and cultural. Through the lens of Berry's acculturation model, Sian demonstrates integration, where she retains aspects of her Christian identity while gradually accepting and participating in Hindu religious customs that are central to her new Indian environment. For Sian, religion becomes a sensitive space where this dual belonging plays out. She is not shown as renouncing her beliefs but rather expanding them to include respect for the spiritual customs of her husband's family. In one scene, she is seen observing a family puja, described as "a ritual that was alien to her, moving in its quiet rhythm" (103). She does not feel compelled to convert, but she participates with empathy. This quiet acceptance and emotional resonance reflect what Berry identifies as the psychological flexibility necessary for integration (2005, 701).

Food often acts as both a cultural marker and a medium for social inclusion. Sian's willingness to embrace Indian food while maintaining her own culinary preferences embodies this dual process. One of the key moments illustrating this is when Sian tries to prepare a meal for her in-laws and is confronted with unfamiliar ingredients and techniques. Doshi writes, "She had never cooked with mustard seeds, and the popping terrified her. But she didn't stop" (89). The act of learning to cook Indian dishes is more than domestic adaptation it is a symbolic participation in the family's cultural rituals. Sian's migration to India thrusts her into an unfamiliar cultural environment where traditional gender roles and family structures diverge from her Welsh upbringing. As Doshi describes:

Sian's days began and ended with Mayuri's delicate powder rose smell, Selvi's heady coconut oil and jasmine flower combina-

tion, and Babo – his layers of earth and mica, his Gold Flake-smoking fingertips. These smells began to permeate Sian’s consciousness so strongly that they came to replace her early memories of Sylvan Lodge, and define, somehow, the beginning of her real relationship with India and her new phase of motherhood. She began to understand how Babo and she were inextricably tied, how between them, they held the power of creation (88).

This sensory immersion represents more than nostalgia; it marks the reconfiguration of Sian’s identity through intimate, familial bonds. The co-existence of cultural traditions in her child-rearing reflects Berry’s model of integration as a strategy fostering bicultural competence rather than cultural erasure (1997b, 9). In fact, “gender roles in diasporic families are often used to mediate cultural authenticity” (Lukose 2009, 55). Within this framework, Sian’s acceptance of her roles as wife and mother does not erase her individuality; rather, it reshapes it within the dynamics of a blended household. In other words, the hybridized space which the immigrant experiences may allow her to find a new “form of cultural meaning and production, blurring the limitation of existing boundaries” (Farahmandfar and Alizadeh 2019, 263)

Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress refers to the psychological and social strain migrants experience when adapting to a new cultural environment. According to Berry, this stress emerges from challenges such as language barriers, unfamiliar social norms, and the tension between maintaining one’s original cultural identity and engaging with the host culture (2006c, 289). One significant aspect of Sian’s migration journey is the gradual reduction of acculturative stress associated with language, a key indicator of cultural adjustment. For Sian, language becomes both a challenge and, over time, a bridge toward adaptation. Doshi notes, “She had learned the names of spices in Gujarati, the words for ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘thank you,’ and ‘enough’” (108). These linguistic efforts are not only practical but symbolic: they mark Sian’s participation in daily life and her attempt to meet the host culture halfway. Language, in this sense, becomes a tool of empowerment rather than a barrier.

When Sian first arrives in India, Doshi narrates her reaction to the family’s rituals: “She watched as Babo’s mother lit incense before the gods... unsure whether to join in or stand respectfully” (97).

This moment reflects the internal tension migrants often experience when confronted with unfamiliar religious customs; they do not reject them, but are uncertain how to engage without feeling inauthentic. Sian never converts, but she participates in the shared cultural rhythm of religious life in India, an indicator of integration rather than loss of self. Sian’s experience with Indian food becomes a subtle, meaningful indicator of her gradual adaptation and reduction of acculturative stress. Doshi captures this transition in a telling moment:

Part of Sian’s emancipation from the tyranny of Sylvan Lodge had been to make forays into non-vegetarian Indian cuisine. Being a master chappathi-maker wasn’t enough. She wanted to know how to make kebabs and spicy meat curries, because Babo and she had just made a new circle of friends, and if they were ever going to do any entertaining at home, they were going to have to come up with something a little more exciting than daal and rice (87).

This step signifies more than culinary experimentation. It marks Sian’s willingness to immerse herself in the everyday rhythms of her new social world, a critical stage in reducing cultural stress. At first, the unfamiliarity of Indian spices and flavors could have been a source of acculturative stress, highlighting her sense of difference and displacement. However, by actively participating, asking questions, observing, and sharing in the preparation of food, Sian transformed this potential site of alienation into a bridge of intimacy and cultural connection. Women, particularly migrant wives, often experience intensified acculturative pressure as they become cultural mediators within families (Espin 1999, 85). However, Sian begins to redefine her role on her own terms. As she takes part in family meals, caregiving, and child-rearing, she gradually transforms from outsider to an accepted participant. Doshi notes, “She no longer waited for instruction. She knew what needed doing, and it pleased her to do it” (123). Such internalization of familial rhythms is indicative of Berry’s integration strategy, where individuals retain elements of their heritage while embracing aspects of the host culture (Berry 2006b, 352).

Conclusion

In *The Pleasure Seekers*, Sian embodies the strategy of integration as theorized by John Berry. Despite cultural differences, she actively participates in Indian cultural practices while maintaining her Welsh identity. Her decision to live in India, marry into an

Indian family, and raise bicultural children reflects a balanced approach that aligns with Berry's view of integration: preserving one's cultural heritage while engaging with the host society. Sian learns the local language, adapts to familial norms, and forms emotional bonds with her Indian in-laws without completely abandoning her background. This dual engagement offers her a sense of psychological stability and social belonging. Sian reduces her acculturative stress by embracing a strategy of integration, which, according to John Berry, is the most adaptive and psychologically beneficial form of acculturation. She actively learns about Indian customs and forms genuine emotional bonds with her husband's family, allowing her to feel accepted and grounded within the host culture. At the same time, she does not relinquish her own cultural identity, maintaining aspects of her Welsh background, including language and personal values. This balance between preservation and participation fosters a sense of stability, helping her cope with the cultural challenges of migration. Furthermore, the support of a bicultural family environment also plays a key role in easing her stress and building resilience.

She does not strongly resist assimilation; instead, she adopts a strategy of integration, which, according to John Berry, involves participating in the host culture while maintaining one's original identity. Sian is open to Indian customs and forms emotional bonds with her husband's family, showing a willingness to adapt. However, she does resist full assimilation, as she retains her Welsh identity, values, and linguistic connection. Her resistance lies in refusing to erase her heritage to conform, thus preserving her individuality within a bicultural framework. Her daughters, too, reflect this balance, indicating that the family collectively navigates a hybridized identity rather than total assimilation. Sian experiences moderate acculturative stress, which is notably reduced through meaningful interaction with the host culture. Sian's Welsh identity initially contrasts with the Indian cultural norms of her husband's family, her willingness to engage with their customs and values eases this cultural tension. According to Berry, interaction that allows for mutual respect and cultural exchange lowers acculturative stress. Sian's experience confirms this, as her openness facilitates emotional bonds and cultural negotiation rather than alienation. Her daughters, growing up in bicultural environments, also benefit from this interaction, forming a hybridized identity that minimizes psychological conflict.

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