Dear Literary Agent,

I am respectfully submitting Padma Sherni's Dil Pickle Dilemma, "Dil means: with heart", for your consideration.

Padma Sherni's Dil Pickle Dilemma is a work of multicultural coming of age fiction, told with a memoirist's candor and written for young adult readers and the college age women's fiction audience that reads right alongside them. Complete at approximately 28,000 words, this Indian American fiction work and Rom Com belongs in the company of Sopan Deb's Missed Translations and Sanjena Sathian's Gold Diggers.

The main themes in *Padma Sherni's Dil Pickle Dilemma* center on cultural identity, humor-infused self-reflection, and the emotional journey of growing up "with heart."** Dil is the Indian Bengali word for "heart, courage, valor", and that sentiment is the construct that describes the literary approach of the whole book.

The writing transforms one steady question:  how do you stay whole when family, culture, work, and love each pull you in a different direction?
The story is about how the main character attempts to reach an accepted cultural identity when two or more competing cultural contexts intergenerationally
are influencing character. Thus, the title of the book is revealed, the character is facing a dilemma of culture, and of personal relationships accordingly, "with heart" or "dil".

The book follows Padma Sherni from childhood into her college years and beyond, across the distance between two countries and two versions of herself. She grows up moving between the suburbs of Massachusetts and her family's homes in West Bengal, and her sense of cultural identity gets decided in small, funny, telling things: which language a lesson is taught in, whose kitchen the food comes from, whether the bangles on her wrist are glass or gold. Her local and global travels become a running education in belonging, where culture shock and cross cultural misunderstanding turn into some of the best comedy in the book.

Resolving conflicts with the dynamics of family and friendships and sometimes dating, is the challenge at the center of all of it, warm and chaotic by turns, thick with intergenerational expectation and well meant advisory commentary. A subsequent story is included in the book as backstory about the youthful life of Padma who sets out to recover a missing birthday heirloom, and the search becomes her first real reckoning with where she comes from.

Later, her dating life supplies the mishaps, awkward and sweet and gloriously ill fated, including one family matchmaking scene undone by an overheated pressure cooker.
Underneath the comedy, she is growing up into her own way of being, and working past insecurity and cultural pressure toward a self she can finally accept and share with others. What holds these juxtaposed settings and interpersonal conflicts together is voice, thoughtful and humorous, inviting readers to reflect alongside of the author. Padma is funny in the way that only people who have had to translate themselves for a living can be, and the humor never

hides the real subject beneath it, which is the daily work of accepting yourself when the world keeps asking you to choose a single label.

Early readers have responded to exactly that. They describe the book as warm, witty, and widely relatable, personal enough to read like a confidence and open enough to invite readers to reflect on their own identity, whatever it happens to be. What stays with them is its honesty about family, culture, and dating, and the sense of self acceptance it leaves behind.

Readers have placed its natural audience from older children through college students and parents, which is the crossover reach the young adult and women's fiction markets prize.

The book addresses several important themes:

- **Cultural Identity** by Navigating Indian American life and cultural shock which grounds the emotional core of the story.
- **Humorous Reflection** through anecdotes told with wit and candor which makes the narrative lively and relatable
- **Family Dynamics** through a heartfelt look at family expectations and love which adds emotional depth
- **Romantic Mishaps** through dating adventures and dilemmas which drives character growth
- **Self Acceptance** through embracing identity and adulthood which is a central coming of age message, and
- **Multicultural adventures** through local and global travels which expands the story's world and perspective.

The author holds a Ph.D. in urban affairs and public policy, and teaches and researches social science, human development and family studies, and developmental psychology topics. Her subject matter interests also include child development, family health, education access, gender equity, counseling and coaching topics about health literacy, and multicultural life through the arts. She identifies as Indian American, and was born and raised in the United States with travelling whenever often to India and other places. She enjoys music, arts, cuisine, dance, education, travels, spending time with family and friendship opportunities. Her cultural perspectives and travels entrench the book naturally for a lively discussion in any classroom and or library especially about child development, young adulthood and caregiving in multicultural contexts.

The book has drawn a warm early response from volunteer readers with no marketing behind it yet, and we are now seeking a publishing partner to carry the book, and the series it can anchor, to the wider readership it deserves. The complete manuscript is ready and will reach you the moment you request it. The work speaks to both young adult and multicultural readers, and we would be glad to answer questions or talk through the wider series in the meantime including a cook book.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely, Pialee Roy, Ph.D.

**First 10 Pages of Narrative**

Padma Sherni's Dil Pickle Dilemma, "Dil Means: with heart"

In 1980, during a purposeful visit to mystical India to spend time with my grandparents and extended family, I was a happy, content, and adventurous toddler from America, learning to talk, walk, and dance. I would thoughtfully traverse across the well planned neighborhood, on elevated tippy toes. Exploring onwards from my bustling busy and academic grandparents' house to discover the whereabouts of other jovial yet professional, boarding school educated, or Tagore inspired, extended family and friends, the bicycle rickshaw and vendor-bordered suburban pathways kept me thoroughly entertained. I plodded along, carefully, on the paved path with occasional potholes. As I sauntered over to neighbors' homes, I avoided occasional puddles of muddy water, with my sandals, pretending that they were actually imaginary ballet slippers, like the real ones I had practiced dance with, back home on glossy hardwood floors in a mirror-aligned classroom. My typical days pursuing education and employment back in USA included preschool study with a lot of colorful, glued, construction paper for arts and crafts, frilly and career-oriented dolls, wooden blocks that were blue, red, yellow, and green, shape sorters, puzzles, and large easels to paint primary and sometimes secondary colors on. My emerging literacy curriculum included practicing recognition of letters, numbers, colors, shapes, and story time songs!

My mother had immigrated to USA from India after both completing her BSc. college degree alongside her art hobbies, and marrying my father, already a Ph.D. educated individual searching for career establishment in America. At home, my mother helped me to learn those early education lessons in "Bengali" along with folk songs. I had the opportunity to go from the South Shore suburbs to the Boston area cities to learn North Indian Hindustani Classical Music Lessons as well, in a third language, "Hindi". My teachers included those who were either Gujarati or Bengali. They were serious, talented gurus who shared some of their teaching, sometimes humorously, the guidance usually following a subtle gauging of my level of interest and commitment to the potential offer of lessons. I was lucky to have had their proximity to learn the lovely melodies. Sometimes I struggled with translations of these languages, however, until someone would explain during Bollywood movie viewing get togethers, what was being said according to the plot lines. In preschool, like at home, we even had a public health curriculum of learning how to brush our teeth properly with bubble gum flavored toothpaste. These teeth models later were juxtaposed by my grandfather's dentures left often on the side of the sink, anywhere in India, or wherever he travelled to on scientific meetings. The item was carefully placed, avoiding the tik tikki or wall crawling lizards' attention due to their wall climbing mishaps

resulting often in plopping onto unsuspecting seated guests. This issue was yet another curiously observed phenomenon for a child visiting India from America. Typically, I attended

preschool and other grade levels of American education in regular western style outfits like blue jeans with t-shirts, practical dresses or sometimes frilly ones as well. However, my mother would also often let me wear Indian garb like Rajasthani style ghagra choli skirts and dressy tops or a silk sari for special occasions like school functions and parade events or banquets. My favorite part of this dress up was that I could wear colorful metal and plastic costume jewelry bangles to complement the silk or cotton outfits. Sometimes, the ornaments were real 32 karat gold churis or bracelets to replace the fragile glass bracelets popular during that decade. During the preparatory protocols of travel, my meticulous father would fastidiously weigh the overly stuffed suitcases comprised of neatly and compactly packed gifts, like makeup, perfume, and house décor, for our family and friends abroad, only to discover similar items and already imported ones at our destination land available at almost half price.

Still tagged and ticketed from prior travel, the strong luggage pieces would be squashed to closure with my sitting on them, only to be weighed multiple more times, amidst our anxiety from contemplation of whether or not risking extra fees or total decline of the slightly overly weighted contraption was worth it. Voyaging to India, from USA, with stopovers, was always a welcome excursion for me, especially finding the airport hotel television programs featuring western sitcoms from the decade prior, spoken unexpectedly in the local European language. Once we arrived at my grandparents' place, my family members would eagerly share stories with me about my parents' youth. My energetic mother, for example, would climb the local payara fruit trees according to their retelling of stories. During this trip, however, she was a practical no-nonsense 24-year-old, and as part of her motherly duty had thoughtfully brought along for me relevant outfits given the intermittently sunny days or monsoon weather rains, and humid climate. She also brought many refills of the paper packet of cream-colored instant milk powder for my travels. She would mix the packeted contents in a small glass with a swirling teaspoon, rummaged for, among other non-set utensils, with carefully boiled hot water, then also filtered additionally, before consuming. These were the days much earlier than the subsequent trend of overly purchased plastic bottled spring water by overseas immigrant families visiting their desh or land.

My mother had thoughtfully packed for me a lot of those paper packets of instant milk because although there were a lot of cows and goats around, to stop traffic better than the local authorities, for some reason, no one drank as much milk as I did! The milk they had smelled funny to them at first, therefore they would mix chocolate flavored protein powders to add improvement. Orange and clear carbonated drinks were also a very delicious go-to that I had been fascinated to discover! In addition, the sweet coconut water, or daab-er jol, from a spherical green and rotund fruit, was sipped with my own straw, when we visited beaches and other places! We were empowered with healthful energy from home cooked foods and good examples from our desi family's all morning and sometimes all-afternoon kitchen cooking, directed by my shuthi cotton sari-adorned grandmother on one floor and my aunts from another floor, in the typically three tiered buildings with flat rooftops. While we waited, having eventually completed our homework, my cousins and I had muri, or crispy rice, shingara or samosas, absorbing Bollywood movies that we had rented, this time from the local store in India. Sometimes we would have kumro or butternut squash in a flat fried format and the fruit's yellow

orange flowers can even be dipped into a flour-based batter mixture and fried with a little bit of vegetable oil, for a crunchy savory snack.

The slate blue painted wooden and netted cabinets by the kitchen were also locked daily so that no one, including me, nor the voluntary housemaids would take extra tiffin boxes or other items from their contents. Inside the cabinets were typically where oversized clear plastic jars with manilla colored lids were stored, containing delicious savory or sweet circular crackers or rectangular, chocolate and bourbon filled biscuits. These treats would only remind me that there were mini marts and pan walla and poochka stands, with more plastic jars filled with toffees and chewing gum, and, of course, additionally, bars of chocolate. At home, candy hearts and chocolate chip cookies were preserved in ceramic containers, that my mom had painted and glazed, during participation in an American art class. She had graduated from Tagore's school and maintained her upbringing and a few art endeavors for many years. These practical art pieces were set in proximity to where the contents were served with tea in the adjacent room: the family room with wall décor from batik-on silk tie-dye designed expressions! Learning about heritage and cultural expressions was part of intergenerational upbringing. Eventually, when I had a younger sibling to accompany me on these trips, he and my cousins would surreptitiously take time away from hours of homework assigned to each of us, and curtailed meetings with mastermoshais or tutors, to stroll over to the vendor

stands to enjoy spherical potato chip like poochka treats dipped in curried chickpeas and tamarind sauce. They approached the poochka wala, only to discover, my mother and aunts already at the stands, with the same intent. They each had stronger stomachs than me, at the time, while I prepared, at my grandparents' home, with the other family members, the associated antidotes of those excursions! Soon enough we would be admonished to complete our homework by my grandfather, chasing us or the local monkeys that would try to steal papayas from the yard or other garden vegetables. Once we got serious, the additional guidance from a compact study room was where other professionals and studious Bengali and English literature prolific professors, students, visitors, and friends had received a warm hearted or long list of errands or revisions to complete depending on the respectful client's sincerity or motivation levels. As I participated in various affinity groups, for arts, education, dance, sports, music, etc. I learned to adjust to my emerging multicultural identity. I was enmeshed among many talented surrogate desi families in USA, at first learning to network by word of mouth, rather than today's typical exchange of cell phones and email addresses. The unexpected cultural opportunity of being an Indian American, Bengali and Hindu child, in USA,

eventually lead to celebrating most other faith based American holidays also. What an opportunity to resolve dilemmas of intergenerational and diverse experiences in growing identity and cultural adjustment resolutions! As I sorted through my choices in affiliation and growing identity, life's milestones were achieved at times with many advisors unexpectedly. Sometimes this was a welcome intervention, and other times spoiled plot lines for romance. When finally focused on homework, at the least expected moment, I would find the folder of would be suitor profiles printed out for me to review from the online dating ads (formerly newspaper ads) that my parents had perused on my behalf, tucked into my pile of paperwork. The dilemma of what to

focus on more, my courageous aspiration to earn a Ph.D. and prove my professional status next to much more academically adorned prior generations, typically male, and sometimes female, or give in to contemplating work life balance early to keep up with the challenges of friendships, personal relationships and parenthood prospects in womanhood. What characteristics were most valued in a two income demanding economy? The dating profiles now listed both males and females to have career prowess for some and to be good homemakers simultaneously. With a typically risk averse personality, the only chance I took at the wrong time was to forego settling down at 34

years of age in exchange for having a better sense of how I wanted to relate to the concept of person in environment. As I sorted through the consequences of this dil pickle dilemma, and gauging other people's simultaneous success or failures accordingly, we had events to celebrate nonetheless. My annual last quarter of the year holiday participation included Thanksgiving turkey other than the one vegetable lasagna incident that was somewhat disappointing, saved only by baked goods on the side. However, we always expressed gratitude for what we had, especially visits and phone calls, at that time of the year, from friends and family. The thoughtfulness of giving gifts from Santa's workshop after saving birthday money from earlier in the year was a typical event also. We practiced faith-based prayers for almost everything, especially if one had a brother, plus a festival of lights, Diwali (Deepawali) with candle lighting. These festivities sometimes coincided with amateur theatre performances to celebrate cultural heritage, juxtaposed by costume party dress ups for other holidays, like Halloween, and placing origami birds on an assemble-it-yourself Christmas Tree. We celebrated life, and birthdays, and many special occasions, without intending to disrespect anyone, however sometimes the eclectic lifestyle was due to conflicting messages about how much to accept or not of diversity and inclusivity efforts. I possibly considered that I might have a Shaanthi or peace clause to cope with all these things,

especially parental opinions, and community supports, by grace of grandparents' interventions and other cosmopolitan advice. Speaking of festivities, we also celebrated childhood rice feeding ceremonies with sweet rice pudding, referred to as paiyesh, and again for birthdays. Additionally, we often supported celebrations of toddler propensities, with a plate presented with various symbolic items, like gold bangles, pens, books, and sporty plush toys to predict the likelihood of associated success, given those choices! I was told I had reached for both a gold bangle and pen, and therefore, I am trying to fulfill this expectation every so often! There is also, of course, astrology predictions for life guidance, and I compared both those readings to whatever I could find in American magazine and newspaper columns, when I was more unsure of myself and eventually just got through it all with a mantra, some music or art, here or there, and of course learning how to grow and relate as a result of my experiences. The parents often held onto their traditions with strong self respect and living life at various paces of assimilation and acculturation to new customs. The families had immigrated during daunting trips from India to the east coast of the USA. They returned for visits, like us, to their desh or "the land" of the "home country". These trips would happen occasionally, as my grandparents and their families had requested, to retain both our

Indian heritage and upbringing. We were among those who immigrated in the 1960s to 1970s cohort of many of a new wave of Asian families who had moved to the land of opportunity for work and education. Unlike many of these wonderful peers, however, I was born in America! The cultural contrast took time to navigate. Upon arriving in the suburbs of Calcutta, West Bengal, India, with my then teddy bear comrade, and a newly emerging vocabulary of both English and Bengali, we traversed over to other local cities, to mandirs or temples, and friends' and families' homes, always with a gift or packet of offering something, in exchange for the visit. Sometimes, we traveled by local bicycle rickshaw to the mishtee dhokan or sweet shop to buy shondesh made from sugar, molasses and ricotta cheese, thoroughly cooked, hand crafted, and cooled out on a tray. The shops often might even have savory potato-filled shingara, better known as samosas. We would then gift these items placed carefully into paper boxes, coated in wax paper, wrapped up with twine, string, or elastics. We would then navigate overcrowded trains with rusty metal horizontal bars on the windows, trying not to drop our overfilled arms of other items, vying to get space for both ourselves among many other passengers. Our overly packed suitcases with us, which no one else was often allowed to carry, even after bartering with us, in local business fashion. There was no assigned seating at that time

on the local route, for two hours without air conditioning, from the suburbs to the city, on hard wooden seats fastened with old nuts and bolts. However, the hot tea, snacks, and toy vendors kept us entertained. Garam chai poured from an extra-large metal tea kettle complemented by muri and badaam, the spicy crispy rice mixture with roasted peanuts served in a self-made half-cubed and half cylindrical newspaper packet and alongside sweet orange-like clementines. At other times, the personal driver led cars or taxis, or old style sedans called "ambassador" cars would be a nice complement to train travel so as not to bother my teddy bear or me during these important trips to enjoy life and informally learn about the culture, traditions, and my family. Content from my travels, visiting aunts, uncles, and cousins who were all assigned to play ludo and carom billiards with me, we would also spend time singing folk songs with harmoniums, tablas, and other musical instruments! Mid-morning, we enjoyed delicious luchi or spherical fried dough, yellow and white potato sprinkled with spices like turmeric, salt, sugar, and black cumin, also referred to as shadha thorkari with green coriander garnish. Plus, our plates would include yellow omelets spiced with green chili peppers, salt, and diced tomatoes

also. Eventually, we would return "home" to my grandparents' house and for dinner, be served cooked rice or bhaath, flat bread roti, lentils or daal, and veggie mixed thorkari. Additionally, maach bhajha, aloo bhajha and baegoon bhajha also referred to as fish fries, potato fries and eggplant fries, were on the menu after we shopped in open farmers' markets or purchased the items from the home visiting street vendors to our neighborhood. Chicken curry made with garam masala and cardimom in a thick or watery jhol or other meats were sometimes presented also. This was a lovely menu thoughtfully prepared with support each day from voluntarily employed housemaids who visited from a neighboring village. They might help with cooking, cleaning, or childcare along with specific daily instructions. At wedding events, there would be both a juxtaposition of regular plates, or snacks and foods on banana leaves, with a teaspoon of salt, a lemon or lime piece, green chilli on the side, and another tablespoon of mashed pickle

with a mango flavor yet rather spicy or tangy also referred to as “aachaar”. Usually raita or a cucumber yogurt and tomato chutney were offered to cool these efforts as well. In order to get a second helping of the main course, the seated individuals would strategically, politely and humorously call the servers over to their neighbor to kindly please offer them a spoonful of the menu item like veggie or meat biriyani, or mixed rice, and yes, you might as well offer a spoonful to the 15 Pialee Roy, Ph.D. calling individual while they happened to be there anyways! Ha ha. Thank you!