Chapter 3
Autobiographical Elements in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee

Literary work chiefly reflects its author’s life and times or the character’s life and times in the work. Each writer’s work reflects his/her own culture, social system, tradition and political situation of that time. Like other creative writers, Bharati Mukherjee’s works reflect particular experiences of her life. Her writings either fictional or nonfictional are highly autobiographical in nature. Bharati Mukherjee’s life experiences and incidents can be easily traced by analysing her works minutely. Her life is marked in these following years: 1940; her birth in Calcutta, 1961; she got admission in Iowa University in Creative writing program, 1963; her migration to Canada with her Canadian husband Clark Blaise and two sons, 1972; she became naturalized citizen of Canada, 1980; her final decision to make U.S.A. her home after facing racial discrimination in Canada and her final settlement at University of California Berkeley. Her works and life experiences coincide in her works. Her novels are reflection of her life, first as exile from her homeland West Bengal, then her experiences as expatriate in Canada and her final settlement in North America as immigrant. Her life has undergone many transformations and each transformation requires a total rebirth. Bharati Mukherjee wrote in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* about her life transformation:

My life, I now realize, falls into three disproportionate parts. Till the age of eight I lived in the typical joint family, indistinguishable from my twenty cousins, indistinguishable, in fact, from an eternity of Bengali Brahmin girls. From eight till twenty-one we lived as a single family, enjoying for a time wealth and confidence. And since twenty-one I have lived in the west. Each phase required a repudiation of all previous avatars; an almost total rebirth. (Mukherjee, *Days* 179)

Like eponymous character of her famous novel *Jasmine*, Bharati Mukherjee has altered several citizenship and culture during her life. Her novels and collection of short stories are more or less autobiographical. Her experiences as expatriate in Canada and immigrant in North America are
recurring themes in her works. Her biography and her works have a close connection. Her biography is not mirrored directly but imaginatively and artistically in her writings. She wrote in *Days and Nights in Calcutta* about her writing:

> During my stay in India, the year I began to see how typical my life had actually been, and given the limited options of a woman from my class and from my city, how predictably I had acted in each crisis. And I see how, even in the West, I have acted predictably. My writing is a satellite of my marriage and profession. (Mukherjee, *Days* 180)

Her first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* largely reflects her personal experiences as a woman caught between two different cultures of East and West. The protagonist of the novel Tara Cartwright Banerjee, a young upper middle class Bengali Brahmin like the writer, returns to Calcutta after spending seven years in United States with her American husband David Cartwright, to visit her family and discovers the country has changed completely within the seven years. Her childhood memories, genteel lifestyle of Brahmin family are seized by the current condition of poverty, overpopulation, political unrest and riots. *The Tiger’s Daughter* reflects the two opposite world which cannot merge together, either at the cultural levels or individual level. This novel explores the expatriate sensibility which stance Bharati Mukherjee herself faced during her stay at Canada.

Bharati Mukherjee and Tara Banerjee share a common background. Bharati Mukherjee was born in upper middle class Brahmin family and lived a privileged life, as daughter of Sudhir Mukherjee, an owner of pharmaceutical company. Like Bharati Mukherjee, Tara Banerjee was also born in upper middle class Bengali family and lived a privileged life as daughter of the Bengal Tiger, an owner of Banerjee & Thomas [tobacco] co., Ltd. Sudhir Mukherjee had dominant influence on early years of Bharati Mukherjee’s life. He was a very energetic and authorative by nature. He became the model for the “Bengal Tiger” of her first novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter*. He received scholarship from Calcutta University for doctoral work at the University of London. He alone received doctoral degree, and possessed the traditional Bengali ambition to become a professional man. After 1947, his
pharmaceutical company was turning profit. He became very famous man in the business world of Calcutta. Clark Blaise wrote in the Days and Nights in Calcutta about Sudhir Mukherjee, “he wanted to build up his company, serve his country by eradicating T.B. and a win a Nobel prize, all at the same time” (Mukherjee, Days 27). Through the character of the Bengal Tiger, Bharati Mukherjee had actually written about her father Sudhir Mukhejee. The Bengal Tiger is a very powerful, just and fearless man. During the period of disorder in Calcutta, the Bengal Tiger was busy in expanding his tobacco company:

He was working out medical and disability insurances for his workers, night classes in the factory for those who could not write or read. Outside his house on Camac Street and his Barrackpore factory, men were responding with threats of heroism to the sullenness of Calcutta; but the Bengal Tiger remained jovial and impartial, absorbed in his duties, his business, and his charities. (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 12)

Sudhir Mukherjee had supported Bharati Mukherjee’s decision to be a writer. He sent her to the Writer’s workshop at the University of Iowa to do M.F.A. in creative writing. In an interview with Geoff Hancock Bharati Mukherjee said,“he was an extraordinary man… very much the benevolent patriarch “who wanted” the best for his daughters. And to him the “best” meant intellectually fulfilling lives” (Hancock 11). He had supported his three daughters for getting higher education in foreign. The Bengal Tiger sent his only child Tara to Vassar for higher study at the early age of fifteen. But here, the Bengal Tiger’s reason to send his daughter Tara to Vassar for higher study was different from Sudhir Mukherjee’s reason to send Bharati Mukherjee to Iowa University for higher study. The Bengal Tiger sensed that Calcutta was on the verge of revolution and the future generation had to face many challenges and changes in Calcutta so he took bold decision to send Tara to Vassar which had terrifying consequences. Bharati Mukherjee received Ph.D. in English and comparative literature from the University of Iowa. The title of her Ph.D dissertation is The Use of Indian Mythology in E. M. Forster’s A Passage to India and Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha. Tara Banerjee has been doing Ph.D. on Katherine Mansfield the Plight of Women and Racial Minorities.
The Mukherjee family returned to Calcutta in 1951 after spending three years in London and Germany. Bharati Mukherjee was admitted in Lorento Convent School. Lorento Convent School had been run by Irish nuns who regarded the “walled off” school compound in Calcutta as a corner (forever green and tropical) of England (Woman 29). Everyday Bharati Mukherjee and her sisters were chauffeured in a black Dodge to the school with two bodyguards who always accompanied them and at the times of riots. The Mukherjee family’s life was completely cut off from the middle class Calcutta life. In the school, nuns taught her to devalue Bengali culture and religion which created conflict and confusion in her life from childhood. “Unlearning Bengali traditions and learning to be English, performing in Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, and practicing English elocution lessons made Bharati fast become part of “a class that did not live in its native language” (Woman 24). Like Bharati Mukherjee, Tara also was admitted to Convent missionary school St Blaise’s for her schooling. Here nuns taught her to despise Bengali Culture and religion which created confusion in her life. Tara spent her life in luxurious house and was chauffeured to school which distanced and alienated her from middle class Bengali life. She had not seen real Calcutta which was full of garbage heaps, poverty, and beggars. Thus she lived a life of duality and conflict since her childhood. Bharati Mukherjee and Tara Banerjee lived parallel life from childhood which created split personality. According to Brinda Bose:

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

The Mukherjee family returned to Calcutta in 1951 from Germany. Till the middle of 1959, the Mukherjee family lived in the compound of the
pharmaceutical factory which Sudhir Mukherjee and his partner had set up in Cossipore on the outskirts of the city. The factory compound had a swimming pool, a lake, armed guards, and a retinue of servants. They were the golden years of the Mukherjee’s family. The spacious house filled with furniture and artefacts quite characteristics of post- independence era. There would be roll top desks, carved tea tables, Victorian love seats and ornate lamps. Adapting to colonial architecture, it had shuttered green windows and gargoyle headed storm water drains. The house had archetype of Victorian era, but Indian touch would be showed in the framed portraits of ancestors reverently mounted on the walls of drawing room or study room. The years spent within the walled compound distanced the Mukherjee family from the middle class Calcutta. As Bharati Mukherjee sees it, the family had now “refused to merge with the city, having decided to embark on the route that would eventually make them all leave it and settle in far off places” (Mukherjee, Days 185).

Bharati Mukherjee’s luxurious life is reflected in the novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* through the life spent by Tara in her father’s luxurious house. Tara lived in the luxurious house on Camac Street which was guarded by the darwans. It had high compound wall studded with spikes and shards of glass. The hall was furnished by Italian marble tables, and mahogany tables in the shapes of hearts, diamonds and spades. The framed photographs of earlier Banerjee’s were hung on the hall’s wall. One headless tiger skin which has been acquired by Tara’s maternal grandfather, hung on a poorly lit corner of the hall. “The living room was filled with imported furniture- heavy, dark, incongruous pieces whose foreignness had been slightly mitigated by brilliantly colored Indian upholstery” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 39). Tara was home in a class that lived by Victorian rules, changed decisively by the exuberance of the Hindu imagination.

Bharati Mukherjee met Clark Blaise, the Canadian novelist, professor and journalist when they were graduate students at the University of Iowa’s Writer’s workshop. In 1963, they married in civil court on their lunch hour without matching horoscope and any traditional rituals meant for Bengali brides. Bharati Mukherjee’s father had planned arranged marriage for her with a nuclear physicist in India. She went against her father’s will and informed her parents about her marriage by telegram. All three daughters of
Sudhir Mukherjee married against his wishes. Once he told Clark Blaise “A man’s dies, seeing his daughters throw their lives away on worthless chaps like the three of us. Added marrying wisely matters. I could have done better for them picking names from a hat” (Mukherjee, Days 53). According to his high position in the Bengali society, he is right. “His younger daughter Ranu was headstrong and married “beneath” his with Marathi boy. Bharati Mukherjee was romantic and docile and married a mleccha, and now she wears miniskirt” (Mukherjee, Days 54).

Like Bharati Mukherjee, Tara also married American writer David Cartwright against her father’s wish. First time Tara met David Cartwright incidentally at Greyhound bus station. She knocked down David in her anxiety to find a cab but at that time she did not know that she would marry him. She fell in love with David Cartwright in her second meeting with David in an elevator and completed her father’s business. The Bengal tiger also found a suitable boy named Amya Chakravorty, Ph.D. in Chemistry (Heidelberg), earning high salary from Govt. But before everything was decided, she eventually married David in the court without matching horoscope, and informed her parents about her marriage through telegram. The Bengal tiger gave more importance to Class, Caste and province in marriage.

Such cross cultural relationship between Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise has had its difficult moments. Bharati Mukherjee’s marriage with Canadian novelist Clark Blaise had majorly impacted on her academic career and writings. Bharati Mukherjee has described their marriage as “an intensely literary marriage” between two writer academics coming from different background (Carb 30). For Clark Blaise concept of arrange marriage is hardest thing to accept. In India people give more importance to caste, class, family and province. Clark Blaise wrote in Days and Nights in Calcutta about marriage:

In India, marriage, like death, is forever. The full vedic rite, once endured, could not possibly be repeated. The girl( always “the girl” and “the boy”) takes her whole identity from the two men in her life-her father and her husband- and marriage marks her transfer from one identity to other. She leaves the private
role of daughter and enters society, bearing all the gold that her father can give. (Mukherjee, Days 151)

Bharati Mukherjee’s mother used to lock doors, windows, safes, cupboard and closets. Her mother even stowed passports, heath certificate, important documents and photographs in a locked cupboard. Clark could not understand her mother’s attitude and considered it paranoia. Clark Blaise did not believe in premonitions and mental telepathy. For him it was irrational and intellectually dishonest. Clark Blaise wrote in Days and Nights in Calcutta, “Bharati was unknown to me because I had not been able to appreciate the texture of her first twenty one years” (Mukherjee, Days 138). Even he felt Bharati’s love for family as over dependency. In West people suffer from disconnectedness, and alienation from their family, while in India people suffer from oppression of kinship. Parents decide their son/daughter’s career and marriage partner and it is child’s duty to follow the parent’s decision in each matter. During her stay at Canada she faced racism and discrimination. She wrote about her position in Canada in Days and Nights in Calcutta, “In Canada I was both too visible and too invisible. I am brown; I cannot disappear in a rush hour Montreal crowd. The media had made me self-conscious about racism” (Mukherjee, Days 169). Clark Blaise works got easily recognised and published in Canada but her works went ignored in vast Canadian literary scenario. This created frustration and confusion in their life. Bharati Mukherjee quarrelled with Clark Blaise for forcing her to live the life of expatriate. On the other hand being Canadian, he did not understand her feelings and suffering. Bharati Mukherjee stopped writing and started working as political activist. She wrote in the Days and Nights in the Calcutta about her position as a writer in a literary world of Canada:

But if as a citizen I am painfully visible, I cannot make myself visible at all as a Canadian writer. The literary world in Canada is nascent, aggressively nationalistic, and self-engrossed. Reviewers claim that my material deals with Indians usually in India, and because my publisher is American, my work is of no interest to Canadian writers and readers. In Canada I am the wife of a well-known Canadian writer who “also writes”, though people often assume it is in Bengali. In order to be
recognised as an Indian born Canadian writer, I would have to convert myself into a token figure, write abusively about local racism and make brown power fashionable. (Mukherjee, Days 169-170)

Before 1973, India had been a place for Clark to send Bharati and children on summer vacation so that he could have plenty of time for writing. He had little interest in listening to her endless stories about her early years spent in India. But circumstances were so contrive that he took bold decision to visit India.

In the novel, Bharati Mukherjee’s marriage life is reflected through the relationship between Tara and David Cartwright. Being a cross cultural marriage, it creates some confusion, frustration, and misunderstanding in their marriage life. Tara’s marriage with American David Cartwright is an impulsive act on the part of Tara. Frustrated by being a rootless person in America, she tried to assimilate in the American culture by entering into the wedlock with American David. Tara did not have any knowledge about white people’s culture, society, and tradition. The white foreigners with whom she had talked in Calcutta had been mainly businessman and diplomats in the party. Tara could not explain and share her background which was very important part of her life with David. David was hostile to genealogies and background because he had very little experience of it and had just his divorced mother in Boston whom he called very rarely. David asked naïve questions about religion and tradition. David could not understand her parent’s love for food and their eating habit. “David had been amused by her parent’s chronicle of birthday menus in aerogrammes. How can they eat so much? It’s obscene! he had said” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 118). David usually skipped lunch and followed strict diet schedule. But for Bengali, eating is a class protection and it is very unfair to laugh at this habit. “David knew nothing of Calcutta, Camac street, the rows of gods, the power and goodness of the Bengal tiger.” and she could not explain “the security of a traditional Bengali marriage to David” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 151).

David wrote regularly but Tara could not visualize her face. After spending some days in luxurious mansion and surrounded by the relatives and friends, it was hard for her to visualize David. In India she was torn between
two cultures. She could not share her feelings with her friends and relatives because of their superficial interest in her American life. “In India she felt, she was not married to a person but to foreigner and this foreignness was a burden” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 78). David informed her that he bought two or three books on India. This innocent information enraged Tara. She felt that he had not understood her country through her so he had not understood her either. Tara felt David no longer loved her.

Tara could not communicate her feelings with David who always found some rational points and reason behind everything. “She felt there was no way she could describe endless conversation with Catelli-continental, or the strange old man in a blazer who tried to catch her eye in the café, or the hatred of aunt Jharna, or the bitterness of slogans scrawled on walls of stores and hotels” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 78). David wanted her to take stand against injustice, unemployment, hunger and bribery. She could not explain David that “the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 157). After reading Ved Mehta’s journals on India, “he told Tara he saw Calcutta as the collective future in which garbage, disease, and stagnation are man’s estate” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 238). Though the Bengal Tiger tried to protect her from the excess of the city, he could not protect her from evil design of P.K. Tuntunwala. She understood during her stay in Calcutta by choosing David as husband. She “had slipped outside and by her exile of seven years from her homeland her re-entry was barred” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 110). Her friends were racial purist who liked foreigners in movie magazines. But they did not approve of foreign marriage partners. Her marriage seemed imprudent to her friends and relatives. They thought that her long stay in other country and her marriage with foreigner had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature. Bharati Mukherjee’s relatives and friends did not consider her marriage imprudent but when she asked their opinion on marriage outside their states and caste, they were against their daughter or younger sister’s marriage outside their state and caste. At the ending of the novel like Bharati Mukherjee, Tara came out of the stance of exile and decided to embrace America as expatriate.

During the first eight years that were spent in Ballygunge in a flat crowded with relatives, Bharati Mukherjee had survived by becoming
compulsive reader and by inducing sick headaches. She had a memory of herself as a neurasthenic child given to reading in dark corners and to nursing sick headaches. She had a memory of her childhood

I loved my headaches. Later, with a Bengali typical love of adumbration, I added to that a love of vomiting, of slipping a long delicate finger over the rough-grained tongue and down the silky, fleshy walls of throat and gullet until I was rewarded by an arc of fluid which I watched splatter against the rusty grid of the old-fashioned bathroom drain. (Mukherjee, Days 222)

But this was the story which she cannot be shared with her husband Clark Blaise or relatives. Like Bharati Mukherjee, Tara also suffered from headaches and nightmares during her stay at Vassar. When Tara returned her home after seven years, she suffered from headache which was just fastening itself to her neck and eyeballs. Tara is caught between two different cultures which create confusion, tension and split personality. Here her problem of headache is more psychological than physical.

Bharati Mukherjee wrote her younger sister Ranu’s experience at Vassar in the novel through Tara’s experiences at Vassar during her stay in the hostel. Ranu got admission in Vassar on scholarship at the age of sixteen. She left for Vassar but she came back by Christmas too homesick to continue. At that time, Bharati Mukherjee stayed at Baroda and completed her M.A. from M.S. University. She got admission and scholarship for further study in Iowa University. In the fall of 1961, Bharati Mukherjee and Ranu left for Vassar, the two most protected women American colleges would have ever seen. But Ranu again came back home by Christmas because she suffered from homesickness and discrimination. Tara was sent at Vassar at the age of fifteen by her father. Tara longed for Camac Street, parents and friends where she had grown up. Tara could not share her life at Camac Street with pale, dry skinned girls. At first she wanted to share her genealogies and glorious past of her great grandfather with them but she found it created a bad impression on the mind of the girls. Tara felt discrimination and homesickness:

Little things pained her. If her roommate did not share her bottle of mango chutney she sensed discrimination. Three week in Poughkeepsie and I am undone, thought Tara. Three weeks
and I must defend my family, my country, my Johnny Mathis. She prayed to Kali for strength so she would not break down before these polite Americans. (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 14*)

The girls around her asked her about poverty, beggars, population explosion, and bustee (slum). During her first year stay in hostel, when all the girls around her prepare to go home at the end of May, she was seized by a vision of terror.

Bharati Mukherjee was brought up in a traditional Brahmin family. Her parents imparted religious knowledge and she has deep faith in God Vishnu and Kali. Her grandmother told her religious stories during her childhood. Bharati Mukherjee took idol of goddess Kali and Vishnu with her to Iowa. Tara also believed in goddess Kali. When she had suffered from nightmares and headaches, she prayed goddess Kali for strength. So here Bharati Mukherjee and Tara share common background.

In the novel, *The Tiger’s Daughter* Bharati Mukherjee wrote about her class, society, and culture. She had depicted upper middle class society of Calcutta where traditional values and morals had been shattered forever. The Bengali Brahmin considered as the tigers of Bengal in traditional class bound society but gradually the scenario was changed and Marwari played important role in politics and business. It was a social revolution in which old values, beliefs, customs, class difference were destroyed. In replay to Ameena Meer’s question whether *The Tiger’s Daughter*- the story of the young Indian girl coming back to Calcutta after having been married to an American was more autobiographical than others, the author explained:

When I wrote I certainly didn’t think of it as autobiographical. But my father felt he recognized himself in the portrait and there other people just as well. In The Tiger’s Daughter I was writing about my class, a certain period in Calcutta’s history about a class and a way of life that’s become extinct. Calcutta soon after changed; the government became a communist government. I felt my world was that kind of nineteenth century world that became outmoded in the twentieth century; a class aware of the enormous changes about to come and hoping those changes would not come. (Meer 26-7).
She wrote about upper middle class convent educated westernized society which was still clung to British Raj after independence. Bharati Mukherjee depicted decadent life of upper middle class. The society was falling apart because of various factors like poverty, overpopulation, political unrest and class conflicts. The opening page of the novel depicted the decline of the glories of Calcutta. The Catelli Continental, a luxurious hotel which was once “navel of the universe” (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 3*) now indicates extent of the city’s decline,

The entrance is small, almost shabby, the walls are patterned with mold and rust, the sidewalk along the hotel are painted with obscenities and political slogans, in the daytime the beggars roll out their torn mate or rearrange their portable ovens and cardboard boxes under the balcony of hotel (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 3*).

The society which apparently looked open and friendly was simultaneously rigid and hierarchical. The Bengalis rarely praised non-Bengali and they always spoke repulsively about the Marwaris who controlled the economy of their city. P.K. Tuntunwala was the Marwari businessman and politician who represented his class in the novel. He was a very powerful man and full of energy. After spending sometimes with him at annual charity carnival of the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce, Tara thought “he was a dangerous man. He could create whatever situation, whatever catastrophe he needed. It was no use criticizing him” (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 97*). Pronob seemed flabby compared to P.K. Tuntunwala (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 134*). Even Tara’s father popularly known as the Bengal tiger could not save her from rape by P.K. Tuntunwala. Tara became victim of P.K. Tuntunwala’s evil design at Nayapura. In another Calcutta Tara never went into the suite of a gentleman for medicine and a gentleman did not dare to make such improper suggestion to her. “But except for Camac Street, Calcutta had changed greatly; and even Camac Street had felt the first stirrings of death. With new dreams like Nayapur Tara’s Calcutta was disappearing” (Mukherjee, *Tiger’s 235*). First Tara thought to complain about P.K. Tuntunwala to Pronob and Sanjay but she realized that even a friendly smile, an accidental brush of the finger can ignite rumours so she did not speak of Mr P.K. Tuntunwala act to
anyone in Calcutta. Bharati Mukherjee first hesitated to write about episode of Tara’s rape in the novel, she thought people took it as this incident happened with her. But Clark Blaise advised her to write this episode in the novel because this incident indicated the change in the Calcutta. Joyonto Roy represented upper middle class of Calcutta which was falling apart. Joyonto Roy was the owner of foothills in Assam and estates in Tollygunge, who felt trapped in this city. He witnessed riots, poverty, and men club each other and he had been moved by their violence. At the Catelli Continental he observed Tara’s friends group which reminded him about his twenties. At the end of the novel he was caught in the mob. Bharati Mukherjee seemed to write about condition of business class of her community. Tara’s father the Bengal Tiger, Pronob and Joyonto Roy were from the same class who were in danger of being overthrown by left wing Deepak Ghose or right wing P.K.Tuntunwala.

Bharati Mukherjee during the early days of her visit to Calcutta was very eager to explore the social life of her friends and relatives. But after sometimes her friends and relatives behaviour unsettled her. Every day she met one or more old friends in clubs or in their luxurious houses. Her friends were absorbed in their life, and they never paid attention on social revolution or the social condition of poor in Calcutta. She looked upon her friends’ superficial life with irony. Like Bharati Mukherjee, at first Tara had looked forward to parties. But after sometimes her friends beliefs and omissions began to unsettle her. Her friends called her Americawali so now she was not one of them in the eyes of her friends. Her friends were social purist. They liked foreigners in movies and magazine. They loved Englishmen at the British council or in parties. But they did not approve foreign marriage partner. For Tara’s friends, her marriage with David Cartwright was imprudent. They talked about imported gadgets, stereos, transistors and blenders. They discussed about current events only to show their familiarity with Time magazine or Reader’s Digest. “In their superficial conversation the real Calcutta, the thick laughter of brutal men, open dustbins, warm and dark where carcasses were sometimes discarded did not exist” (Mukherjee, Tiger’s 52).

Bharati Mukherjee wrote about the political movement of Post Indepence India- the Naxalite movement. Tara’s visit to India coincided with
Naxalite unrest in Bengal. Tara’s grandfather Hari Lal Banerjee foresaw the ghost of change in Bengal. Large numbers of refugees from East Bengal and Tibet encroached on any unprotected place which increased poverty and disorder in Bengal. Pronob had very bitter experience of gheraoed. The rioters surrounded Pronob’s factory for eighteen hours. There was no food, no water for them in that place. When they tried to get water, these goondahs sent coke bottle filled with urine. The marchers were coming towards the Catelli Continental. Tara’s from the porch of the Catelli-Continental observed the procession. The crowds overturned the cars or burnt it. They were shouting slogan ‘blood shed’. Some marchers came out of procession and punched policeman. All passing cars were being stopped by either the marchers or the police. Police ordered the passengers to go to safe place so they abandoned their cars in the middle of the street. The marchers entered into the Catelli-Continental hotel. Sanjay’s fiat surrounded by the mob and rioters thrown soda bottles and bamboo sticks on fiat. Joyonto Roy was kicked, scratched and tossed by the mob. At that time Tara was still locked in a fiat thought whether she would ever get out of Calcutta or not.

Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise spent a year in India in 1973. During her one year stay in Calcutta and Mumbai, she came across the plight of women in traditional bound society. Wife was written in response to question asked her during her stay in Ramkrishna mission in Calcutta. She told in an interview with Geoff Hancock about origin of Wife. “Clark and I were having breakfast at a long dining-table when a Columbia Professor next to me asked, ‘What do you Bengali girls do between the ages of fifteen and twenty five?’ so I wrote a novel to explain to him what we did” (Hancock 22). The protagonist of the novel Dimple Dasgupta, a young Bengali girl, married an engineer Amit Basu and moved to New York City on immigration. Dimple felt trapped in Bengali culture even in New York and could not break away from the Bengali culture which suffocating her. Dimple torn between the need to play the role society expected from her and her need for self-expression. Actually her life was modelled on the life of Sita legend but she wanted to become self sufficient which created conflict and confusion in her life. When the novel was first published, it received a harsh response from the American feminists. Wife was a very controversial book. Bharati Mukherjee during her
stay in India realized the position of women in middle class and upper middle class through her encounter with her relatives and classmates in Lorento Convent School. She wrote about her novel in Days and Nights in Calcutta;

I was writing a second novel, Wife, at the time, about a young Bengali wife who was sensitive enough to feel the the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and break out. The anger that young wives around me were trying so hard to hide had became my anger. And that anger washed over the manuscript. I wrote what I hoped would be a wounding novel. (Mukherjee, Days 268)

Clark Blaise considered arrange marriage cold and calculating. The father chose partner for his child. He got information about caste, family and village which considered enough information for marriage and never paid any attention on psychoanalysis of the partner. Clark Blaise wrote about Bharati Mukherjee’s second novel Wife in Days and Nights in Calcutta; “Wife, about such a girl, a Ballygunge girl from Rash Behari Avenue much further down the social ladder than any women I’ve been describing, whose only available outlet, suicide is transformed in the madness of emigration to New York into murder” (Mukherjee, Days 141).

Bharati Mukherjee felt very close to Dimple but she was completely different from Dimple. She wrote about her culture, society and condition of women of all strata. She deliberately chose the name of the protagonist as Dimple. The meaning of her name according to Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries Online is “any slight surface depression”. From the beginning of the novel we can see unnatural behaviour pattern of Dimple. Dimple was twenty years old and lived in a narrow pink house on Rash Behari Avenue. Dimple wanted to live very comfortable and luxurious life so she thought to marry neurosurgeon and architect which gave her freedom of expression. “She thought of premarital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living. Years of waiting had already made her nervous, unnaturally prone to cogs, coughs and headaches” (Mukherjee, Wife 3). In Bengali culture beauty played important role for securing a good match for any girl than intelligence. Dimple thought that she was ugly and worried about sitar-shaped body and rudimentary breasts. She bought skin whiteners and isometric exerciser. Her mother advised her pre-
bath mustard oil massages, ground almond and honey packs and homeopathic pills for improvement of her physical features. She wrote a letter to Miss Problemwala for the solution but it never appeared in magazine. She almost became desperate and suicidal. In Days and Nights in Calcutta Clark Blaise wrote about marriage market of Calcutta:

A girl, who has been raised in a genteel house with the expectation of a genteel marriage, may find herself cheated for no better reason than a dark complexion, glasses, a flat chest, or an unquenchable curiosity about branches of knowledge outside the Lorento curriculum. She may end up- for she cannot refuse to marry- with a lout who will not tolerate the slightest deviation from expectancy or the most pathetic gesture toward self expression. (Mukherjee, Days 141)

Girl’s beauty, breeding and proficiency in English were important attributes for marriage. If she did not exhibit these qualities, she would not have been chosen by boy with high position in society. The irony of the society was boy’s parents wanted convent educated girl for marriage but they disregarded persistent ambition, intelligence, and self sufficiency in the girl. Mr Dasgupta was searching an engineer boy for Dimple. But after sometimes he felt “No one would marry an ugly girl like her; no one would make her happy or treat with respect” (Mukherjee, Wife 10). At last Mr Dasgupta found a suitable boy for Dimple. Amit Kumar Basu was consultant engineer and had already applied for immigration to Canada and U.S. Mr Dasgupta had matched the horoscope and made preliminary inquiries about dowry requirements. “He said he was prepared to give usual gold ornaments, saris, watch and fountain pen, some furniture, perhaps, but absolutely not a scooter or a refrigerator” (Mukherjee, Wife 14). Bharati Mukherjee as a child heard endless stories about wife beating and suicide for bringing inadequate dowry. She wrote in Days and Nights in Calcutta;

I had heard of women committing suicide by setting themselves on fire or trying themselves to train tracks or jumping into wells. That to the culture into which I was born, was the potential tragedy. To be a woman, I had learned early enough, to be powerless victim whose only escape was through self-inflicted wounds. (Mukherjee, Days 227-228).
Bharati Mukherjee lost her hope to become self-sufficient in Calcutta and chose a foreign country as her battleground for proving self-worth.

Mrs Basu did not like the name Dimple which she thought too frivolous and unbengali. Mrs Basu wanted to call her Nandini. The girl has to change her own identity after her marriage and she identified by the name and surname given by her husband’s family. Amit Basu’s sister felt that Dimple was little darker than photograph had suggested. Mr. Dasgupta flattered and pleaded, “she is so sweet and docile; I tell you she will never give a moment’s headache” (Mukherjee, *Wife* 14-15). Bharati Mukherjee heard this refrain again and again among Bengali women. She wrote about in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*; “I would hear, she is a lovely, docile girl, she’s never given us any trouble, or she is not at all independent, she’ll do whatever her husband tells her and this remarks would be offer as compliment” (Mukherjee, *Days* 231). After wedding day was fixed on early February, she spent two weeks on shopping every day. She felt that she was going into exile. She came to the Basu’s flat on Dr. Sarat Banerjee road after marriage. Dimple felt cheated in marriage and Amit did not feed her fantasy. Dimple thought all these problems were temporary and they would come to an end after her immigration. When she was in hospital before her marriage, she dreamed of becoming Sita.

In Dimple’s dreams, she became Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends, who had walked through fire at her husband’s request. Such pain, such loyalty, seemed reserved for married women. How such easier to suffer from burns, stones, growths; from diseases with precise, even dignified, names. (Mukherjee, *Wife* 6)

Dimple modelled her life on legend of Sita which created confusion and conflict in her life after her migration to U.S.A. Bharati Mukherjee wrote about how Sita’s legend imbibed in each girl from childhood from in *Days and Night in Calcutta*; “To the Hindu girl child Sita is an exemplary figure. The lesson is clear, uncomplicated: the wife’s role is one of self-abnegation” (Mukherjee, *Days* 232).

Dimple became pregnant after two months of marriage. By the end of the month, she started to vomit at all hours of the day and night. Every
woman must give birth to a son child for continuity of the family. If the woman failed to born son child, she was condemned by society and became an object of hatred in the family. Dimple was not happy with her pregnancy so she devised a way to get rid of her pregnancy:

She thought of ways to get rid of... whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes. At worst, she could arrange a slip in the bathroom or fall down the staircase or sit on a knitting needle, thought that would be too obvious to conceal. When she ran out of ideas, she thought bitterly that no one had consulted her before depositing it in her body. (Mukherjee, *Wife* 31)

Amit was very happy with Dimple’s pregnancy. Amit wanted only baby boy and he looked upon unborn son as communal property. The Basus became concerned about Dimple’s health. In the patriarchal society son was desirable and everyone wanted son as a child who would continued their family. Dimple thought of her pregnancy as unfinished business. “She did not want to carry any relics from her old life; given another chance she could be a more exciting person, take evening classes perhaps, become a librarian” (Mukherjee, *Wife* 42). Dimple was not happy with her life and she came out of mould of Sita and wanted to become self sufficient. Dimple decided to get rid of her pregnancy by skipping rope. Bharati Mukherjee described Dimple’s self abortion very poignantly in the following lines, “she had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she had poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed” (Mukherjee, *Wife* 42).

Dimple’s self abortion raised many questions regarding her womanhood. Many critics criticized Bharati Mukherjee for understanding of Indian culture. Rossane Klass criticized Bharati Mukherjee for not understanding Indian Culture. In a review of *Wife* she commented: “For an Indian wife, childlessness is a disaster, pregnancy the achievement that seals her status. To overturn such ingrained values would involve a major emotional upheaval; yet Dimple acts on the vaguest and most undefined impulses and think no more about it” (Klass 88).
Dimple freed herself from the role of a Hindu wife of just bearing and rearing child by her abortion. When she was in hospital, Amit gave her news of migration to U.S.A.

Amit and Dimple arrived at Kennedy airport, there Amit’s friend Jyoti Sen came to received the couple. The couple lived with Jyoti and Meena Sen in their apartment at Queens till Amit got the job. Dimple was very happy and full of life of hope about her new life in U.S.A. because she did not has to play the role of the traditional Indian wife in New York. The Sens’ apartment was all Indian inside. They had created their own little India inside apartment and never tried to come out of the ghetto. Dimple was a girl of limited intelligence so she was not really prepared for the life in New York.

The next evening both couple went to the party of Vinod Khanna in Manhattan. At the party Dimple met Ina Mullicks who wore pants and mascara. Vinod Khanna offered her a job. Amit did not give permission to Dimple for job. He said “one breadwinner in the family is quite enough. He added besides, Dimple can’t add two and two. She would ruin your business in a fortnight” (Mukherjee, Wife 61). Here Amit sounded very traditional and had very low opinion about his wife’s intelligence. This was the scenario of society where male members of the family never thought about self sufficiency of female members. Even Dimple could not give her opinion on anything. Amit always wanted her to follow the footsteps of legendary Sita and Savitri. In the party Ina asked Dimple for another drink, Amit bluntly replied Ina that she did not like alcoholic beverages and not even coke. Dimple felt that Amit wanted from her to uphold Bengali womanhood, marriage and male pride. After her arrival at New York her life was torn between two opposite world, she wanted to come out of the role reserved for a wife in her community. Even Dimple afraid of using modern technologies and machines. In Calcutta when her mother-in-low suffered from fever, she could not read the thermometer. She said “I can’t tell where the thread of mercury is; it’s too fine. I’m too stupid about mechanical things” (Mukherjee, Wife 25). In New York, she was frightened by self service elevator with their red emergency button, she could not use elevator alone and also wished there were a liftman in the elevator to press the right button for her. Linda Sandler considered it the reason of her traditional upbringing. “Dimple emigrates to
the electronic age with her traditional values almost intact, only partly modified by the pop culture of modern Calcutta. She is unable to make transition from Before to After and chooses violence as a “problem-solving” device…” (Sandler 75).

In the traditional society, it was prohibited for women to do the job and earn money. It was very shameful for the man. The woman always remained dependent on her father and after marriage on her husband. Amit did not give her money. They went to the Grand Union together every Saturday so she could not cheat from the weekly shopping either.

The other character of the novel Ina Mullick also represented the condition of women in the society. Ina was wife of a billionaire businessman Bijoy Mullick. Ina did her M.Sc. in Physics from Calcutta University and she wanted to be a physicist. She confessed that she was not happy in her life. She said:

I wanted to be a physicist. I wanted to use words like thermodynamics and superconductivity at parties. And one day when I was ready to start my doctorate, my father announced that I could throw away my books and start packing my bags because he’d found a perfect match for me in America with a suave rupee-millionaire. It wasn’t even Bijoy’s picture they showed me. (Mukherjee, Wife 139)

Ina wore pants and mascara and even smokes and drink alcoholic beverages. Although she was a wife of successful businessman, she was not happy in her life with her husband. She became more American than American and she had an affair with Milt Glasser. Ina Mullick was a very intelligent and an ambitious girl but she ended up being a wife of Bijoy Mullick.

Dimple accepted Ina as her role model in life who was not happy in her life and was always contemptuous of her arranged marriage. Dimple tried to discover her own identity which took her away from the wifely duties. Amit became obstacle in her path of self realization. Amit was absorbed in his job and never paid any attention towards changes going on inside Dimple. The couple moved to Greenwich in Marsha’s flat. Here in the apartment Dimple felt lonely and spent her time by watching T.V. or reading newspapers. Amit
rarely took her out of apartment, he thought that providing creature comforts was enough and never paid any attention on her emotional needs and complaints. Her life was confined in apartment and media became her only friend in this world. On their fifth evening in the Marsha’s apartment, she complained Amit about boredom and tiredness. Amit did not look up from the paper which irritated her. She lost her temper and said, “I feel sort of dead inside and all you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You’ve never listened to me. You hate me. Don’t deny it; I know you do. You hate me because I’m not fat and fair” (Mukherjee, Wife 110).

This outburst showed her frustration. She thought that she was not able to win her husband’s love and attention. During the day Dimple slept, she skipped lunch every day. If sometimes she felt hungry, she took out remaining rice and curry from the fridge and ate it. She wanted to dream about Amit but she failed to do it. She ranked Amit with the electronics appliances which showed for her Amit was only a provider of small material comforts. She didn’t tell him about her daytime sleeping and insomnia.

She had expected pain when she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any new beginning, and in the sweet structure of that new life had allotted pain a special place. But she had not expected her mind to be strained like this, beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia, exhaustion, endless indecisiveness. (Mukherjee, Wife 115)

This showed her mental condition and frustration. Asnani considered Dimple’s mental state as the dilemma of culture- Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be submissive and self-effacing. (Asnani 42)

At night she suffered from insomnia, she devised ten ways to commit suicide. Dimple cut Amit’s finger when he was sneaking up from behind. She thought it was someone evil or some burglar. One day Ina brought turtle necks bodysuits and three pairs of pants for Dimple. Ina told her that she might like this to wear when you came with me. Dimple whispered “there are something I can’t do. Wearing pants is one of them” (Mukherjee, Wife 154).
Amit thought about Dimple’s transformation that “Husbands should not permit their wives to wear pants. A healthy society and mutual respect are based on the clear distinction between the appearance and functions of the sexes” (Mukherjee, *Wife* 158).

Dimple wanted to break free from her inculcated virtues of Bengali wife. She attracted towards Ina’s lifestyle. Like Ina she wanted to go to night school and worked for Vinod Khanna. Her thinking created gulf in her relationship with Amit. Amit never paid any attention on her changing attitude and took it as “culture shock” instead of any psychological problems. He thought only American wives had those breakdowns. Although Amit loved Dimple, he was very busy in her work and he was very traditional to help Dimple in achieve selfhood. Bharati Mukherjee wrote about this process:

> When an Asian man comes to America, he comes for economic transformation, and he brings a wife who winds up being psychologically changed. This one of the tragedies you see being played out in all the New Jersey shopping malls these days. The Indian women walking around in the malls with nothing to do all day, while the men are out busy in making money. The men have a sense of accomplishment. They have no idea of staying here. The idea is saving money and going. But they don’t realize the women have been transformed” (Connell, Grearson and Grimes 44).

Dimple started going out with Ina and Milt and wore Marsha’s pants. She developed intimate relationship with Milt. She went out with Milt at pizzeria. Dimple liked Milt. Dimple and Milt made a love in her home. Her outing with Milt created more confusion in her life. She decided, she could explain the guilty adventure to Amit in two ways. The one way was she could pretend that she had been taken against her will to the pizzeria by Ina, by the time Ina left the pizzeria for some work. She devised second way to deal with guilt; “she would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her made her feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a T.V, series” (Mukherjee, *Wife* 195). Dimple lost touch with reality. She could not differentiate between what she saw on the T.V. and what she had imagined. She turned neurotic and the violence outside
turned inside. She devised many ways to murder Amit. The idea of killing her husband fascinated her. She became insomniac and ultimately killed Amit without thinking about its consequences. She stabbed Amit seven times until his head fall off. Bharati Mukherjee said about Dimple in an interview with Geoff Hancock:

If she had remained a housewife living with her extended family in India, she would probably not have asked herself questions such as, am I unhappy, do I deserve to be unhappy. And if by chance she had asked herself these questions, she might have settled her problems by committing suicide. So turning to violence outward rather than inward is part of her slow and misguided Americanization. (Hancock 24)

Bharati Mukherjee’s third novel *Jasmine* was published in 1989 after her moved in North America. The narrator- heroine of the novel Jasmine was born in feudal village called Hasnapur in Punjab and moved New York after her husband Prakash’s death. Jasmine like her creator Bharati Mukherjee changed several citizenships rapidly and finally assimilated in America. Bharati Mukherjee admitted in an interview:

Jasmine became the summary of my own emotions, without any of the events or characters being in any way autobiographical. My fiction comes out of my personal obsessions. I listen to the voices in my head, I find the appropriate metaphors for getting it across, for embodying an obsession. My Jasmine or Mukherjee have lived through hundreds of years within one generation in the sense of and then coming out a world with fixed destinies, fixed cultures taking on culture which, for us, is without rules. I’m making the rules up as I go along, because, in many ways, I and my characters are pioneers. (Meer 26)

Apparently Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine comes from very different background. Bharati Mukherjee lived a privileged life as a daughter of Sudhir Mukherjee, an owner of a pharmaceutical company. She spent her childhood in a luxurious mansion which her father built in a company compound. On the other hand Jasmine was born in small village named Hasnapur of the Punjab district. She was the fifth daughter, the seventh of nine children. In the traditional society daughter was curse. Jasmine spent her childhood in a mud
hut and she had to fight against her family and society for getting school education. Although Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine come from different background but Jasmine’s life experiences have their genesis in Bharati Mukherjee’s life.

Jasmine was first female candidate of Masterji whom he taught English Language. From childhood, she got information about life in America through Masterji. Once she saw a real American film in school. Jasmine wanted to become a doctor and set up her clinic in a big town. Her father considered it madness on the part of Jasmine. At the age of three Bharati Mukherjee decided to become writer. During her stay at Britain, she began to regard English as her chief weapon for bending her personality. Jasmine is born fighter, saviour and adaptor. Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine both believe in free will which gradually leads them to Americanization. Bharati Mukherjee once said in an interview: “Like Jasmine, I, feel there are people born to be Americans. By American I mean an intensity of spirit and a quality of desire. I feel American in a very fundamental way whether Americans see me that way or not” (Steinberg 36).

Jasmine wanted to continue her education beyond sixth grade but her father and grandmother opposed her education. Dida found a suitable bridegroom for Jasmine at the age of thirteen. Mataji fought with Pitaji to keep her in school. Jasmine remembered the conflicts between her parents; “And deeper into that night I heard the thwack of blows. But in the morning Mataji said, they’ve come around. Just make sure you ace your exams” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 52). Bharati Mukherjee’s mother was very ambitious for her three daughters’ education. She supervised her daughters’ English reading and spelling. Her mother had loved her enough to risk the wrath of elderly relatives and put her in bilingual school. “During her childhood Bharati Mukherjee heard her mother shout between sobs, just wait until the girls are a little older, I’m going to make sure they’re well educated so no one can make them suffer” (Mukherjee, Days 228).

Two incidents in the life of Bharati Mukherjee are reflected in Jasmine’s life. At the age of eleven she learned that according to her horoscope, she would marry a blue eyed foreigner and cross oceans to settle far from home. Bharati Mukherjee’s marriage with Clark Blaise and her
decision to settle in America fulfilled two key predictions of her horoscope. Like Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine’s future was foretold at the age of seven; “Lifetime ago, under a banyan tree in the village of Hasnapur an astrologer cupped his ears- his satellite dish to the star- and foretold my widowhood and exile” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 3). Jasmine opposed astrologer and shouted, “You’re crazy old man. You don’t know what my future holds” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 3). Jasmine is fighter, survivor and adaptor from childhood. In response, “the astrologer chucked hard on her head and she fell on a stick, made “a star shaped wound” on her forehead. (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 3) Jasmine rejects the notion of fate in traditional society and she converts the scar into a sage usually reserved for men. When Bharati Mukherjee was three years old, she slipped and hit her forehead on a metal door knocker. The mishap resulted in a faint scar because her parents did not have the cut sutured. “For a Bengali girl to have a physical imperfection is to be unmarriageable” (Steinberg 34). Jasmine got scar from astrologer while Bharati Mukherjee got scar on her forehead by an accident. Only difference between Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine’s scar is: Jasmine’s wound is the result of violence against a girl who disobeys the male dominated society whereas Bharati Mukherjee’s scar is the result of an accident.

Bharati Mukherjee rejected patriarchal authority and tradition of arranged marriage and married with Canadian Writer Clark Blaise in the court. Like Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine also married with Prakash Vijh in the court. When Jasmine was thirteen years old, Dida found widower bridegroom for Jasmine. But Jasmine and her Mataji opposed this marriage, Jasmine wanted to complete secondary school education. Prakash was a good student from Amritsar. Prakash had a special talent for fixing television, VCRs and computers. After two weeks of their courtship, Jasmine and Prakash got married, “theirs was no dowry, no guests, Registry office wedding in a town” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 75). Jyoti became Jasmine after her marriage with modern man Prakash. “He wanted to break down the Jyoti I’d been in Hasnapur and make me a new kind of city woman. To break off the past he gave me a new name Jasmine. He said, you are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You’ll quicken the whole world with your perfume” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 77).
Prakash secured an admission in the Florida International Institute of Technology in America. Jasmine had a little knowledge about America; she read only Shane and saw only one movie about America. Jasmine always remembered astrologer prophecy so she thought that she would start with new fates in other country. “If we could just get away from India, the all fates would be concealed. We’d start with new tales, new stars. We could say or be anything we wanted. We’d be on the other side of the earth, out of God’s sight” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 85).

Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine married the same way in civil court. Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine were raised in repressive traditional society; their marriage with the men who believed in equality in the relationship was the first step towards indepence in both lives. Prakash fell a prey to the Khalsa Lion and died. Jasmine went back to Hasnapur after her husband’s death. There Jasmine and her mother lived a life of untouchables in the widow’s dark hut. Jasmine heard the voice of her dead husband from every corner of the dark room. “There is no dying; there is only an ascending or a descending, a moving on to other planes. Don’t crawl back to Hasnapur and feudalism that Jyoti is dead” (Mukherjee, Jasmine 96). Jasmine’s life was stifled in the war of feudalism. She made a plan to visit the institute where Prakash got the admission and to burn her ‘sati’ on the campus of that institute. By her decision, all family members were aghast. This is Jasmine’s first step towards Americanization.

Bharati Mukherjee has a deep faith in Hindu god and she is particular devotee of the destroyer of evil the goddess Kali;

The God head as Kali is what I worship. Most Hindu Bengalis in Calcutta do. Most Hindu Bengali families have an altar to her in their homes. I do; in my bedroom. You can see for yourself that Kali isn’t one bit passive. She has strung herself a garland of severed heads, and she’s hefting Her blood-stained weapons to decapitate more evil men. Kali is what Jasmine was mythologizing herself into when she killed her rapist, Half-Face. (Chen, and Goudie 95).

Bharati Mukherjee has used the myth of the goddess Kali in this novel. On her first night in America, Jasmine was raped by Half-Face in the
Flamingo court motel in Florida. She was ready to kill herself with knife but suddenly she remembered about her incomplete mission. She cut her tongue and transformed herself into the goddess Kali. Her mouth filled with warm blood and she cut Half-Face’s neck. Her act of killing Half-Face was a kind of self-assertion. During Bharati Mukherjee’s stay in Baroda has started to believe in the god Ganpati. According to Hindu mythology the god Ganpati uproot every evil in everyone’s path. Jasmine kept sandalwood Ganpati’s idol in her purse to uproot every evil in her path.

Jasmine met Lillian Gordon, a kind Quaker lady who helped her and took her home. Lillian Gordon gave her new name Jazzy, and taught her to talk, walk and dress like an American. Lillian Gordon gave Jasmine her daughter’s high-school clothes- T-shirts, sweaters, cords and loafers. Jasmine shocked by her transformation; “Jazzy in a T-shirt, tight cords, and running shoes. I couldn’t tell with the Hasnapuri sidle I’d also abandoned my Hasnapuri modesty” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 133). Jasmine came to New York and there she lived in Queens with the professor Vadhera’s family, Prakash’s former teacher. The Vadheras created their own little India in apartment and never came out of ghetto. Professor’s wife Nirmala brought plain saris and salwar kameez for Jasmine so she could not embarrass the Professor’s parents in American T-shirts. Jasmine accustomed to American clothes and in American clothes, she was taken for student. “In this apartment of artificially maintain Indianness, I wanted to distance myself from everything Indian, everything Jyoti-like. To them I was a widow who should show proper modesty of appearance and attitude” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 145). After five months Jasmine left Vadhera’s house. Jasmine came to Manhattan to become the caregiver of Taylor and Wylie Hayese’s adopted daughter Du. Jasmine became an American in an apartment on Claremont Avenue. Taylor gave her new name Jase. She again started to wear T-shirt and cords and she looked like a student in American clothes. “Jase bought herself spangled heels and silk chartreuse pant” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 176). In the second year Taylor arranged a job of answering phone calls in the Mathematics department at Columbia University. Wylie left Taylor for an Economist Stuart Eschelman. Jasmine could not understand Wylie’s progressive attitude towards life which lead her to abandon Taylor and Duff for a married man.
Bharati Mukherjee moved to New York after facing racial discrimination in Canada. Bharati Mukherjee felt her move to America liberating and in her interview she said, “In the U.S. I wasn’t continuously forced to deal with my physical appearance. I could wear western clothes and blend in with people on New York city street” (Carb 29). By wearing western clothes in New York City Bharati Mukherjee and Jasmine both free them from stereotypes womanhood.

Jasmine left Taylor after sighting Prakash’s killer in Park for Iowa. In Iowa mother Ripplemeyer helped her in getting a job in her son Bud’s Bank as a teller girl. After six months she became live in companion of Bud Ripplemeyer and Bud gave her a new name Jane. Harlan Kroener shot Bud and leaving him crippled. Jasmine remained faithful towards Bud during her stay in Iowa. She played the role of caregiver to Bud and became pregnant without marriage with Bud. Bud many times proposed her for marriage but she was not ready for marriage. Jasmine always remembered the prophecy and thought herself responsible for Prakash’s death and Bud’s maiming. Jasmine got a letter from Taylor. Taylor was coming to Iowa with his daughter Duff to meet Jasmine. Jasmine was caught between the struggle of old world of dutifulness and the promise of America. Jasmine took decision to leave Bud and she was heading for California with Taylor without informing Bud. Jasmine completely became American by choosing Taylor instead of Bud for her future life.

Bharati Mukherjee believes immigrant undergoes series of reincarnations. Immigrant lives through several life and time in a single life. Bharati Mukherjee confides in her interview:

I have been murdered and reborn at least three times, the very correct young woman I was trained to be, and was very happy being, is very different from the politicized, shrill, civil right activist I was in Canada and from the urgent writer that I have become in the last few years in the United States. (Connell, Grearson, and Grimes 46)

Jasmine has also undergone through many transformation- Jyoti, Jasmine, Jase and Jane via divergent geographical locales like Punjab, Florida, New York, Iowa and California. Jasmine says “there are no harmless,
compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams” (Mukherjee, *Jasmine* 20).

The story of the novel Desirable Daughter revolves around the life of three sisters Padma, Parvati, and Tara have settled in New York, Bombay, California respectively. “Sisters three are we… as like as blossoms on a tree. But we are not” (Mukherjee, *Desirable* 21). Three sisters are like blossoms on a tree but each sister have taken distinct path of immigration to settle in country. Motilal Bhattacharjee, a trained engineer who turned his training into tea-business is father of Padma, Parvati and Tara. Their “Raj-style fortress of home” is located on Ballygunge Park road behind a wall topped with glass shards. Tara says about the society in which she is brought up:

To be Calcutta Bhadra lok, as we Bhattacharjee’s were, was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born, and from which we have made our separate exits (Mukherjee, *Desirable* 22).

Padma is the most beautiful among the three sisters. At the age of fifteen she wishes to work in movie. In fact Satyajit Ray himself offers a role in his films but her father does not permit Padma to work in movie. When the novels unfold Padma is living in New Jersey with her Punabi husband Harish Mehta. The second daughter Parvati meets Aurobindo in Boston and falls in love with Aurobindo. Aurobindo is a Bengali Brahmin from a good Tollygunge family. Parvati has jumped the marriage queue and getting married before her elder sister Padma’s marriage. Parvati lives in Bombay with her husband and her teenage sons, Dinesh and Bhupesh in a high rise building on the Marine Drive. “The family disapproved Auro before marriage but her marriage had proved to be more solid, her lifestyle more conspicuously luxurious than Padma and Tara’s” (Mukherjee, *Desirable* 55). Parvati lives a life of traditional and dependent Indian woman. The narrator of the novel Tara, the third daughter lives in San Francisco with her son Rabi and her live in lover Andy, a Hungarian refugee. She gives divorce to her husband Bishwapiya Chatterjee, the icon of Silicon Valley. One late October afternoon a young man named Christopher Dey, comes to her house in San
Francisco and claims to be the son of Tara’s sister Padma and Ron Dey out of wedlock. This creates tension and confusion in Tara’s smooth life. It creates question in her mind about her traditional family and also about her own identity in the novel which she tries to search during the novel.

Bharati Mukherjee writes about her own experiences in the novel. The characters of the novel Padma, Parvati and Tara are modelled on Mira, Bharati and Ranu respectively. The novel has a genesis from Bharati Mukherjee’s article entitled “Two Ways to Belong” published in New York Times on 22 September. In this article Bharati Mukherjee writes about how she and her sister Mira take distinct path of immigration in their adopted country.

Mira comes in Detroit to study child psychology. Now she is a renowned child psychologist for many years in Detroit. Bharati Mukherjee comes to the University of Iowa to study Creative Writing Programme after a year. Mira marries Bombay born graduate student and gets a green card after acquiring Labour Certification. Mira now lives in Detroit and works in South Field Michigan school system. Mira has chosen to remain an Indian citizen whereas Bharati Mukherjee becomes a U.S. citizen. Bharati Mukherjee marries an American of Canadian parentage Clark Blaise. Bharati Mukherjee gets citizenship by virtue of her husband’s place of origin. In America Bharati Mukherjee transforms herself completely by renouncing traditional, caste-observant, pure culture. Bharati Mukherjee mentions difference between her and her sister Mira’s chosen path in an interview:

Erasure of Indianness: I think that what my sister meant by that was not to accuse me so much as to say she felt sorry for me, because I no longer automatically wear- choose to wear- Indian saris. I find that Meera- we’re wonderful friends; it a very affectionate family and we call each other twice a week- that her accent has grown more and more Indian over the years because, I think, that gives her a kind of rootedness. She, who was one of the cool, stylish convent girls with short hair in Calcutta, now wears ling sleeves and her hair in a bun so she has that outward appearance of Indianness. (Desai, and, Barnstone 101).
Bharati Mukherjee wears jeans, T-shirts and skirts. She does not identify herself in terms of being a Mukherjee daughter from such and such family or such and such province. She believes that she does not need to wear Indian clothes to feel Indian. Like Mira, Padma has lived in the United States with many Indians in the neighbourhood since twenty five years. Padma is a multicultural performance artist for colleges, schools, and community centre. She stages Indian mythological evenings with readings, slide shows and musical recitals. She and her husband Harish Mehta socialize exclusively with Indians, and she wears Indian clothes and eats Indian food. She has created her own little India in New York and creates imaginary homeland in her mind even though India has changed lot since she left India.

Tara rarely talks with Padma through phone calls. Tara has chosen path of immigration instead of path of expatriation like Padma. Bishwapriya is a multimillionaire business tycoon of Silicon Valley but when Tara finds that her married life is not fulfilling, she takes divorced. Tara leaves a role of a wife in traditional society. Now she has lived with Rabi in Upper Haight, San Francisco and her live in lover Andy for six years. She brought up her son Rabi as a single mother and works in a pre-school as a volunteer. In California Tara wears American clothes and rarely socialize with Indians. Padma criticized Tara for her divorced and for acting too “American”. Tara believes in change but for Padma change is corruption. Tara says about Padma’s way of life:

Her clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and Indian friends, Indian clothes and food and a “charming” accent had seemed to me a cowardly way of coping with a new country. Change is corruption, she seemed to be saying. Take what America can give, but don’t let it tarnish you in any way.

(Mukherjee, Desirable 134)

Mira and Bharati Mukherjee, like Padma and Tara negotiate differently with the host culture. Mira lives as an expatriate in America rather than as an immigrant while Bharati Mukherjee has become the part of the community she has adopted.

Bharati Mukherjee also deals with the problems of second generation kids through character of Rabi. Rabi is son of Indian parents but his life is
shaped in the American culture. Rabi evaluates his parents’ culture and family tradition objectively. He feels that relationship between his mother Tara and her sister are based on hypocrisy and family pride. Bish cannot understand Rabi’s attitude towards life. Rabi is very artistic child. As a child he was copying anything from the books and papers without any understanding. But his special interest is in cartooning which serious minded Bish cannot understand. Bish is genius from his earliest schooldays so for him anything less than perfection from his son has been a veiled attack on himself. Tara understands Rabi’s interest in drawing and always tries to encourage him.

Bharati Mukherjee has vividly fictionalized her life experiences in the Desirable Daughters. At the end of the novel Tara understands through Tara-Lata’s story that her identity can be achieved by a careful negotiation between Indian traditions and American notions of individualism.

Bharati Mukherjee’s life experiences implicitly reflect in *The Tiger’s Daughter, Wife, Jasmine and Desirable Daughter*. The female protagonists of her novels move from East to West. Bharati Mukherjee is born and brought up in traditional Brahmin family so she is aware about the problems of the third world women and she tries to give voice to the problems of the women of her culture in her novels. Even she writes about her own class in which she is brought up. She writes about her own experiences in Canada and America as an immigrant in her novels. In the first two novels Bharati Mukherjee is closer with the protagonists of the novels.
Works Cited


