

Chapter II

2. Expatriation : A Cross - Cultural Perspective

As the very term implies 'expatriation' focuses on the native country that has been left behind. The term 'immigration' emphasizes the country into which one has entered as a migrant. The expatriate dwells on his / her 'ex' status of the past, while the immigrant celebrates his presence in the country. George Steiner in **Extra- territorial : Papers on Language and Literature** describes the expatriate writer as the "contemporary everyman" (10-11).

Expatriation is actually a complex set of mind and emotion which includes a wistful longing for the past, often symbolized by the ancestral home, the pain of exile and homelessness, the struggle to maintain the difference between oneself and the new, unfriendly surroundings, an assumption of moral or cultural superiority over the host country and a refusal to accept the identity forced on one by the environment. The expatriate builds a cocoon around himself / herself as a refugee from cultural dilemmas and from the experienced hostility or unfriendliness in the new country (Gomez 72). Faced with rejection, the new comer clings on to his ethnic identity. Viney Kirpal in **The Third World Novel of Expatriation : A Study of Émigré Fiction by Indian, West African and Caribbean Writers** says : "Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these migrants in the new world" (165). In it, nostalgia is the main reason for the expatriates need to evoke ethnic origins (Howe 194).

The main thrust of expatriation is on the native country and traditions left behind. The expatriate is always assimilated into the host society – at all levels, psychological, sociological, and

linguistics. Thus truly breaking the umbilical cord with his / her homeland, he/she tries to assimilate the foreign culture. Mukherjee felt the same in **Darkness** :

Like V.S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my characters' pain. Irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post-colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong. If you have to wonder, if you keep looking signs, if you wait – surrendering little bits of self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past you'll never belong anywhere. (2)

The expatriate writers face a multi-cultural situation which may be combined with a personal anguish due to discrimination or a sense of rootlessness. They are able to project the cultural confusion and confrontation of a multi-racial society. The clash of culture and the need for adaptation is a part of their expatriate experience / sensibility. In their writings, the expatriate faces the dilemma of being not able to return home and yet not finding a home in the adapted land. The characters nurture the hope that they will be able to merge into the culture of the new land. They change names, clothes, and even partners as is the case with Jasmine and in the case of women characters in **Middleman**.

The expatriate writer occupies a marginal or a borderline position. He / she sits on the periphery of the past, causing the future to take shape. The expatriate writer relates the state of being and becoming. "The former follows a characteristic paradigm beginning with restlessness, repression of the past, and an overt acceptance of the present, the latter begins with a feeling of loss passing through various shades of nostalgia and culminating into schizophrenia" (Bhargava 93). Jasbir Jain in "Foreignness of Spirit : The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels" says : "Mukherjee's novels [...] are representative of the expatriate sensibility. This alone offers an understanding of the

ambivalence present not only in the psychology of the protagonists but also that of the author, this helps us understand the satiric interludes, the ironic juxtapositions, the shifting point of view and also the final disintegration" (12). Mukherjee in **Days** admits that "The year in India", (1973-74), "forced me to view myself more as an immigrant than an exile" (284). Further, she admits that "My year in India had shown me that I did not need to discard my western education in order to retrieve the dim shape of my Indian one" (284). Mukherjee also realized the limitations of a third world expatriate writer. She admits : "To be a woman writer in North America, to be a third world woman writer in North America, is to confine oneself to a narrow airless, tightly roofed arena" (285-286). Mukherjee regards expatriation as a restrictive and self-defeating attitude in a writer.

Mukherjee's **Daughter** is designed to capture the predicament of someone returning to her homeland after a period of self-imposed exile. However, for Tara the home in Calcutta will never be home again to her. In New York, she had dreamed of coming back to Calcutta, but "the return had brought only wounds" (TD 25). By choosing exile, she had slipped outside the parameters of the world in which she belonged to by her birthright. Even seven years of exile barred her reentry into her home at Calcutta. The novel ironically ends with Tara trapped in a car that is surrounded by rioters, wondering "whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn't, whether David would ever know that she loved him freely" (TD 210).

In **Daughter**, Tara was overcome by bouts of homesickness when in North America and returns to Calcutta to gauge the extent of her commitment to what was once her home. Tara had to be porous and passive in order to record the tremors in her culture. She had to react rather than act. Tara's passivity makes her the perfect instrument for recording the discordant aspects of contemporary Calcutta. She cannot say no. She had to go out not only with Joyonto to see the slums but also to move in and out of different social orbits as an observant, sensitive, vulnerable, and not a little confused. The seven years life she spent in the west had altered Tara's vision. It is evident in the scene in which Tara drives past Bombay's Marine Drive on her way back to Calcutta

where she finds the street to be “run-down and crowded” and yet seven years earlier she had had admired the place and found it fashionable (TD 37). When she was in North America she could not stop thinking of home, but now in her trip to Calcutta she missed David and faces losing him continually. She remembers even now the sense of alienation she had in New York. However, she could not cease ruminating in Calcutta on the foreignness of spirit she was experiencing in the city of her birth (TD 37). And as a result, she is not able to react guiltily to Pronob’s comment that he would “hate to be a nobody in America” (TD 59). It makes her feel that she is an outcast among her friends and relatives because of her marriage to a white North American. She feels quite cut off from the people she grew up with (TD 89). She begins to feel that depression has overcome her. Hence, she decides to return to New York. The reason for connecting the foreign land in her mind is that she has changed too much. It is observed by her friend Reena as she puts in her Indian-English idiom! “you’ve changed too much, Tara” (TD 105). Tara begins to feel that of late she had been outraged by Calcutta. Even the language she had used spontaneously once upon a time now appears strange. She had forgotten so many Indian-English words she had once used with her friends (TD 107). Maya Manju Sharma in “The Inner World of Bharati Mukherjee : From Expatriate to Immigrant” says that “Tara is the alter ego of the author. It is clear from the autobiographical details in **Days and Nights**; the testings of Tara are also battles in the growth of the author’s sensibility from that of the expatriate to that of the immigrant” (5). Like Mukherjee, Tara has married a North American novelist who prefers to stay back during his summer breaks so that he can write. Considering Tara’s journey to India Ananda Prabha Barat in “Bharati Mukherjee and the Immigrant Psyche : **The Tiger’s Daughter**” comments :

Thus Tara’s journey to India, her own native land, ironically proves frustrating slowly leading to his(sic) illusion, alienation, depression, and finally her tragic end. The greatest irony hidden in the story of Tara is that she survived the racial hardships of survival in a foreign country but nothing happens to her. She becomes a victim of

her tragic end in her native soil—her home, which she had longed to see since her stay in New York, and where she comes to seek peace. Her desire to find a place to love and security which she missed in New York, ends ironically in frustration. The irony with which we are left is that Tara an India-born young woman feels a greater love and security in the arms of her American husband and thinks about him at a time when her end is approaching. Tara's journey to India is best represented in her mood presented in the following lines : It was so vague, so pointless, so diffuse this trip home to India (130). The immigrant's return to her own country proves frustrating both physically and metaphorically. (58)

Tara's memory played a trick on her during her prolonged expatriate experience in America. She had been homesick and lonely in her early years abroad, then grown wistful and romantic with faint longings that nudged her consistently through her lifestyle to the extent that she hung Indian scarves around her apartment. However, "Tara will feel herself to be an expatriate and an alien for as long as she conceives of India as the only country she can really belong to and the only way the movement toward becoming an exuberant immigrant can be launched is by burying the ghosts of the past" (Bose 52). In fact, she is torn between two oscillating wishes. Commenting on the strange fusion of Americanness and Indianness in Tara, Ananda Prabha Barat in "Bharati Mukherjee and Immigrant Psyche : **The Tiger's Daughter**" says :

There is a strange fusion of Americanness and Indianness in the psyche of Tara and they are always at a note of confrontation with each other. Sometimes she makes futile effort to establish her American self. But it clashes with the pulse of Indian life on her visit to Calcutta. Neither she can take refuge in her old Indian self nor in her newly discovered American self. The outcome of this confrontation is her split – up psyche. The protagonist, being depressed and disgusted with the deteriorating situation of India and her new personality, finds herself difficult to adjust with the

situation and finally wishes to go back to the USA to her husband, but she becomes a victim of violence in India. (54)

The clash is deeply felt in the psyche of Tara who finds it difficult to adjust with her friends and relatives in India. The greatest irony of her return is that she feels loneliness in her own native land. Tara expected that her return to India would remove her displeasure of staying abroad, but what happens is what Mukherjee visualizes :

For years she had dreamed of this return to India. She had believed that all hesitations, all shadowy fears of the time abroad would be erased quite magically if she could just return home to Calcutta. But so far the return had brought only wounds. First the corrosive hours on Marine Drive, then the deformed beggar in the railway station, and now the inexorable train ride steadily undid what strength she had held in reserve. She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty-two and quick to take offence. (TD 25)

The most important cause aggravating her discomfort and unease is her marriage which hangs on her heart as a burden. Mukherjee discloses : "In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner, and this foreignness was a burden. It was hard for her to talk about marriage responsibilities in Camac Street; her friends were curious only about the adjustments she had made" (TD 62). Tara finds herself a misfit everywhere she goes. Ananda Prabha Barat in "Bharati Mukherjee and the Immigrant Psyche : **The Tiger's Daughter**" avers : "The world of western liberation represented by Tara and David and the conservatism and Indianness represented by her mother Arati are irreparable. The gulf cannot be bridged and Tara's psyche remains split-up like other immigrants" (58).

Tara becomes 'foreign' to her native values. She is once again filled with the sense of alienation. She begins to question her own identity. There occurs a conflict in her mind between

her old sense of perception and outlook while in India and now her changed outlook after her sojourn to America. Tara leads a life of duality and conflict seeking stability through marriage which lacked confidence and mutual understanding and put her in an acute traumatic dilemma. It is as Brinda Bose clinically observes :

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 begins early, their lives being shaped by the confluence of rich culture 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. (50)

Tara fails to adjust with her American husband merely because she is bound to traditions and customs.

Tara's efforts to adapt to American society are measured by her rejection and revulsion of Indian modes of life. Tara finds in India nothing to her like. For Tara, Calcutta appears to be Conrad's **Heart of Darkness** with riots in the city, buses burning, and workers surrounding the warehouses. Manju Sampat in "Bharati Mukherjee : The Fiction of Alienation and Identification" avers and equates Tara and Mukherjee as follows:

This implies that even in her own land, with western outlook and education Tara / Mukherjee felt an alien, as she did in North America where she was racially an outsider. Thus there is alienation at two levels. In the end, the two worlds cannot be reconciled, and since the alienation from the mother country seems stronger, Tara chooses to return to David and America. Though at cross-roads still, we get

the impression, that the author is now one step closer towards psychologically working out the old country from her psyche. (142-143)

It is further affirmed by M.L. Pandit in “Woman as Protagonist : Self in Margaret Laurence’s **The Diviners** and Bharati Mukherjee’s **The Tigger’s Daughter**”. Pandit says :

The heroine of **The Tigger’s Daughter** grows up, more or less, in the same environs as her creator. Though bred up in independent India, Bharati Mukherjee’s mental set up, when she went abroad for higher education to the free and permissive society of the USA, still reflected the prejudices inherent to the educational system of a colonial convent school at Calcutta. This is a circumstance that is repeated in the experience of Tara. Her sense of culture shock on going abroad is a repetition of what the author herself experienced under similar circumstances. Like Bharati Mukherjee, she too returns to India and to her parents, as the young bride of a white man, whom they have yet to see and know. The novelist’s sensitive presentation of the manner in which the friends and relations of Tara react to her changed status is a true reflection of what she herself went through in Calcutta that is no longer the same as it was during her school day. (33)

Misunderstanding, confusion, and incomprehension are inevitable in any cross-cultural encounter. Passages to and out of India will cause pain and bewilderment. It is the case with Tara’s husband, David, who is not only able to understand and tolerate Indians but also not able to listen to Tara’s stories related to Calcutta. He reads about Tara’s experience of Calcutta with a measure of incomprehension. Tara at times wonders about the difficulties of communicating her feelings about the city and its people. How could she explain to David who was, after all, “a foreigner” (TD 48). She could not explain to David, who “was hostile to genealogies and had often misunderstood her affection for the family as overdependence” (TD 64).

The other two minor characters of **Daughter**, Washington McDowell and Antonia Whitehead illustrate the extent of the confusion caused in the contact between cultures. McDowell is an American student but he happens to be a black African who joins hands with Calcutta's revolutionaries. Antonia Whitehead is out on a mission to save the Third World. Tara is aware that the white American girl was destined to create much confusion during her stay in India, because Tara has learned that "it was impossible to be a bridge for anyone" since "bridges had a way of cluttering up the landscape" (TD 144).

Like Tara, Dimple, as an immature girl, constantly dreams of marriage as she hopes that it would bring her freedom and much awaited happiness and love. She hopes that marriage would bring her different way of life – "an apartment in Chouringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon sarees" (W 3). In the end of the novel, she admits: "provided all the glittery things she had imagined", marriage "had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies" (W 101). She experiences a total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. She finds a wide gulf between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation. She sinks into the world of isolation. Dimple's morbid imagination and the growing frustration have a deep impact on her marital life. She starts having a feeling of revulsion for Amit. She becomes a psychically disturbed woman. She undergoes a mental trauma. She is increasingly rejecting her husband, as she is in the process of absorbing American culture. Seema Sunil says: "prone to the world of fantasy, she easily falls a victim to the glamour and colourful world of advertisements. This fascination leads her to a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. Indeed she is unable to grasp her own intensity of feeling and chooses to terms with either her own culture or America's culture and, almost in a bit of hallucination, kills her husband Amit" (15).

Mukherjee presents the world of Dimple as a world of daydreams and nightmares. "Though she is at times shocked at her own intensity of feeling and her capacity to hate, eventually Dimple exercises her ungratified passion through violence alone. Neither the cultural conflict nor a

feminine need for freedom can account for Dimple's bizarre, blasphemous responses" (Indira 103).

Dimple, in her fantasies, used to reconstruct Amit as a dashing hero of a newspaper advertisement or a television commercial. But in the end, when Amit realizes that his wife is desperately unhappy, he can only diagnose her condition as the culture shock, which all Indian wives go through, a condition to be distinguished from "one of those famous breakdowns that American wives were fond of having" (W 180). In fact, he fails to note that Dimple is disintegrating. Dimple encounters alienation, isolation, and deep sense of cultural shock. In fact, Dimple is trapped in a dilemma of tension between American culture and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife.

Dimple has come to America to be transformed. She is willing to seek out an identity that would take her away from her wifely duties and responsibilities. And yet, she fails to break away from her South Asian community or connect her with mainstream American society. Brinda Bose in "A Question of Identity : Where Gender, Race, and America Meet in Bharati Mukherjee" aptly says : "Dimple is helplessly caught in the gripping quest for a new female American identity"; for her, "a happy guiltless amalgamation seems possible" and what goes on inside her therefore is a "simultaneous fracturing and evolving of identity" (55-57).

Dimple, as an immigrant in America, day dreams about abortions. She wants to get rid of whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes. The height of her abnormality reaches when she skips her way to abortion : "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" (W 42). Despair sets in her life. She thinks "marriage had betrayed her, had not provided all the glittering things she had imagined" (W 102). "Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne" (W 117).

As an immigrant in the United States, Dimple wants to do away with the traditional taboos of a wife. She becomes an escapist. The killing of the mouse is to her a symbolic suicide of herself. She thinks of herself as a non-human being. She feels that she is instinctively drawn towards some disastrous end. Mukherjee surrealistically narrates :

It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster; some monster had overtaken her body, a creature with serpentine curls and heaving bosom that would erupt indiscretly through one of Dimple's orifices, leaving her, Dimple Basu, splattered like a Bug on the living – room wall and rag. (W 156)

She identifies herself with the mouse when she is pregnant. "It had a swollen body. A very small creature with a fat belly. To Dimple, the dead mouse looked pregnant" (W 35). In killing the mouse, she has destroyed her own self. Commenting on such morbidity in Dimple, S. Indira in "'Splintered Self' : An Approach to **Wife**" says :

Bharati Mukherjee presents the world of Dimple, a world of daydreams and nightmares and her morbid psyche, through a series of grotesque images. Dimple's morbidity is evident while she is still at her parental home in the way she allows her conscious mind to be completely dominated by the colourful romance projected in the advertisements and stories of magazines. Indulging herself in sexual fantasies with cricket stars, young cabinet ministers and heroes from novels, Dimple sets out on a long journey of unreal, meaningless and morbid existence. (101)

Dimple suffers from a terrible angst. The anxiety of living haunts her. She becomes mentally deranged. She begins to develop a nausea for things around her. S.P. Swain in "Dimple in **Wife** : A Study of the Lacerated Self" admits that "Taedium vitae and apprehension phobia split her self, breeding a morbid fear for the milieu : [...]" (88). Further, Swain is of the view that "Amit appears to her a projection of her neurotic self which she wants to annihilate and hence her committing the act

of murder [...] The murdering of Amit is an assertion of her American identity [...] The novel traces the psychic break down of an Indian wife in America and the concomittant deep culture – shock leading to neurosis” (88). However, M. Rajeshwar in “Sado-Masochism as a Literary Device in **Wife**” is of the view that Dimple’s “sado-masochist drives further compel her to inflict the same kind of punishment upon Amit which she wishes him to do her. In other words, she wishes to die, forming a reaction she kills Amit. Her killing of Amit with a kitchen-knife is the most longed-for, albeit unconsciously masochistic event in her life” (97). It is done in a dream-like state which is given in a delirious style by Mukherjee :

She sneaked upon him and chosen a spot, her favourite spot just under the hairline, where the mole was getting larger and browner, and she drew an imaginary line of kisses... She touched the mole very lightly and let her fingers draw a circle around the delectable spot, then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times, each time a little harder, until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any advertiser, and then she saw the head fall off—but of course it was her imagination because she was not sure anymore what she had seen on TV and what she had seen in the private screen of three A.M. and it stayed upright on the counter top, still with its eyes averted from her face, and she said very loudly to the knife that was redder now than it had ever been when she had chopped chicken and mutton with it in the same kitchen and on the same counter, “I wonder if Leni can make a base for it; she’s supposed to be very clever with her fingers”.

Women on television got away with murder. (W 212-213)

Dimple keeps on trying in her own confused and uncertain manner to see if she could immerse herself in the exciting world of America. In fact, she has a desire to break free from the traditional role of a Bengali wife. She dreams of working and of going to night school, of throwing her own parties for her

friends, and of having her own flat where she could be herself. She feels attracted by women and men like Mullick and feels a stirring sexual desire for Milt Glasser.

In the third part of the novel, **Wife**, Dimple gets the opportunity to set up her own house after Amit lands in a job. They decide to move for a while into a New York university apartment sublet to them for a term by Prodosh and Marsha Mookerji, who have taken sabbatical leave. In that flat, Dimple begins to feel alienation. Dimple's anxieties and confusion about her identity increase when she finds herself alone for most of the day when Amit is out working. Concerning the importance of this section, as Dimple undergoes psychological transformation, Fakrul Alam in **Bharati Mukherjee** avers :

Her propensity for violence and tendency to take refuge in a fantasy world or slide into depression and irrational behavior are as evident in this section of the book as is her longing to acquire a new identity as an American woman. While she has more opportunities now for mixing with Americans and experimenting with an American life-style, she finds herself even more traumatized by the turn of events. (44)

In the United States, Dimple and her friends suffer from alienation in a culture whose codes they cannot decipher. Dimple had been given an advice even before she reached New York. She had heard friends talk of America as a place where you could have fun and frolick but where you would have to be a foreigner all your life. At a farewell party given to her before leaving Calcutta by her friend Pixie, a woman, who had known all about America and the American life, told Dimple about South Asian expatriate life in North America, "you may think of it as immigration, my dear ... but what you are is a resident alien" (W 46). In New York, Dimple hears Meena confess how inadequate she feels outside her community because she has such a hard time understanding American humour or the English language. It is also felt by Dimple in one such occasion where she could not buy Cheescakes in her first shopping expedition in an alien culture. She finds herself then that she is "caught in the crossfire

of an American communalism she couldn't understand" (W 60). Even she wants to talk to one of the American women she keeps meeting in the streets but she cannot decide what to talk and what to ask. It makes her realize that she is living in a country "where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator" (W 112). In fact, in the character of Dimple, Mukherjee dramatizes the opposition between two cultures, the despair of prejudice, and the precariousness of immigrant status. Dimple has to undergo the psychological fragmentation, alienation, and insanity. It is viewed in terms of culture-shock. It is also viewed as an "intense experience of female biological, sexual and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency" (Chesler 31). Meera Manvi in "Rereading Indian Womanhood : A Note on the Narrative Structure of **Wife**" says that in **Wife**, Mukherjee had made a detailed study of female powerlessness and female psychosis (140).

New York and the life of Indian immigrants in New York first seem appealing to her. But she has to encounter some disconcerting signs like that of a triple murder that has just hit the radio waves which indicate that she has entered into a violent society. However, life in America allows Dimple to seek ways out of the role reserved for a wife in her community and to explore methods of breaking out of the mould made for the middle-class Indian woman. She fails to accept as a friend and a role model Jyoti Sen's, Amit's friend, wife, Meena, instead she takes Mullick, who is "more American than the Americans" (W 68) in the sense that she is openly disdainful of her arranged marriage and is liberated and flirtatious. Mullick dresses skimpily and smokes and drinks in public and attends a night school. All that fascinates Dimple. However, major obstacle in Dimple's quest for identity is her husband Amit, who is basically well absorbed in his search for economic security. Amit does not have the time to sensitise or understand the complicated changes going on inside Dimple. Although quite tolerant and considerate in some ways, he is too self-absorbed and traditional to help his wife achieve selfhood. Amit is also happy to see that his wife is becoming American, but he does not want her to be too American (W 112). Another obstacle in Dimple's path of self-realization is the expatriate Indian

community in which she has to spend her time. Dimple's relation to Meena Sen is a contradictory one. Dimple finds that Meena Sen is full of prejudice and quite parochial and suspicious of mixed marriages. She can be taken as an example of devastating critique of immigrant culture. She is typical of the Indian immigrant in the United States who longs to amass enough dollars and return to India. Even men like Jyoti and Amit share a pervasive sense of insecurity about losing their jobs because of accusations of disorderly conduct and prefer not to risk anything.

Displacement distances Dimple from Amit. She is lonely and alienated. When the outlets to relate to people around her are blocked, Dimple's personality indicates fragmentation. She suffers from insomnia which is the direct result of the feeling of insecurity and fear. Her reaction to violence and the talk about murders change fast. The empty mind and the casual approach and the constant news reported about the murders in the town reduce her sense of guilt in committing a crime; "she could make Amit die in his sleep" (W 98). The realization of her shattered dream – world is an emotional threat to her which creates anxiety and as a result, the dormant destructive tendencies emerge. Dimple begins to contemplate suicide :

Between three and four the next morning Dimple thought of seven ways to commit suicide in Queens. The surest way, she felt, would be to borrow a can of Drano from under the kitchen sink and drink it, diluted slightly with water. She could see herself as a Before and After type of T.V. commercial; human face and feet and an S-trap for a body. The least certain, she thought, would be to slip a green garbage bag over her head and tie it with a string around the shoulders. The idea appealed to her sense of beauty; a green world, plastic smooth and soft, until her nostrils trembled and her eyes bulged and a green death overtook her. There was one snag, of course-there was always a snag in dreaming up perfect endings and solutions-she was sore she would not be able to tie the mouth of the garbage bag tightly enough. (W 102)

Dimple frequently wishes to die. This leads her to bad dreams and nightmares. There are frequent references of her wishes to commit suicide. Mukherjee writes :

An after-dream persisted when she woke up. Someone had murdered her the night before and concealed her corpse among the Bedouin brasses in baskets of indoor plants. She wrapped her blue bathrobe tighter around her breasts and hips and did all the things she normally did between seven and eight on weekday mornings, but she knew that she was dead and that Amit would recoil from her soon as he sat down at the table for his wheaties and two fried eggs. (W 185-186)

Dimple cogitates upon the ways of dying : 1. set fire to sari made of synthetic fibre; 2. head in oven; 3, nick wrist with broken glass in a sink full of scalding dishwater; 4, starve, 5, fall on bread knife with thinking of Japanese Samurai revivals.

Dimple, in her desperation, resumes her old habit of thinking of ways out of her predicament through suicide. She also contemplates attacking Amit. She feels that he is the cause for all such entrapment and isolation in a world of "Americans who ate hamburgers and pizzas" (W 119). She is also sure that nothing is going to help her by lingering on the world of past/memories of the past. Hence, she develops her relationship with Mullick and through her with Milt Glasser. She is intrigued by the way Milt flirts with Mullick and herself at parties and is aroused by the casual way he treats her and touches her. She begins to attend parties but after every party she feels depressed and becomes increasingly conscious of being constricted in her New York apartment. She gets addicted to television, not realizing that the violence in her is further stimulated by it. The talk shows and soapoperas she watches begin to corrode her psyche and prepare her for more violence. Her increasing inability to order her life is more visible in the way in which she keeps her apartment disorder, chaos, and confusion. And as a result, when Amit attempts to grasp her from behind in sexual plays, she attacks him with a paring knife as she thinks "in America anything is possible... you can be

raped and killed on any floor” (W 129). In fact, she is horrified by her own frenzy. She begins to think that “perhaps she was capable of unimagined, calculative violence” (W 130). But, soon she alternates between self-pity and rage against Amit. Her only solace is the television set. She does not realize that it is leading her to something terrible because “it was getting harder and harder to distinguish between what she had seen on TV and what she had imagined” (W 157).

Dimple gets totally cut off from the outside world. This situation starts thwarting her life. The isolation and powerlessness is so acute that the other potentialities such as sensuous, emotional, and intellectual ones, which are essential for life and evolution of personality, cannot be realized by her. The lack of inner security and spontaneity blocks this realization. This blockage increases with the shock of another culture.

The burden of the feeling of being trapped weighs on Dimple’s mind. It is manifested in her hysterical behavior. She confesses to Amit : “The trouble is I’ve stopped brooding about Calcutta” (W 111). Most of the time, she dreams because dreams feed her fantasy. It is because “Amit did not feed her fantasy life; he was merely the provider of small material comforts. In bitter moments she ranked her husband, blender, colour T.V., cassette, taperecorder, stereo in their order of convenience” (W 113). The alienated mind is strained beyond endurance. Her defenses are not ready to meet the challenges of the western world. She is prepared for pain but not inertia, exhaustion, and endless indecisiveness. Dimple’s fantasy gives rise to destructiveness. Dimple tends to develop masochistic strivings. The sick mind contemplates only death and destruction. Dimple arouses pity, horror, surprise, and shock, and a sense of futility too. Hers is the pre-marital and post-marital anxiety heightened by displacement. The disorientation of an immigrant wife from sanity to insanity is authentic and pathetic.

In the beginning of the novel, **Wife**, Dimple which means ‘a small surface depression’, shows at twenty the strains of waiting for a husband. She used to dream of Sita, “the ideal wife of Hindu

legends, who had walked through fire at her husband's request" (W 6). She even used to fantasize about sacrificing her own self for the sake of her husband. She used to imagine to conquer her husband by her docility and coyness. But in the end of the novel, she contemplates about committing suicide and ultimately kills her husband Amit Basu.

Dimple's madness is also evident in a scene in which she has a kind of imagination in which an intruder comes into her apartment. When he leaves, she is certain of one thing nothing had happened between them. However, Dimple's fantasies about this intruder comes in the form of Milt Glasser. Even though he seems to be having an affair with Mullick and is always accompanied by her, every chance encounter between him and Dimple brings them closer and closer to each other. Initially, Dimple does not know whether he will love her or kiss her. In fact, he excites her and represents for her nothing less than the seductiveness of the new world, America, as Mukherjee writes, "he was, to her, America" (W 174). Milt Glasser seems to understand her and is ready to treat her as an individual and talk to her about all sorts of things. Dimple, in fact, after an outing with him, begins to think that "the inhuman maze of New York became as safe and simple as Ballygunge" (W 196). When they return from this outing, they have sex and afterwards he promises to look after her and protect her from everything that seemed to be upsetting her. He admits : "Everything about you is shocking and exciting and a little sad" (W 201). Further, this chance sexual encounter increases her loneliness and madness after he leaves her in her apartment. She feels that she is cut off from her husband and from her community. It panics her. It terrifies her. It makes her to have a new quest to have a new identity. "Her desire to unite with an American has taken her to a dead end, while she has experienced enough of expatriate life to know that she cannot stand it anymore" (Alam 47). In the end of the novel, **Wife**, Dimple resorts to extreme violent action of murdering her husband to get out of the bind that expatriation to America has gotten her into. She sneaks up behind Amit and then stabs him to death without an awareness that "women on television got away with murder" (W 213).

To Dimple, the dominant society seems to be one of violent extremes. Everything she sees on television deals with love. Everything she reads deals with murder. Murder is frightening to her. Meena advises her not to do the laundering alone, at risk of being mugged in the basement of the building. Screaming police sirens in the night remind her of the dangerous world beyond her apartment. Her gallery of monsters includes alcoholics, dope friends, black men in leather jackets, small, dark Hispanics, and Puerto Rican girls in tight clothes (W 120). Dimple's first entry into the new world is accompanied by two interrelated dimensions of violence – the triple murder in Queens which Jyoti Sen narrates with relish, and images of the self-immolation of Sita on the batik – wallhanging in Meena Sen's home, where the Basus are forced to spend the next several months. Further, fear, anxiety, and the dread of the unknown characterize Dimple's strange confinement. With the dangers of urban New York looming large on the street outside, the ghettoization of female immigrant status is painfully brought home to Dimple. Seema Suneel in "Emergence of New Woman in Indian Fiction : A Study of Bharati Mukherjee's **Wife**, Shashi Deshpande's **That Long Silence** and R.W. Desai's **Frailty, Thy Name is (W)oman**" says : "Having been disenchanted, Dimple is a physically disturbed person. She undergoes a mental trauma which allows her no peace. The sense of violence and aggression is heightened in the novel by the pervasive violence in American life. Dimple confesses that in America talking about violence and murders was like talking about weather" (223). "The novel as a whole is full of what Frederick J. Hoffman calls crime passionel or sentimental violence which lies in excess of expectation" (Vishnu 209). From the beginning of the novel, Dimple is depicted to be weak and irresolute woman. In the US, she compares herself with Mullick, whose sense of liberty, freak way of dressing and her flirtations are Dimple's point of envy. "Thus, dissatisfaction leads to comparison and undue comparison in turn leads to depression on account of which Dimple falls into frequent bouts of insomnia. During such moments, she suffers from paranoia whereby she has hallucinatory fears of burglars stealing into her flat and raping her [...] Therefore, she suffers both from the Eros and the Thanatos complex. Dimple transcends merely the culture shock and embraces existential angst" (Sarada, "Marriage" 60). Even she has lost her old culture. But "for Dimple the loss of old culture is

neither an exciting nor an exhilarating experience. She is disillusioned on all planes – physical, mental, and emotional. Freedom from the bonds of caste, gender, and family instead of turning her hilarious, leaves her utterly lonely and desolate. Her killing of her husband is partly an act of desperation and partly an outcome of her guilty conscience” (Dimri 75).

Even Americans understand that theirs is a violent ridden society. In **Wife**, Milt Glasser invites Dimple to a Roman show, “The Bull’s Eye”, in which a man runs around in circles in Madison Square Garden while spectators throw darts, javelins, and arrows at him. On seeing that, Milt Glasser glibly says that the intention is to redeem a violence-ridden society by estranging the audience from violence (W 202). She imagines that all the violence is outside and fails to see the violence within her own being. In fact, she has to realize that murder and death result from “love gone awry” (W 73). In fact, Amit is not Dimple’s victim but it is her baby conceived in India and aborted with a help of a skipping rope because “it cultured up the preparation for going abroad” (W 42) as she looks on emigration to America as a chance to refashion herself. Dimple’s frustrations and violent reactions against Amit not only show her incapacity in adjusting herself in the new environs but the incessant violent attitudes of the New York life also. Pradipsingh Rathod in “The Psycho / Cross-Cultural Patterns in the Protagonist of Bharati Mukherjee’s **Wife**” says :

Dimple leads her life in despair under an inexplicable psychic pressure that makes her rethink over her married life. And she eventually concludes that her married life has resulted in having some trivial material comforts merely. She wished America to be a dream-destination but what she realizes is nothing more than the excess of constant TV watching, reports on killings, suicides, muggings, rapes and persistent racial prejudices to which she succumbs very quickly. Now she tries to look like an American, wears clothes of the Americans, borrows English, plans to commit suicide, thinks of killing her husband, wants to develop extra-marital relationship, longs to live like the glamorous TV characters and she, in an agonized intensity. (36)

Dimple slides into madness when she gets the chance to be all herself and more particularly when she is free of the constraints imposed on an Indian wife by the constant presence of other members of her community. Dimple goes crazy in part because of her own instability but mostly because she has moved into a social vacuum. In the Greenwich village flat, she has to spend almost all her time watching television as she is too terrified of the violent world outside her flat. It only intensifies her frustration and she goes further unhinged from reality. Linda Sandler in her review of **Wife in Saturday Night** suggests that Dimple has moved into “a vacuum where once was society, and that violence becomes increasingly ordinary where there is no anchoring community” (76). Gita Rajan in “Bharati Mukherjee” also notes that **Wife** centres “on the debilitating, corrosive influence of an alien culture on a tragic self” and that Dimple’s self is ultimately “shattered, detonated by a raw and alien reality” (236, 237). She feels like “a star collapsing inwardly” (W 109). She is sure that something has gone dead inside her. She is sure that she is not suffering from home sickness. She also does not want to tell him that she has no necessity to act like Sita. She has no one to share her thoughts and feelings. She takes to sleeping all through the day. She wanted to have an apartment of her own, but now how can she explain her mind’s strain and pain beyond endurance and how can she anticipate such an “inertia, exhaustion, endless indecisiveness” (W 114).

In one way or the other, Dimple’s neurosis may be taken as Mukherjee’s frustration with the aloofness caused by expatriation. In fact, Dimple’s outbursts mark her as a manic-depressive. Her spirited gestures or thoughts of rebellion are followed by thoughts of hopelessness. She is conscious of being alienated more and more. Her thoughts begin to circle on death, dyings and dismemberment. She becomes “a pitiful immigrant among demanding appliances” (W 186) in her New York University flat. She has premonitions of disorder and disaster. It is as Lieu-Geok Leong in “Bharati Mukherjee” observes that Mukherjee has taken “the psychology and geography of displacement as far as possible in its true pursuit of disaster” (490). Commenting on the psychotic change in Dimple, S.P. Swain in “Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee’s **Wife** : A Study of Lacerated Self” says : “It is the gloomy corridor of

her psyche, that Mukherjee probes with a keen and penetrating psychological subtlety. Dimple moves from a state of mute resentment to an escalating disgust and intolerance which finally culminates in disaster" (119). Abnormal as she was, she was often "sucked into the centre of cone-shaped emotions that made her sweat, cry loudly, sit up in bed" (W 34). Lack of communication stifles and chokes her voice and disintegrates her sensibility. It takes away the sanity of her mind. She has nightmares of violence, of suicide, and of death. She even has the sensation of being raped and killed in her flat. Thoughts of illusion and reality alternate in her psyche. Dimple is perilously estranged from her own self. She is alien to it. It is her self-alienation that breeds a terrible anguish in her. It prompts her to murder her husband. Mukherjee describes : "Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne" (W 117). Dimple suffers from a terrible angst. The anxiety of living haunts her. She loses her balance of mind. Mentally deranged, she begins to develop a nausea for things around her. Mukherjee writes :

Everything scared her, the sputtering of the radiators, the brown corduroy sofa with depressions – the needles in the ray, the ironing board – the legar prints, the cactus that had not flowered the way it was supposed to be, the smudgy wide windows behind the dining table. (W 156)

Dimple's ill-concealed sado-masochistic compulsions are soon precipitated by the violence-ridden and individualistic American life and culminate in her killing of her husband. In fact, Dimple suffers from the neurotic compulsion of indulging in sado-masochistic acts in order to conceal her own sense of intrinsic weakness and failure. She appears to indulge in masochistic suffering in order to lull the pain of disappointment with life, especially with married life. She hoped that marriage would free her and give her freedom. She constantly imagined that her future husband to be the very embodiment of the commercial society. Mukherjee writes :

She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes, and chin from a body-builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad, and put the ideal

man by herself in a restaurant on Park street or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel. He wore blue bathing trunks, there was no ugly black hair on the back and shoulder blades as he heaped feet first into the pool while she stood on the edge in a scarlet sari with a gold border behind wraparound sunglasses, and trailed her toes in the water. (W 23)

But what happened after her marriage to Amit is deseperating and disappointing as all her expectations become waste. Life with him in India and America is naturally a big disappointment for her. In her moment of feverish introspection, she thinks that life has become cruel to her. "Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries; he was unreal. She was furious; she felt sick" (W 156). It is as Jasbir Jain in "Foreignness of Spirit : The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels" observes : 'Her isolation is rooted not merely in loneliness, in isolation or cultural differences but in her estrangement from her own past and her own inner being" (17).

In **Daughter** and **Wife**, Tara and Dimple are expatriates, geographically as well as in mind and spirit. They share the expatriate characteristic of being ill at ease both in the native culture and in the alien soil. They represent the dilemma faced by expatriates. Tara feels lonely as an expatriate who senses a gap between herself and her tradition. Dimple also experiences an intense loneliness-the loneliness of the expatriate. There is a progressive and total estrangement from the environment, from herself, and from existence itself. "She was so much worse than ever, more lonely, more cut off from Amit, from the Indians; left alone with borrowed disguises, she felt like a shadow without feeling" (W 200). Sivaramakrishna, while observing about Tara and Dimple, says that "the retention of their identity as Indian is in constant tension with the need for its renunciation if they have to acquire a new identity as immigrants" (74). Jasbir Jain in "Foreignness of Spirit : The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels" also observes that they are the "representative of the expatriate sensibility" (12). Tara in **Daughter**, returning to India after seven years in America, experiences the alienation of an expatriate

who senses a gulf between herself and her native people and traditions. In analyzing her own sense of alienation, Tara questions : “How does the foreignness of the spirit begin? ... Does it begin right in the centre of Calcutta, with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads welling under starched white headresses, long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian sun?” (TD 37). Dimple also experiences an intense loneliness, which is different from the loneliness of the expatriates. M.L. Pandit in “The Indian Middle-Woman in America : Cross-Cultural Concerns in Bharati Mukherjee’s **The Tiger’s Daughter** and **Wife**” says : “Both Tara and Dimple are projected as ‘middlewomen’ between two cultures, and both are shown as experiencing culture – shock in a diametrically opposed conditions. Their disillusionment with India and America, respectively, is not sudden but gradual, over a period of time, and by stages” (40). However, it is also avered by Shobha Shinde in “Cross-Cultural Crisis in **Jasmine** and **The Tiger’s Daughter**” that in **Jasmine** and **Daughter**, Mukherjee has shown the cultural shock of the migrants or cultural transplants. In fact, Shobha Shinde observes : “She (Mukherjee) has presented a fascinating study of the problem of a displaced person in America as well as in India. Jasmine leaves India in search of the American Dream while Tara nostalgically plans a trip to India in search of the Indian dream” (47). In fact, Jasmine becomes a metaphor as, O.P. Budholia in “Dialectics of Culture / Acculturation in Bharati Mukherjee’s **Jasmine** and Anita Desai’s **Journey to Ithaca**” says : “Based on the metaphor of collective memories (Semantic and episodic), **Jasmine** becomes symbolic of the duality of cultures – the East and the West. Jyoti, the protagonist, experiments with life in terms of human feeling, intuition, sensation and the dilemma of an expatriate who voluntarily leaves India and comes to America [....] In **Jasmine** the protagonist shares the poetic qualities of the novelist so far as range of imagination and the objectivization of human emotions are concerned. It raises the question of *otherness* and assimilation through the logocentric dialectics of culture” (21). Equally, it is interesting to correspond the observation made by Shobha Shinde in “Cross-Cultural Crisis in **Jasmine** and **The Tiger’s Daughter**”. Shinde says :

As in Jasmine, **The Tiger's Daughter** also reflects the confrontation between illusion and reality. But **The Tiger's Daughter** had adopted the technique of documentation to bring out the contrast between two worlds and two attitudes. (50)

Hence, it is quite clear that both Tara and Dimple suffer in their alien land, America, as expatriates. They have nostalgia for the past and the country they left behind. It may be equated with the experience of Mukherjee, as Mukherjee too felt to be insecured expatriate in Canada while writing these two novels. Hers is extremely an expatriate sensibility as she has shuffled between two different countries / cultures.

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