CHAPTER – II
Indian Context: *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*

“In The compact between novelist and reader, the novelist promises to lie and the reader promises to allow it”. (Ozick)

The first two novels were written by Bharati Mukherjee at an interval of three years—*The Tiger’s Daughter* (1972) and *wife* (1975) followed by her autobiographical non-fictional work *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) she wrote in collaboration with her husband Clark Blaise. These three works belong to her first phase designated as Indian context and deal with the theme of cultural conflict, strain, drift, and survival as well as with cross-cultural encounters. Misunderstanding, confusion and incomprehension are the inevitable markers generated by the cultural drift and conflict owing due to the transculturation of the protagonists of *The Tiger’s Daughter* and *Wife*. There is an instability and disquietude owing to the misbalance in the process of their transculturation consequent upon the conflict of their will to accept or to not accept a new culture. Ms. Mukherjee wrote her first novel *The Tiger’s Daughter* more than a decade after she had left the city of Calcutta. She has projected in it her exilic preoccupation with her native city Calcutta through the self-same experience of her protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright, nee Tara Banerjee, who is in Calcutta for a visit after having been away in America for seven years. As mentioned by Bharati Mukherjee in her interview with *Canadian Fiction Review* in 1987, she wrote this novel on a “summer’s break in response to request” from the editor Houghton Mifflin. After its publication in 1972, it was well received and singled out by western reviewers for the charm, wit and intelligence present everywhere in it.
John Spurling in his review of *The Tiger’s Daughter* in *New Statesman* (25) compared to Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* (1901), which is based on the theme of the decay of a family with strong autobiographical features and Guiseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s historical novel *The Leopard* (1958) because of its thematic proximity to these two works.

The Core themes of *The Tiger’s Daughter* are the discovery by its protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright that the city of Calcutta as well as its people are in a state of fatal decline; her growing awareness of her “foreignness of spirit” (37) and her eventual realization that her prospects lie not in Calcutta but in expatriation. The description of Calcutta’s terminal decline begins with that of the CATELLI CONTINENTAL HOTEL which, once the novel of the Universe, has been turned now into “a gloomy place” even during the daytime and the sidewalks along the hotel painted with obscenities and political slogans” (3). This glory of Calcutta is now hemmed in by “a colony of beggars” who take advantage of the shade of this palatial hotel for rolling out “their torn mats or for rearranging their portable ovens and cardboard boxes and “Shriveled women” selling their wares” (Ibidem). Tara is an eye-witness to how the city which, after a span of seven years after of her absence, has become “restive” forcing “weak men to fanatical defiance or dishonesty” and losing its “memories in a bonfire of effigies, buses and trams” (9). While men outside Tara’s father’s house on Camac Street and his Barrackpore factory are “responding with threats or heroism to the sullenness of Calcutta”, her father, the Bengal tiger remains Jovial and impartial, absorbed in his duties, his business, and his charities” (Ibidem). Although “everything has gone down horribly” (41) in Calcutta, yet the beautiful world of fashion and high society acts as if “the real Calcutta, the thick
laughter of brutal men, open dustbins, warm and dark where carcasses were sometimes discarded, did not exit” (Ibidem). She finds to her amazement that Calcutta elite who formerly went through “their daily ritual of espresso tea” are now talking without conviction and are under siege from people who are full of passionate intensity, ready to mob and brutalize them. A couplet quoted from W.H. Davies’ poem on the occasion of a picnic arranged in Tara’s honor sums up perfectly the decadent atmosphere of the upper-class Calcutta: “What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stand and Stare”. This picnic was meant to assuage “their sense of panic, their racial and class fears” and to help them reconstruct another Calcutta they “longed to return to, more stable, less bitter” (98). Tara begins to feel that:

…the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed on by on. That it was fatal to fight for justice; that it was better to remain passive and absorb all shocks as they came; (131)

What a ghastly prospect, the “ugly decay” of Calcutta is being watched by Joyonto Roy Choudhury, the owner of tea estates in Assam, from his hotel perch: “sidewalks beneath growing restless with refugees from East Bengal and Tibet”; rioters becoming “insolent”: powerful landowners “first tormented and “later beheaded”: businessmen padlocking their “factories” and sneaking off “like ghosts to richer provinces”; and housewives crying at night, or retreating into screaming hate” (Daughter, 40). Calcutta is going to “the dogs”, to the “left-of-leftists”. It is going communist wherein leftist “goondahs” are ruling the roost. Pronob’s description of their nasty, destructive activities at his factory is sensational:
These goondahs surrounded us for eighteen hours. There was no food, no water, no nothing. When we tried to get water……. They sent in a coke bottle filled with…. (44)

In this city of Calcutta “gone to hell” now, the troubles is that “nasty things always happened to nice people” (179). Successive characters in this novel describe Calcutta as a hell on earth and Tara herself thinks of it as the “deadliest City” in the world where “alarm and impatience” is “equally useless” (168). Tara’s husband David Cartwright too concludes on the basis of Tara’s reports about the city and New Yorker’s Ved Mehta’s Journals on India that Calcutta is the “Collective future in which garbage, disease, and stagnation are man’s estate”.

The leitmotif used by Ms. Mukherjee in this novel is that of the return of its protagonist Tara Banerjee Cartwright home from a self – willed and self-imposed exile in an alien Country with the conclusion that expatriation is more desirable than what her native city Calcutta has become. Times Literary Supplement’s review of Tara’s predicament in “Oh Calcutta” needs to be quoted here: “Tara’s westernization has opened her eyes to gulf between the two worlds that still make India the despair of those who govern it” (736). It would also be germane to say about this novel that more or less, it deals exactly with what Rudyard Kipling said about Kimball O’Hara, an orphaned son of a sergeant in an Irish regiment, who spends his childhood as a vagabond in Lahore until he meets an old Lama from Tibet and accompanies him in his travels in KIM (1901): “He has lost his own country and has not acquired any other”. Tara Banerjee Cartwright’s personal experience as a woman caught between the two cultures Indian and American--- are Ms. Mukherjee own, she may or may not own up. In her interview with Sybil Steinberg in Publishers Weekly(46-47), she acknowledged that The Tiger’s Daughter is the:
Wisest of my novels in the sense I was between both worlds. I was detached enough from India so that I could look back with affection and irony, but I did not know America long enough to feel any conflict. I was like a bridge between two worlds.

This novel is a fine and vivid narration of the story of an Upper-class Bengali Brahmin girl Tara Banerjee who, like he author, goes to America for higher studies and returns home after seven years as Tara Banerjee Cartwright (Wife of David Cartwright) exactly as had Bharati Mukherjee returned to Calcutta seven years after having married to Clark Blaise. From the omniscient point of view the narrator of the story says that for Tara:

Vassar had been an almost unsalvageable mistake. If she had not been a Banerjee, a Bengali Brahmin, the great-granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee, or perhaps if she had not been trained by the good nuns at St. Blaise’s to remain composed and ladylike in all emergencies, she would have rushed home to India at the end of her first week. (10)

At St. Blaise’s Tara:

...had not been permitted to think about sex: love was all right if it could be linked to the poetry of Francis Thompson or Alice Meynell. But now [at Vassar], realizing the girls identified her with the population explosion, the loop, vasectomy in railway stations, she blossomed into a bedside intellectual. (11)

At a gathering of the Indian Students’ Association in New York, Tara Banerjee had met, in December of her first year abroad, a young man Manik (Mota) Mukherjee from Calcutta who was studying Political Science at Columbia and fancied herself being in love with him. Though “She did not confide in any one, not even in Camae Street girls who had seemed ghostly by December”, her father was “quick to detect her
concealed emotion” and knowing that she “had fallen in love” he wrote to her without “losing his temper”:

Remember love is nine-tenths prudence, one-tenth physical attraction. Don’t do anything foolish or rash. It is your happiness that I demand. Caste, class, and province are more valuable in marriage than giddiness. We do not approve of this young man, but we’re not there to guide you, Taramoni. It may be only fair to indicate to the young chap that we are modernized people, and do not believe in dowry system. (12-13)

Treating her as an adult, her father was “now frankly discussing dating and marriage with her”. His advice, falling on deaf years of Tara, was never “put to practical application” and before Tara “could pursue her fancies about being in love, Manilk (Mota) went to Sweden for a vacation and on his return did not once call her” (Ibidem). Seized by a “vision of terror” and suffering from “fainting spells, headaches and nightmares”, Tara began complaining of “homesickness” in letters to her mother who “promptly prayed to Kali to save Tara’s conscience, Chastity and Complexion on” (Ibidem). Seething with by terror in a “lonely room at Vassar”, Tara “made it her business to keep the young woman occupied all summer” (13-14) and after “two semesters of reading primly in library” left for Summer School in Madison where:

Within fifteen minutes of her arrival at the Greyhound bus station there, in her anxiety to find a Cab. She almost knocked down a young man. She did not know then that she eventually would marry that young man. But at that moment she merely said “Excuse me”, and continued to drag her offensive luggage toward the taxi stand. (Daughter, 14)

That young man she had knocked down unawares was David Cartwright whom she got married to and though afraid of the unknown
ways of America in the beginning trained to adjust herself thus by entering into the wedlock with him.

The Tiger’s Daughter consists of four parts. The narrative in the first part of the novel commences with CATELLI-CONTINENTAL HOTEL on Chowringhee Avenue, Calcutta and ends with Tara who amidst the scenes of violence and terror perpetrated by Naxalites remains:

…still locked in a car across the street from the CATELLI-CONTINENTAL wonders whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she did not, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely. (210)

In the first part of this novel, Tara, the great-granddaughter of Hari Lal Banerjee of Pachapara (now in Bangala Desh) she had never been to, is found ruminating, grieving, and reminiscing retrospectively about hundred years after 1879:

While sitting by a window in America to dream of Hari Lal, her great-grandfather, at the gulf that separated him from herself. But her dreams and her straining would yield a knowledge that was visionless. (9)

In the second part of the novel we see Tara at Bombay airport received and hugged by her relatives and introduced to little nephews as “the America Auntie” (17). Her Bombay relatives enquire the whereabouts of her husband David Cartwright who has not come with her exclaiming “How dare he not come” (Ibidem). They drive her past from the airport to their apartment at Marine Drive which now seemed to Tara run-down and crowded. Seven years earlier on her way to Vassar, she had admired the houses on Marine Drive, had thought them fashionable, but now their Shabbiness appalled her (18).
Before starting her journey home to Calcutta from Bombay the next evening she had presumed that after “years of airplanes and Greyhoundbuses” she would be “thrilled to travel in an Indian train”. But, to the contrary, she finds the train ride nauseating and depressing. While sitting in the “hostile compartment with two loathsome traveling companions---one Marwari businessman and the other Nepali----She frets about her husband David:

The Marwari was indeed very ugly and tiny and insolent. He reminded her of a circus animal who had gotten the better of her master. The Nepali was fidgety older man with coarse hair. He kept crossing and crossing his legs and pinching the creases of his pants. Both men, Tara decided, could effortlessly ruin her Journey to Calcutta. (20)

These two---- Marwari P.K. Tuntunwala and Nepali Ratan----by their silly talks and unsavory behavior towards her make her train journey hellish. As the darkness outside the window depends, Tara sinks into “Unhappy self-analysis”:

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 beggars 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 offense. (25)

Her journey from Bombay ends at Howrah Station where she is received by her family on the “crowded platform too noisy and filthy of course to allow her any insight into the world to which she had returned” (29).
Back home, enervated Tara rested “for a full forty-eight hours” in her “parent’s house on Camac Street designed to be restful” (30). Tara is now:

home in a class that lived by Victorian rules, Changed decisively by the exuberance of the Hindu imagination. Now she was in a city that took for granted most men were born to suffer, others to fall asleep during committee meetings of the Chamber of Commerce. She was among the ordinary and she felt rested. (34)

Tara feels grateful to call this “restful house home”:

After seven years abroad, after extraordinary turns of destiny that had swept her from Calcutta to Poughkeepsie, and Madison, and finally to a two-room apartment within walking distance of Columbia, strange turns that had taught her to worry over a dissertation on Katherine Mansfield, the plight of women and racial minorities. (33)

Hypnotized by her house on Camac Street, Tara begins to think of exotic New York not because it “had Laundromats and subways”, but because:

There were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels….. Because girls like her, at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. Students were rioting about campus recruiters and far-away wars rather than the price of rice or the stiffness of final exams. People were agitated over pollution. The only pollution she had been warned against in Calcutta had been caste pollution. New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair. (33-34)

Many parties, teas, and dinners are hosted in Tara’s honor only to convince her that “Calcutta could be as much fun as her New York or Madison” (Daughter 55). Featuring in the *Feminine weekly* and the
Ladies of Calcutta Journal, the motive of these dinners and parties is to bring it home to her that “city’s westernized high society” has fallen in “love with the Bengali young woman from the States” (Ibidem). Nevertheless, she remains to her friend Reena’s mother “Ione America-wali” (151). In the opinion of her friends, her marriage has been “imprudent” and that her sojourn “Seven years abroad” has “eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (Ibidem). Hated and detested by Bengali majority solely for having married a “Mlechchha”, David Cartwright, Tara feels that:

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. (62)

Back from her terribly depressing trip to the “Funeral ghats”, Tara happens to stand one afternoon in early June outside the Kapoor’s restaurant, deemed as the symbol of modern India, and thinks it “best to return to New York” since the “racial purists” of her community do not:

…approve of foreign marriage partners. So much for the glamour of her own marriage, she had expected admiration from them. She had wanted them to consider her marriage an emancipation gesture. But emancipation was suspicious---it presupposed bondage….. it had been foolish, she knew, to expect admiration. The years away from India had made her self-centered. (86)

In order to ward off her depression and keep her in good humor, a “smashing picnic” has been arranged by the end of the second part of the novel.

Major fleshed out characters who figure in the third part are millionaire P.K. Tuntunwala, with home Tara had traveled in train from Bombay to Calcutta, Tara’s friend Reena and her whimsical mother, an
Irish-American Washington MacDowel--- a negro belonging to the class of have-nots in America, Pronob, and Joyonto Roy Choudhury. P.K. Tuntunwala has been appraised by the assistant editor of the Calcutta Observer Sanjay Basu as an “Industrialist with spunk” (137). When Tara asks Tuntunwala to express his opinion on “refugees and love”, he responds with a show of arrogance: “Heart’s matters, Mrs. Cartwright, are for idiots and women. I do not knowingly stray into heart’s matters” (Daughter, 135). Supposed to have emerged recently as the strongest conservative candidate, a political rally is being staged to highlight his candidature in the forthcoming election. Sanjay Basu, who is covering this political rally for him for the Calcutta Observer presents the political profile of Tuntunwala in his editorial as:

…the hero of all heroes, the only savior who can pull us people out of the burning and monstrous mouth. If Calcutta were to be saved….then all other Candidates must fail. (133)

Sanjay Basu’s appraisal of Tuntunwala is just the converse of what he really is. It is Pronob who, laughing at Basu’s idea of Calcutta “nearing any violent Catastrophe,” presents the realistic profile of Tuntunwala as not a savior of Calcutta and its people but as “an opportunist and money-minded” man who:

…would charge too much. Look at the way he runs his factories and mills! Look at the way he slave-drives his workers! Of love he knows nothing; I can tell you he is a mistake. (Ibidem)

And as the reality about him is disclosed in the fourth part of the novel later, he proves to be not only a wily, a acquisitive, and selfish business man but also the lecherous seducer who Clutches Tara with his “sticky fingers” in the air –conditioned Marwari suit in the Nayapur
Guest house and lies that he is given to “unfortunate impulses”. He also intimidates her that she can’t surely break from him now. After his lecherous, sexual advances are repelled by Tara:

The Marwari sat on the arm of Tara’s sofa, looking most unhappy. Then slowly the disappointment paled and was succeeded by dull anger. “I thing you have no choice”, he said putting away the Jar of Vicks. (198)

As the omniscient narrator puts it:

In another Calcutta such a scene would not have happened. Tara would not have walked into a suit of a gentleman for medicine, and a gentleman would not have dared to make such improper suggestions 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. (199)

We also come to know through the Omniscient narrator that:

The Education of Tara had been tastefully executed by Tuntunwala, and the maid in the corridor remained ignorant of all untoward details. There were no apologies or recriminations. Tuntunwala assumed that “heart’s matters” were unimportant. He invited her to join him for tea, then went to the next room to confer with the serious men in dhoti who were planning his (election) campaign. Tara’s first reaction had been to complain to Sanjay and Pronob, to tell them Tuntunwala was a parasite who would survive only at their expense. (Ibidem)

But Tara’s outrage soon subsides “leaving a residue of unforgiving bitterness”, and she realizes that:

She could not share her knowledge of Tuntunwala with any of her friends. In a land where a friendly smile, an accidental brush of the fingers, can ignite rumors------even lawsuits------ how is one to speak of Mr. Tuntunwala’s
violence” The others would have to make their own compromises … Then, accompanied by the useless maid, she left immediately for Camac Street by train. (Ibidem)

We also come across a cross-cultural encounter with “a pale Londoner Mr. Worthington” who with “a slight trace of dandruff” prides in being “one of a new breed of British Council directors and sought opportunities to inform the Indians that he had gone to Essex rather than Oxford and Cambridge” (66). Essentially an innocent young man, he likes to “wear Indian dress on Sundays and eat curry with his fingers” (Ibidem), to sleep with his fiancée on “weekends”, and to enjoy “his own tolerance of such lasciviousness”. Addressing charming ladies and witty gentlemen, he says, “Perhaps by the end of the evening, if the motion wins, I shall be saying Bhai ebong or bhaioboheno” (67). Worthington’s, appearance in the novel, however, is minor as compared to Washington MacDowell’s. Of Irish-American descent, he is a Negro who belongs to the class of have-nots in America. He has come to Calcutta on an Indo-American exchange program He and Antonia Whitehead illustrate the extent of confusion created in the Contact Zones between American and Indian cultures. In Calcutta, he is supposed to stay in Tara’s friend Reena’s family. Reena’s family looks forward to his visit with excitement but is shocked to discover that the family would be hosting a black American aged sixteen and six foot seven inch tall-----“ a high school basketball star on a scholarship to Berkeley” (140). To the only question asked by Reena and her parents as to how does he like India, his response is that he “cannot take the heat” because back home in California “Everything was air-conditioned” (Ibidem). And, in response Reena’s mother’s question “what do you know of our Culture”, he says, “I knew an Indian cat in school used to groove on Ravi Shankar record, a little guy blacker than I am ----you know him?”(140-41). Assistant editor of
the *Calcutta Observer* Sanjay Basu feels betrayed by this black visitor’s shallow query—“Don’t people here use any deodorants?” (148). Reena answers him back by saying:

We don’t need deodorants, Washington. We people take three baths a day. We leave scents and deodorants to European”. (Ibidem)

MacDowell turns out to be a Black Panther who soon deserts his affluent hosts and takes up the cause of Calcutta’s Naxal rebels. His sympathies are “probably with the goondahs”:

It would be impossible to explain to Reena that Washington MacDowell was the other side, that when he returned to Watts he would make fun of Camac Street girls like Reena, that one day at Berkeley perhaps he too would slash cars and riot (146).

Reena’s mother suspects “hanky-panky business” between her daughter and MacDowell and dismayed takes him to be “a traitor”, a *persona non grata* in the family because he has joined the bullies, the boys who “at the coffee shop” talk about “pickets and things” (154). When she finds that her daughter Reena is missing MacDowel because of his being lost to rowdy, unruly “Students”, she explains to Reena that young MacDowell:

...had been one of the others from the beginning. Only his slogan, his outlandish appearance, his outlandish appearance, his knowledge of music had deceived Reena. She tried to soften things for her friend. In America a girl like you and a boy like MacDowell would never have met--so it’s. Natural that he’s gone away. (Ibidem)
The third part ends with the Omniscient narrator’s comment that:

the visit of Washington MacDowell left other permanent scars on Camac Street. The residents were pained by MacDowell’s easy desertion …. Only Tara insisted it had not been thoughtless, it had been inevitable, a minimal act of gratitude from the other side. (Ibidem)

Antonia White is another minor Character who figures in the fourth part of the novel. She is a big redhead character who represents American Culture and is out on a “mission” to save the Third world. Bumbling her way through India, she is the cynosure of the cynical and impassioned editorial by Tara’s Journalist friend Sanjay Basu:

It has been said that she is really a blessing in disguise, that she is a missionary defrocked, that she is Deepak Ghose’s special lady friend. But I say … she is dangerous. She is like a snake tightly coiled …. She spreads further discontent. She talks in shambazar of “democratization” and “politicization”, of parity and socioeconomic balance. But I urge you… Calcattians to throw out this perilous lady before it is too late (164-65).

Although Tara knows that Antonia is just as she was in her first few weeks in this trip home—“impatient, menacing and equally innocent” (166)—she is aware that the white American girl is destined to create much confusion during her stay in India. But since Tara has learned earlier that “it was impossible to be a bridge for anyone” since “bridges had a way of cluttering up the landscape” (144), she lets Antonia bumbles her way through India and be misconstrued by the Indians with whom she comes in Contact.

Fakrul Alam has it in his Bharati Mukherjee that “by suggestion the difficulties of passages in and out of India and by pointing at bridges that cannot be built between cultures, Mukherjee is, of course, alluding to
E.M. Forster’s classic novel *A Passage to India* she had set out in *The Tiger’s Daughters* to deliberately mimic and subvert”(24). As revealed by her in her 1990 interview (24), the swimming pool scene in her novel is based on Forster’s Mau tank episode ----only in *The Tiger’s Daughter* there is no “regeneration” to be had from the swimming pool since ennui will continue to be the dominant emotion of its users (1990 interview,24). Mukherjee also noted that her novel has “a rather British feel to it” because of her use of the omniscient point of view and irony in the manner of Jane Austen, Dickens, and Forster. Her “comic vision”, as felt by her, puts *The Tiger’s Daughter* in the British tradition, because “most of the characters, even when they are caught in ghastly situations, acquaint themselves in amusing ways” (1987 interview, 43). Another scene that appears to echo an episode from Forster’s novel is Tara’s visit to the slum that has grown up on Joyonto’s estate where Tara loses her composure because when a little girl with sores on her legs screams at her she is reacting just as Adela Quested did in the Marbar Cave episode of Forster’s novel.

Bharati Mukherjee has also affected a kind of cultural innovation which is an innovative set of useful social behavior adopted by people and passed on to other in this novel. Apart from Antonia Whitehead who is here in India because “India needs help” and her special mission is to rouse the “third world” to “help itself” (166) and who like Washington MacDowell would supply Tara’s friend Reena with phrases “you poor Silly-Billy fusspot” (Ibidem). There are two other peripheral characters in this novel-----Carefree Kevin, “a pole in Colombo turning on hundreds of St. Blaise’s girls (Daughter, 59) and Victoria Fernandez, an Anglo-Indian dancer whom we see in the Kinchen Janga Miss Himalaya Pan-Hill-Station Deluxe Beauty Queen Contest in Darjeeling (185). The prettiest
of the Anglo-Indian girls at the dance, she is, in the “cross-cultural eyes” of the audience “a dream made flesh”. Though she possesses qualities that may generally be rewarded in beauty contests---- prettiness, gracefulness, ambition, and sportiveness---she somehow “was not destined to win” the Beauty contest that night (188). Turning evil the evening deepens the “audience’s capacity for shock” and increases “Antonia whitehead’s playfulness”:

She strode to the centre of the hall, laughing and unzipping her dress as she went, then let it fall in a loop around her sandals till she was revealed to the world in her body stocking: an immense column of white flesh ... blended with the vision of an almost naked Miss Whitehead. (Ibidem)

Ms. Mukherjee’s characters may be “fleshed out abstractions”, but her descriptions of Calcutta scenes are quit realistic, as is the episode set in the West Bengal hill Station of Darjeeling. She has also alluded in it to Chekhov’s “Yearning for Moscow but staying” (45) for underscoring Tara’s consideration of the plight of the Upper-Class Bengalis of Calcutta facing the breakdown of law and order activated by Naxal movement on the one hand, and their usurpation by the business-minded Marwaris of Western India, on the other. Reference to Eliot’s “After such knowledge, what forgiveness?” from “Gerontion” has been given at the end of the novel (209) through Joyonto Roy Chowdhury who, like Eliot’s character “An old man in a draughty house/under a windy knob”, is waiting for apocalypse as a witness to the violent passing of a cycle of Bengali history. The allusion to Rupert Brooke’s lines from “The Soldier”---- “If I should die, think only this of me/ That there is some corner of a foreign field/That is forever”---- has also been given much earlier in the novel by Joyonto Roy Chowdhury himself in order to single out Tara as the repository of the values of high Culture associated with Bengal
renaissance at least abroad in America because those who have chosen to stay back in Calcutta are doomed. The drift of another reference to the line of verse from Eliot’s *The Waste Land* by Joyonto- “Dear Madam, You I shored against my ruins” (209)-- is that though he will die, yet those values of high Bengali Culture will remain preserved in Tara’s life overseas. *The Tiger’s Daughter* has benefited, too, from its tightly knit structure. It ends as it began- Just outside the 4 Catelli-Continental Hotel. This hotel, once the symbol of Calcutta’s preeminence in India and already decrepit in the opening episode, is under siege in the concluding chapter. The novel ends in medias res, in the midst of violence, bouncing off “banners”, and “picket signs” with:

Tara, still locked in a car across the street from the street from the Catelli-continental, wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta, and if she didn’t, whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely. (Daughter, 210)

The final scene has charted a further step downwards in the fortunes of the city.

Ms. Mukherjee’s *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) written in Collaboration with her husband Clark Blaise is to be seen as a sequel to *The Tiger’s Daughter* and complementary to *Wife*. It makes for the Indian context of both of these works. A product of the Sabbatical year when the couple spent in India in 1973-74 and passed some more time in India in 1976-77, it “assumes special significance when considered as an indispensable part of Mukherjee’s oeuvre and integral to her developing vision of her status as an expatriate writer” (26). Ms. Mukherjee’s chapters in it concentrate mostly on the lives of the upper-middle- class women of the city with whom she had gone to school and on her discovery that there was a gulf that separated her now from them.
In her interview with Geoff Hancock in *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, Ms. Mukherjee revealed that her putative book about these women “ended up” in an “accidental autobiography” (1987 interview 36). During the year she spent with her husband in Calcutta, she had felt traumatized. In her interview to *IOWA Review* (15) in 1990, she realized that for all the trouble she was going through in Canada, “it was still the new world” that she wanted to live in, and that the “old world was dead” for her (1990 interview 15). Ms. Mukherjee has recapitulated the changed socio-economic and political scenario of Calcutta in it in terms of the joint family system being on the verge of collapse, Calcutta’s upper-class having become much more security conscious with the Naxalite revolution just behind them, the economic and political situation getting from bad to worse, and Calcutta’s having become obsessed with the idea of survival to the extent that nothing could be taken for granted anymore. Even a visit to the exclusive Calcutta Turf Club on a beautiful day can turn out without warning into an encounter with a mob, ready to riot and destroy. It is especially in this respect that *Days and Nights in Calcutta*’s is complementary to and reminiscent of the volatile events and situations described in *The Tiger’s Daughter*.

Divided into two parts that is into Blaise’s and Mukherjee’s parts, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*’s latter part devotes considerable space to individual case studies of a few upper and upper-middle-class women of Calcutta. It records Meena’s experience of class warfare, Anjali’s admonition of their way of life dying and the “marvelously elastic and open and friendly” society was changing into “Simultaneously rigid, hierarchical, and exclusive” (212), and the wife of a rich Marwari businessmen educated in the United States Meena’s struggle with their community’s code dictating that a woman should not study because “education gets in the way of husband worship” (266).
Meena’s defiance of her-in-laws for becoming a writer and her determination to do something drastic to break out of the mold for Marwari women had made Ms. Mukherjee cry and the anger that it had roused happened to shape her novel Wife where in the protagonist Dimple Dasgupta ultimately fails to contain her violent feelings against her husband and ends up killing him.

Ms. Mukherjee’s anticipation of her easy acceptability by Calcutta or of her reentry into the world she had left behind without posing any problem turns to sour end. Even her husband Clark Blaise admits that the Diaspora moves of Mukherjee girls had made them lose “their place in the joint family that is India” (57) and that his wife Ms. Mukherjee in particular had become “an outsider because of her marriage, her residence, and especially her choice of English as an artistic language (115). Before coming to India, Ms. Mukherjee had apprehended that her “Indianness is fragile” and that her “decades-long use of English as a first language had cut” her off from her own country (170). Although she strives to re-root herself in Calcutta by immersing herself in the social life of the city, everywhere she goes and everything that she observes reminds her of her alienation from Calcuttans, even from her kiths and kins. It is in this respect that Days and Nights in Calcutta is complementary to The Tiger’s Daughter as well.

Ms. Mukherjee happens to realize that despite her efforts to reconnect herself with her friends and family, she is not acceptable within their midst without reservation. She knew that in Montreal she was of course seen by others as “a brown woman in a white society, different, perhaps even special, but definitely not a part of the majority” (179), but in Calcutta she finds herself “an intimidating alien” to even her female relatives because of the way she argued in her American accent with
“male relative about tax breaks and inflation” and the way she was not prepared to defer to men they considered holy (225). She even feels at times that she is considered a little bizarre by some people in Calcutta.

Ms. Mukherjee declares at the end of the year spent in the city that she was glad to leave India and ready to view herself henceforth as an immigrant and not as an exile and that India would no longer be for her “a talisman” enabling her to survive in Canada as an exile (284). She reaches to the conclusion that with this trip to India she had crossed her Rubicon and from now on it would be for her “Just another Asian Country”, and that she would be in it only as “another knowledgeable but desolate tourist” (285) It is also from now on that she would stop thinking of herself as an Indian woman writer living in self-imposed exile in the West and writing as an expatriate writer and further that no longer would she attempt to create a “Chekhovian image of India” as she had done in The Tiger’s Daughter. She decides to find her own voice even if she has to model it, of necessity, on that of the “accidental tourist” V.S. Naipaul who “has written most movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and exile, of ‘Third World art’ and exile among the former colonizers; the tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home” (287).

Ms. Mukherjee attempts to unite in the concluding paragraph of her portion of Days and Nights in Calcutta the two subjects that are the lot of Indian women and the developing vision of her own self. Pramila Venkateswaran has aptly identified the uniqueness about Days and Nights in Calcutta in terms of its being a work “Created at the intersection of cultures, of Postcolonial and ‘free’ worlds, of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, of East and West” and that it “occupies the indeterminate area…between self-writing and cultural anamnesis” (Venkateswaran 23)
Ms. Mukherjee had to write this book to discover the very Kernel of her thought it and that is “what she wanted really to be was a writer not writing about exiles but about expatriates and immigrants” (Alam 33).

**Wife:**

During the Sabbatical year Ms. Mukherjee and her husband Clark Blaise were spending in Calcutta in 1974, a visiting Columbia University professor had asked Ms. Mukherjee, “What do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one?” (Days 212). As it had transpired to the couples, a young Bengali girl had very few options except getting married, and that if the marriage arranged by her parents eventually failed she had little prospect of looking forward to. Blaise’s view expressed in his section of *Days and Nights in Calcutta* is that the young girl “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 gestures towards self-expression”. In his opinion *Wife* is “about such a girl ... whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed into the madness of emigration to New York into murder” (Days 141). In her won section of *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Ms. Mukherjee’s express opinion about *Wife* is that it is about “a young Bengali Wife who was sensitive enough to feel the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and break out” (Days 268). Quoting Ms. Mukherjee’s admission in her 1990 *Iowa Review* interview of *Wife* as being “a very painful book” for her to write (23), Fakarul Alam in *Bharti Mukherjee* has construed that “Mukherjee’s anger at the predicament of Bengali wives in Calcutta merged with her own frustrations as an Indian immigrant in an intolerant Canada to give *Wife* the feel of a book bred in bitterness and tinged with violence (38). Alam’s perceptive and discerning chapter “The Aloofness of Expatriation” in *Bharti Mukherjee* begins with the investigation of the themes of *Wife*:
…its major theme- the plight of an Indian wife is the need of self-expression. Another theme of the novel is her predicament as an Indian immigrant wife in North America, since she can neither connect with the people around her nor give a expression to her feeling of rage at her old life. Moreover, the novel tracks the violence building up inside and all around her in North American landscape until she is driven to murder her husband. (37-38)

It needs must be said here that the converse of such a claim made on and about this wounding novel and its protagonist Dimple is true. A Claim countering it may be corroborated by taking into account the clear picture of the typical protagonist Dimple Dasgupta, presented in the first thirteen pages of the novel before her marriage to the mechanical engineer Amit Basu. Omniscent narrative apprises us in unequivocal terms that the high-tension daughter of an electrical engineer Mr. Dasgupta who called himself a “high-tension man” , Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marring a neurosurgeon” (Wife, 3). She had wanted “a different kind of life” ---- an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for Nylon Saris” and fantasized that marriage would bring her “freedom” and “love” (Ibidem). She had thought of:

…premarital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living. Years of waiting already made her nervous, unnaturally prone to colds, coughs and headaches. Wasted years---- she was twenty –lay like a chill weight in her body, giving her eyes a watchful squint and her spine a slight curve. (Ibidem)

The weeks and months that slipped by and two weddings that had taken place farther down the block worried her. She worried that she was ugly and had “sitar-shaped body and rudimentary breasts”(Wife, 4). Moreover she also thought of: “breasts as heaving destinies of their own, ruining marriages or making fortunes”---- “In her despair took to reading
ads in women’s magazines and buying skin whiteners and an isometric exerciser. The girls in the ads were her friends. Like her, they suffered and wept, even if they were fair and busty (Ibidem).

Unable to “breathe” or “talk”, she was “rushed to the hospital with a sharp pain in her chest” but “when the doctor asked her to show him where exactly she hurt, she could not locate it” (Wife, 5). And when, during the night in the hospital she heard “a burn victim scream (A human torch!” the nurse said. “Would you believe it, she set fire to herself!”) She envied that woman”(6). Her central concern was her marriage, and therefore she hated “the endless waiting”. Being eluded by love’s “precise description, she was sure that “love” would become magically lucid on her Wedding day” (9).

While memorizing passages from Gandhi’s The Doctrine of Passive Resistance, she had thought:

...not of freedom fighters and fasting armies led by a balding, bespectacled old man but of herself at some future date a good wife, a docile wife conquering the husband-enemy by withholding affection and other tactics of domestic passive resistance. (Ibidem)

Presumptions of a B.A. first year student were that “without a B.A. degree she’d never get a decent husband” (Ibidem) and that “All the handsome young engineers would be married by the time she got a degree” worried her even more (10).

While studying for her exams, she wrote “a letter on pink notepaper” to MISS PROBLEM-WALLA, C/O EVE’S BEAUTY BASKET, BOMBAY-1 about how a “young woman of twenty with wheatish complexion” she suffered from:
...just one annoying flea in my ointment. The flea is my flat chest. As I am sure you realize, this defect will adversely affect my chances of securing an ideal husband and will sorely vex the prowess of even the shrewdest match-makers in this great nation. Therefore I’m sure you will agree it is imperative that I do something about my problem and enhance my figure to the best of my ability .... I am desperate, almost suicidal. I see life slamming its doors in my face. I want to live. (10-11)

On dark September nights in Rash Behari Avenue she invented “desperate schemes” such as “Cosmetic surgery in the West! Transplant Nearly Human Cones on offensively Flat Flesh!” and looking “in the bathrooms for her father’s razor blades” she “thought of death” (11). “Erotic fantasies began to sneak into her mind” and her heart “grew vulnerable and paper-thin, transparent as butter-flies’ wings”. She hallucinated at night and sometimes when she entered the bathroom in the dark “the toilet seat twitched like a Coiled Snake” (12). Since marriage was her idée fix, she was sure that it “would free her, fill her with passion and being discreet and virgin she waited for real life to begin” (13). She confided her friend Pixie that she indulged in “sexual fantasies” (Ibidem). It is at this point of narrative in the novel that her father announces that he had found his “ideal boy” – the groom Amit Kumar Basu aged twenty-nine for Dimple (14).

The first evening after their “perfect wedding ceremony” (13), we see her sitting with her husband Amit on an low, wide bed in the Basu’s flat on Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road and listening to him “talk about cricket” and his immigration to “Kenya, Canada, or the U.S.A. that was likely to “come through any day”. (17):

Thoughts of living in Africa or North America terrified her. She wanted to know how long they would stay, but she didn’t know quite how to ask it without revealing her fear. (Ibidem)
The dictionary meaning of the word “dimple” - “slight surface depression” - applied to Dimple by Ms. Mukherjee has ironic implication in the sense that there is a broader surface depression in her over-all character. Not liking Dimple’s name, Amit’s mother gives her a new nomenclature “Nandini” which she (as confide to her friend Pixie) “Just does not suit” her (18). Amit’s proposition to call her “Nandini” instead of “Dimple” on the rationale of “what’s in a name” is countered by Dimple’s ironical “Everything” (Ibidem). One evening Amit takes her to kwality’s restaurant where:

She ate large spoonfuls of fried rice and worried about the most discreet way of eating chili chicken. It was difficult to tackle the small pieces with knife and fork, but eating with her fingers, Bengali-style, in a restaurant, seemed terribly uncouth. He should have taken her to Trinca’s on Park Street, where she could have listened to a Goan band play American music, to prepare her for the trip to New York or Toronto or the discotheque in the Park Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle (21).

When Amit is not at home, she tries to “Speak their filmi language” “Arre yaar, this Mitu is such a yummy lovey-dovey pie, I want to bite a piece of him off” (23). And when Amit is away, any face in a magazine is a “fair game” to fidgety Dimple:

She borrowed a forehead from an aspurn 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 and herself in a restaurant on Park-Street or by the side of a pool at a five-star hotel. (Ibidem)
She had her “first convulsion of regret” for not having taken the “University exams” (24). She “hated the lakes, thought of them as death, as calm warm water closing over wasted bodies” (29), and sometimes:

Under the cover of her loose sari, she gave vicious squeezes to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding .... she had begun to vomit, not just in the mornings as she thought pregnant woman did, but at all hours of the day and night, whenever she thought no one was watching .... her fingers deep inside her mouth, once jabbing a squishy organ she supposed was her tonsil, and drew the finger in and out in smooth washer tonsil, and drew the finger in and out in smooth hard strokes until she collapsed with vomiting. Later, when the spasms subsided, she realized she enjoyed the sensation or vomiting, the tightening in the gut, the wild expulsion from the belly (30-31).

She thought of:

...the ways to get rid of... whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes. Her insides were like a clogged drain. She would pour some cleaning powder down her throat .... she spent her time cataloguing ways to rid herself of it .... she had thought bitterly that no one had consulted her before depositing it in her body. Or was it her fault? She was probably more fertile than others, and there was that poor village woman rendered roofless because of her infertility. Life was too unjust (31-32).

Thrilled with joy Basu family “looked on the unborn son as communal property” and, therefore, “solicitous of her health” forbade her
to “carry heavy pails of water to the bathroom or the kitchen” or “trip on dark staircases” (33). But capricious Dimple:

...hated all the Basus; her body swelled violently with unvented hate. In her daydreams, neurosurgeons gave way to sinister abortionists, men with broken teeth and dirty fingers, who dug into her body in a dark, suburban garage (Wife, 33).

A woman transformed. She chases a mice to the bathroom and in “an outburst of hatred, her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury” smashes the top of its “small gray head” (35). Henceforth, she hurtles forward by a violent impact in her behavior. She tells Amit that as a little girl she had pulled a snake by its tail “straight out of its hole” and at the age of two and a half had “wrestled with a python” (39).

She begins to think of the fetus she has conceived as an “unfinished business” because it “cluttered up the preparation for going abroad “and, moreover, “she did not want to carry any relic from her old life” (42). And therefore 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 collapsed. (Ibidem)

The first part to the novel ends with the tea party organized by her friend Pixie before her departure with her husband Amit to the U.S. the next day. While everyone at the tea party laughed and smiled, to Dimple:

Real happiness was in the movies or in the west. She felt a sudden panic that, just as she was being introduced to happy people, she was being taken away again to become a resident alien {in the U.S.} (47).
The second part of the novel begins with Amit and Dimple being received by Amit’s IIT Kharagpur alumnus Jyoti Sen at Kennedy airport. While he is driving them away home from the airport, they are apprised by him of “news about triple murder in Queens, something he had heard on the car radio on the way to the airport”:

Jesus Christ, man, in a soda fountain! Can you beat that? Some guy came in and asked for a chocolate ice-cream cone and the guy said he only had vanilla and strawberry, So he took out a gun and shot him and two other customers! Christ, nothing’s sacred anymore. I tell Meena not to go out unless she absolutely has to...” (51-52).

Jyoti Sen further tells them that “Here, if you honk your horn at some guy, he is likely to blow your head off” (Ibidem). Dimple who is already violence-prone is thus being to introduce the insidious violence American culture is infested with. Meena Sen, Jyoti Sen’s wife, tells Dimple about women who have been mugged in the basement of “this building” by American “goondahs” Who are crazy because of the “rare beef they eat” (70). “Dimple had never seen television” (54) and “vacuum cleaner before she came over” to America (72). In the process of learning the details of American home life, everything Dimple:

Saw on TV was about love; even murder and death were gone awry. But all she read in the newspapers was about death, the scary, ugly kind of death, random and poorly timed. Dimple much preferred to watch TV than read (73).

And add to that:

The women on television led complicated lives, became pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances murdered or were murdered, were brought to trial and release; they suffered through the Ping-Ping volley of their fates with courage (Ibidem).
Dimple wonders “why all Jyoti Sen’s conversations led back to violence, muggings, rape and murder” (85). Though remote and exotic they were, even a little exciting on TV, but when Jyoti described them they became “ugly and accessible”. We hear Jyoti Sen speaking about the problem of violence in querulous voice: “The gun is the whole problem. There is no need to go any further. It is only the gun we have to eliminate (Ibidem). He is heard talking again though very casually about a murder in Nevada or Nebraska.

As the omniscient voice has it:

Talking about murders in America was like talking about the weather, and she was glad that an elderly couple had been fatally shot on a fishing trip so that she did not have to feel guilty about Amit (99).

To be shot is “bearable to Jyoti” but to be “dismembered after being shot” is what “really gets”(upsets) him (Ibidem).

Dimple wondered if minor irritations accumulated over decades could erupt into the kind of violence she read about in the papers (88).

It is through Sens that Amit and Dimple are introduced to people of Indian Diaspora. Punjabi Vinod Khannna had came over as student and after doing a business degree at New York University has opened an import-export business, and is doing very well with three boutiques in the village. Apart from Kiran Mehra’s, the names of Mullicks ----Bijoy Mullick and his wife Ina Mullick whos is “more American than the Americans” also figure in the novel (68). In a Mullick wears “white pants” and a “white shirt”, Chain-smokes, loves to “Show off” and meets “bad types” (74). Among Bengalis, there is one Miss Chakravorty, a physics student at Columbia. She “goes out with any and everyone, even
Africans!” (62). Mrs. Bhattacharya from New Jersey has been living in the States for more than sixteen years. Pradosh Mukherjee, a Yale student is teaching at New York University. He has married an American memsahib Marsha Mukherjee nee Glasser, an Associate Professor of Semitic studies. Mr. Desai is also there from Gujarat in addition to some unnamed South Indians among lots of Indian immigrants inhabiting the Indian ghettos.

Marking the cultural difference of Americans from that of the Indians, Meena Sen posits that “They bathe only once a week. Rest of the week they just take two-minute showers and use a lot of perfume” (Ibidem), and that the people in California eat “vine-ripened tomatoes for breakfast” and are so impatient that a “woman divorced her husband because he snored” (86). To her dismay, Dimple learns that for cultural exchanges:

Hindi films were sometimes shown in high-school auditoriums in Queens by the Indo- American Society, on Saturday night or Sunday mornings. Bengali films were intellectual and played for the college students …. But here his [Satyajit Ray’s] films were too sad (66).

A magazine ad in italics is found expressive of the salient feature of American culture:

Express yourself in your surroundings. Discover your own grand passion and indulge it to excess. Then simplify the rest, throw out, be ruthless. That’s the secret to happiness” (87).

Towards the end of the second part, we find Dimple striding in the direction charted by the pseudo postulates of American culture:

Dimple’s belief that her husband Amit, still Jobless in the States, “wasn’t a man at all” (102) add to her bitterness even more:
marriage had betrayed her, had not provided all the glittery things she had imagined, had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies and three A.M. drives to dingy restaurants where they sold divine kababs rolled in roti (101-02).

And, therefore, between three and four in one consequential morning Dimple thinks 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 before and after type of TV commercial (102).

The third part of the novel begins with Dimple feelings “like a star, collapsing inwardly” (109). Amit “had failed to feed her fantasy life “and he was merely the provider of small material things” (113). She had expected pain when she had come to America but she had “not expected her mind to be strained like this, beyond endurance. She had “not anticipated inertia, exhaustion, endless indecisiveness”(115). Setting fire to a sari had been one of the seven types of suicide that she had recently imagined. Kerosene stoves and electric ranges being equally dangerous, Amit admonishes her never to “wear anything but cotton saris while cooking” since “synthetic fibers are dangerous”(116). She does not like the thought of Amit “prying the details of suicide out of her” (Ibidem).

She begins to feel violence “right, even decent” and darkness “unbearably exciting, taut with angry premonitions, promises”:

He own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne...with a viciousness she thought inappropriate to her wifely status, she said ‘I’ll wear synthetic saris if I want to! I’ll wear any goddamn thing I want to, so there! (117).
Her thoughts center endlessly on death, dying and dismemberment. Feeling more and more alienated from her surroundings, she thinks of being a pitiful immigrant among demanding appliances” (186). A “dying bonfire” happens to be her “visual image of life” (119). She feels sad to think how her marriage has cut off “glittery alternatives” and that “If fate had assigned her not Amit but some other engineer, she might have been a very different kind of person” (126). She shuns discussing her “dreams with anyone”, feels disturbed by “silence”, and “of all fatal diseases” leukemia is the “most glamorous” disease she wishes to catch (128). She likes to be seduced by Marsha’s brother Milt Glasser and equates him with “America” (174). Milt is the only person she can talk to. Drifting away from her wifely moorings, she has become fidgety, frivolous and fallen easy prey to female brandishing. A day-dreamer, she keeps her feelings under suppression and eats her heart out for no definable rhyme or reason. Television has taught her to “cope with life’s real problems” but the “imaginary ills” she suffers from is “impossible to treat” and therefore she happens to have turned “moody and lightheaded” (Wife, 205). Neurotic, psychotic, manic-depressive, schizophrenic, and self-willed, she displays arbitrary conduct with no restraint. Having an ingrained tendency to veer away from reality, she has also become a victim of fi fe fo fom which is expressive of blood thirstiness or murderous intent. She “creates moments of death” (153) and thinks of “two more ways to die” (Ibidem), in addition to her contemplation of “nine ways to die” – “Drano she thought; garbage bag; set fire to sari made of synthetic fiber; head in oven; nick wrist with broken glass in a sink full of scalding dishwater: starve; fall on bread knife while thinking of Japanese samurai revivals” (154). Psychosomatic signs and symptoms before and after her marriage are indicative, with the benefit of hindsight, of something untoward that ultimately happens----her husband’s murder.
by herself. She places Amit’s pillow over her eyes and chants her “nine ways to die”, the tenth one still eluding her (177). She confesses to be “terrible in crises” (204) and, in selfsame manner, in a feat of murderous frenzy stabs Amit seven times with a kitchen knife “redder than it had ever been” each time a little harder assuming that “women on television got away with murder” (213). She is not a victim of culture shock, as Amit happens to think of. He asks her as to why she didn’t tell him that she was unhappy:

...she should have unburdened her worries to him and he would have explained her it was culture shock and that culture shock happened all the time to Indian wives; it wasn’t a serious thing and it certainly wasn’t one of those famous “breakdowns” that American wives were fond of having. (180)

She is rather a pathological psychopath who deserves only scathing incrimination, not auctorial sympathy as Ms. Mukherjee happens to have in her interview. Ms. Mukherjee’s claim in her 1990 Iowa Review (20) that “self-oriented questions Dimple asks herself: Am I happy? Am I unhappy? Is indicative of her progress towards self-realization” does not seem to have a sound basis. Conversely, it is indicative of her self-meandering and self-destructive drive.

Tightly structured and poignantly textured, the second novel by Bharati Mukherjee Wife deals with its protagonist Dimple Dasgupta—a middle-class girl -----who gets married to an engineer Amit Basu and goes with him, without a degree and with interests limited only to cooking and reading film magazines, to New York to find herself at a loss in the fast, strange world there -----“a pitiful immigrant among demanding appliances” (186).
Tribune’s observation about *Wife* that it “deals with the culture shock a timid Calcutta woman undergoes in New York” is based on the following perception of Amit about Dimple:

Instead of trying to work things out for herself on the cold park bench and almost freezing to death … she should have unburdened her worries to him and he would have explained that it was culture shock and that culture shock happened all the time to Indian wives; it wasn’t serious this and it certainly wasn’t one of those famous “breakdowns” that American wives were fond of having (180).

Tribune’s observation that though this “culture shock” keeps happening all the time to Indian wives, “Dimple’s case turns out to be curable” does not hold its ground for the reason that she is genetically an incurable case is explicit in the novel from the beginning to end. Her problems lie within, not without, herself as she struggles for the articulation of her stifled desires and smothered voice. It the lexical implication of hers name “Dimple” be “Slight surface depression”, the flawed beauty of Dimple Dasgupta is symbolic very much of the depression within her psyche. This irrelevant depression is borne out by her irritable response to that thing around her. She hates “lakes” because she thinks of them as “death” (wife, 29); her name “Nandini” suggested by her mother-in-low does not suit her (18); she thinks of “sleeping bodies as corpses” (97); her own seems “curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless almost airborne (117); she suffers “insomnia” (185); and, she has nightmares of violence, of suicide, of death, and sensation of being raped and killed in her flat. She is psychotic, neurotic, and schizophrenic all at the same time. She may be a case of cultural disorientation, and displacement but only partly. Her problems are sui generis who there in India or in New York (America).
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------------- *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. With Clark Blaise.


