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Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*: Immigrant Isolationist's Struggle for Survival

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Bharati Mukherjee's second novel and a finalist for Governor General's Award, *Wife* (1975) takes up a complex dimension of the theme of cross-cultural meaning of immigrant experience. It centers on the life of a middle class married Bengali woman who migrates from Calcutta to New York. After a ten-year sojourn in Canada Mukherjee returned to her native country in 1973 and encountered an India which she had never anticipated, a world far less innocent than the one she remembered.

Wife is about such a girl whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed in her madness of migration to New York into murder.¹ In this novel Mukherjee shows how in the New World, effort to sustain the conscious difference between American and Indian components of her life ultimately ravage and destroy Dimple. She is in fact a dynamic metaphor of dislocation, for whom margin and border holds no existential meaning. In *Wife* Mukherjee also has incorporated her own frustration as an Indian settler in Canada before assimilating into the American mainstream. Even though the setting of *Wife* is New York, in the mind of the author it is probably Toronto. In Dimple, Holzer says: 'Mukherjee articulates an instructive admonition about the relevance of psychological transformation, beyond the immigrant isolationist's struggle for survival, through adaptation to new surroundings and to the ways of the dominant American culture.'² In the new cultural mosaic the quest of the third world immigrants demands readiness to accept hybridity and translation. Mukherjee insists on this quest to substantiate their reality as *hybrid signifier*³ in America and embrace the transplantation as a necessary precondition of survival.

Dimple, the woman protagonist in *Wife*, stands at the transit point of culture, confused between her Indianness and the transplantation; she is skeptical about traditional values and vapid social norms but she is unable to negotiate the need of the crude transnational norms which demand both exclusion and merger. Her inability to deal with the pangs of displacement results in violence, both psychic and physical. In India, unhappy wives commit suicide; Dimple asserts herself by committing murder, not suicide.

In Indian context, a woman is better suited for adapting herself to another culture, because she has to undergo a process of 'othering' in her own culture. She has experiences marginalization and discrimination right from her birth. Moreover, she experiences the process of 'dislocation' and relocation in her own culture as a woman. She is displaced at every stage of her life. Initially, she is housed in her parents' place; after marriage, she is relocated in her in-laws' place; in old age she is re-housed in her children's place.

Despite such expected built-in adaptability in Dimple's self, and exposure to dislocation in her life in India, she fumbles a lot in the United States and turns violent. The madness is both psychic and cultural, being put in a new location in the New World. She is trapped in a space where, on the one hand, she needs to repress the traces of her Indianness if she hopes to fit in the location, and on the other hand, she has to negotiate the wrecked promises of a liberated world which however discards her. In Dimple her

madness, her inability to translate is coterminous with her expatriate status. The novelist locates Dimple perfectly in an American situation and describes her 'unspeakable failings':⁴

She has expected pain when she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any new beginning, and in the sweet structures of that new life had allotted pain a special place. But she had not expected her mind to be strained like this, beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia, exhaustion, endless indecisiveness.⁵

For Mukherjee, a stronger assimilative culture requires the transparent assimilation of cross-cultural components. In her novels, Mukherjee seems to assert the need to go to the history of America which had multicultural and multi-racial origin. She positions her protagonists in the same multicultural mosaic of America at the backdrop of liberal American multicultural rhetoric, revealing its space with gaps and fissures.

Dimple, the protagonist of Mukherjee's *Wife*, migrates to the cultural mosaic of the United States with her husband Amit, an engineer from IIT, Kharagpur. While Amit is engrossed in amassing money like every other Indian expatriate in the novel, Dimple is in pursuit of happiness and independence. Since Dimple enters the United States abruptly, without any mental preparation, the shock is too much for her. She is far from the unitary sign of traditional human culture and familiar signification. She has difficulties in understanding the cultural codes of the country, its representations of difference and apparently narcissistic dynamics. She does not want to turn to the Indian 'expatriates' living in the United States for emotional support as she understands the inadequacies of their style of life.

Dimple is caught in inertia between the stages of expatriation and immigration. She is also torn between the traditional role model of a submissive self-effacing Indian wife and the new role model of an assertive independent wife offered by the West. But at a particular stage, she establishes contact with the host culture. She builds bridges between the Indian expatriates and the host culture. But, in the absence of a good facilitator and adequate knowledge to help her encounter the alien reality, she has access only to the televised version of the alternate reality. She eventually succumbs to social/cultural pressures and ultimately becomes a disillusioned expatriate.

Dimple is shocked by the fission between her expectations of America and the tangible mechanics of Americanization. *Wife* offers the author's depiction of America as a signifier of culture defined by an aesthetic of multiculturalism that is expressive of ethnic difference and segregation. The forced difference and solitude of the Indian community in *Wife* eventually destroys Dimple. The character of Jasmine justifies the displacement from the tradition-bound India for America, which offers the trans-cultural chemistry of transformation and change. In the words of Jasbir Jain, '*Wife* does not begin where *The Tiger's Daughter* ends, but it progresses in the opposite direction.'⁶ Tara's problem is not the shine and polish of Manhattan or New York. She is already a New Yorker, so to speak. Her dislocations are many and the main point of disjuncture starts on his return to Calcutta ghetto which is far different from Manhattan enclave.

The simple opening line — 'Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon'⁷ is quite suggestive and at once sets the story in the motion through an uneven trajectory of life. It is a moving study of a depersonalized female subjectivity in a society in which she is a trivial object. From the very beginning Dimple shows symptoms of material consciousness, morbid ambition and an unnatural promptness to succumb to her horrible impulse. Dimple has nothing to do except thinking about marriage, because

she thinks that marriage is a ladder of quick rise and material emancipation. It will bring her freedom, fortune and perfect happiness: 'Marriage would bring her freedom, Cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love.'⁸

Mukherjee portrays quite vividly the preparations for Dimple's marriage and her endless waiting for a husband in her house at Rash Behari Avenue. Through this depiction, Mukherjee demonstrates the truth that marriage is the only source of salvation for a woman in a patriarchal society. The societal orientation for a girl-child begins very early in her life and like any other average Indian girl she waits for her marriage, the only big event in a woman's life. Mukherjee presents Dimple's vision of *Sita*, the ideal wife of the Hindu legend with irony and sarcasm. There are at least four references to *Sita* in the novel. The first reference to *Sita* is in the hospital in which Dimple is admitted for chest pain. Here she learns that a woman has set fire on herself:

At night she heard a burn victim scream [...] and she envied that woman. In Dimple's dreams, she became Sita, the ideal wife of Hindu legends, who had walked through fire at her husband's request. Such pain, such loyalty, seemed reserved for married women.⁹

The image of Sita's trial by fire at the behest of her husband is a declaration and ultimate proof of her 'chastity,' the vital trait of a good wife. But ironically, the very notion of 'chastity' governs the life of a woman and not that of a man in a patriarchal system.

Like most Indian women, Dimple shapes her own feminine identity and female consciousness after the two Indian mythical figures of 'heroism' and 'devotion,' Sita and Savitri. Both Dimple and Jasmine have to negotiate with the invisible influence of such 'heroic' role models and at the same time attempt to break away from this frightening mould. Dimple and Jasmine however differ from each other in their climactic struggles against their Indianness. Dimple is fragmented and displaced by her translated nullity having been detached from the traces of tradition and displays incapacity to cope with new experiences, while Jasmine walks away freely towards yet another 'incarnation.'

It is however, ironic that a woman is a submissive and more so, a passive participant even in her marriage. In the Indian context, as usual, only the wishes of the parents are fulfilled. This is the first of a succession of disappointments in Dimple's life. Dimple 'thought of premarital life as a dress rehearsal for actual living. Years of waiting had already made her nervous, unnaturally prone to colds, coughs and headaches.'¹⁰ Dimple is twenty but she bewails her wasted years. Nothing pleases her more than the imagination about marrying a fellow who provides her all creature-comforts. She is supposed to be studying for university examinations but books irritate her. The novel is an interesting study of the struggle between the ideal of the passive wife and its consequences in reality. It gives an analysis into the unexpected, apparently inexplicable explosion of a simple submissive person into aggression and brutality.

Like any other woman in the Indian context, Dimple experiences the agony and anxiety of a long wait for the most suitable boy. The wasted years, 'lay like a chill weight in her body, giving her eyes a watchful squint and her spine a slight curve.'¹¹ She worries about her 'sitar shaped body and rudimentary breasts.'¹² She tries all sorts of therapies only to end up in the hospital with chest pain. Dimple's excessive concern about her personal appearance is understandable because this counts in the matrimonial transaction. Dimple is in great anguish. She writes to Problemwalla c/o Eves Beauty Basket, Bombay, about her flat chest.

I am a young woman of twenty with whitish complexion. In addition, I am well versed in Rabindra singing, free-style dancing to Tagore's music, sitar playing, knitting and fancy cooking. I weight 48 kilos and am considered slim. My hair is jet black, hip-length and agreeably wavy. [...] There is 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's imperative that I do something about my problem and enhance my figure to the best of my ability. Please do not, I beg you, advocate chicken soup, homeopathic pills, exercise and massages. I have tried them already. [...] Need I say that I am desperate, almost suicidal? I see life slamming its door in my face. I want to live!¹³

This explains the desperate condition of Dimple and more so the pressures of the society on a young woman waiting to get married.

Dimple Basu has always lived in a fantastic world, a world which is created by herself. But when she confronts the hard realities of life the feathers of her imagination are clipped. All her dreams crumble one by one and she is deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for marriage was better than getting married. She starts hating everything: 'She hated the gray cotton with red roses inside yellow circle that her mother-in-law had hung on sagging tapes against the metal bars of the window.'¹⁴

Amit was not the man Dimple had imagined for her husband. When he is out of the house she starts creating the man of her dream: 'She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a bodybuilder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad put the ideal man.'¹⁵ As the time progresses the excitement of marriage diminishes and she becomes pregnant, a stage known for vomiting tendency. However her nauseating proneness is abnormal because she deliberately vomits and never leaves any opportunity of doing so at all hours of the day and night. She feels a strange sensation: 'The vomit fascinated her. It was hers; she was locked in the bathroom expelling brownish liquid from her body. She took pride in brownish blossoms [...]'¹⁶

Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women because they are supposed to maintain the continuity of the clan. They are the very source of creation. If a woman fails to reproduce a child she is condemned and becomes an object of hatred in society. But Dimple is singular in that 'she thought of ways to get rid of ... whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes.'¹⁷ Her killing of the mice which looked pregnant also suggests that she does not feel at ease with her pregnancy. She becomes almost hysteric in killing that tiny creature without any particular reason:

She pounded and pounded the baby clothes until a tiny gray creature ran out of the pile, leaving a faint trickle of blood on the linen. She chased it to the bathroom. She shut the door so it would not escape from her this time [...] 'I'll get you' she screamed. "There is no way out of this, my friend!"[...] And in an outburst of hatred, 'her body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury, she smashed the top of a small gray head.'¹⁸

This act of killing is a manifestation of violence that is brewing inside her. Her repulsion with her own pregnancy is born out of her hatred for Amit who fails to feed her fantasy world. She develops morbid desires like noticing angry faces of men by purposely

dropping on them bits of newspaper, hair balls, nail clippings, etc. Dimple who had shuddered at the pain of the crows shot by Amit, gives a hot chase to a rat and smashes the top of the small grey head with her 'body shuddering, her wrist taut with fury.'¹⁹ These incidents reveal the streak of violence developing in her personality. By mid May, Dimple misses a period but she continues to eat green chilies so that her body will return to its natural cycle. She likes to vomit but not pregnancy. When no one is watching, she gives vicious squeezes to her stomach. She considers pregnancy as an invasion of her body. She starts falling apart. She seeks exile from her essential femininity.

She thinks that no one has consulted her before depositing the foetus in her body. Finally, in a crude way she skips her way to abortion. This is another way of giving vent to her hatred of the Basus, possibly because the Basus look upon the unborn baby as communal property and are very solicitous of her health. For his part, Amit thinks that the unborn boy will become a doctor and mint money.

In this context, Dimple's killing the mouse is a symbolic act. It symbolises her hatred towards Amit and also her own pregnant self. The entire scene looks macabre:

But today she hated the invisible mice for disrupting her day-dreams – she could not dare borrow features from a rodent! — and she pushed aside the platter of rice, listening for soft scratchy sounds so that she could smash life out of the little gray heads. When the noises came again, this time from behind the peeling wooden doors leading to the bedroom, she stood up nervously and grabbed a broom as a weapon. In her hurry to snatch the broom, she stepped on the stainless steel platter of rice grains. The little toe on her left foot began to bleed. There was a tiny drop of blood, her blood she thought, astonished, on the coarse, reddish white grains of rice. It was an added reason for killing the mouse.²⁰

The entire scene indicates her hatred towards pregnancy which is a violation of her normal self. She looks at the unborn fetus as a part of Amit. The connection between Dimple and the mouse is that both are pregnant and before migrating to America she does 'not want to carry any relics from her old life.'²¹ She thinks that old things will remind her of her repressive femininity frustrations and irritations. She counts her pregnancy also among the relics of exasperating tradition and contemplates the ways of getting rid of it. At last she decides to end it by skipping ropes.

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.²²

This is something which only Dimple can do, and her self-abortion raises serious questions regarding her very womanhood. After terminating her pregnancy she hardly gives any after thought to it. She never repents for the cruel deed she has committed by killing a prospective human life. She remains poised and dispassionate while it should have led her to an emotional upheaval. Rosanne Klass counts it as a serious mistake on Bharati Mukherjee's part and questions her understanding of Indian culture. In a review of *Wife*, she comments: 'For an Indian wife, childlessness is a disaster, pregnancy the achievement that seals her status. To overturn such ingrained values would involve a major emotional upheaval; yet Dimple acts on the vaguest and most undefined impulses, and thinks no more about it.'²³

Dimple's act of aborting the unborn foetus is symptomatic of the frustration out of the disjuncture and initial displacement. Dimple gives 'vicious squeezes to her stomach as if to force a vile thing out of hiding.'²⁴ Dimple thought, by aborting the baby she would be free of the burden of motherhood. But such a cold-blooded perverse method of abortion cannot be seen as an expression of freedom. Instead, if Dimple had utilized her creative energy to become a mother, she would have probably experienced a kind of fulfillment. Motherhood, however oppressive, might have provided this insecure immigrant woman with a sense of belonging and identity, and prevented her transformation into an insane murderer.

Dimple's act of abortion could be seen as a sign of dislocation at the very outset of her mission to accomplish her dream. From her perspective, abortion is a signifier of liberation from the traditional roles and constraints of womanhood. Dimple's act of abortion has to be interpreted more from her perspective than from a social one. All along, Dimple has had quarrels with her body. Her *sitar* shaped body has always resisted change. Now, pregnancy has brought about another unwelcome change. So, Dimple's attempts to abort the foetus have to be construed as a continuation of Dimple's ongoing struggle with her body. The termination of her pregnancy is a necessary precondition to sail free in the New World. She thus dislocates to relocate in a new perspective. She faces triple dislocation, as a woman, then wife and finally as an ethnic subject and then strikes at being ruined and pushed beyond margin.

The feticide and the destruction of her impending motherhood are necessary to ensure her dreamscape coming to reality. The act of abortion is a strategy of liberation from the traditional roles and motherhood. Dimple liberates herself from the traditional role of a Hindu wife of just bearing and rearing a child. Like the Western feminists she asserts her will but her abortive act is a kind of moral and cultural suicide.

Mukherjee has portrayed America, a country of Western enclave as the land of openings that embraces change, progress, variety and multiplicity. Mukherjee in fact, wants to identify Americanness as a cultural explication of representing the *otherness* that immigrants require to undergo and experience initially, before assimilation and acculturation. Even before moving to the United States, Amit tries to acculturate Dimple by taking her out. She dislikes having to eat with a knife and fork, —but eating with her fingers, Bengali-style, in a restaurant, seemed terribly uncouth.²⁵ In all such issues Mukherjee emphasizes disjuncture as pre-conditional component before the structuring of hybrid culture and this disjuncture happens while swapping culture through performance.

Amit urges his new wife to perform as American. This is a process initiated to Americanize her. However, for these characters, the concept of —Americanization exists only in some glitziness and fantasies. Amit loves the glitziness but with some reservation. His notion of Americanization is problematic and conditioned. Offering a sip of beer to Dimple to celebrate Americanization he says: '[....] you're becoming American, but not too American, I hope. I don't want you to be like Mrs. Mullick and wear pants in the house! [....] It's a celebration. I mean, we have to celebrate my job and your Americanization, so go on, take a sip of beer.'²⁶

Actual Americanization implies change, it demands metamorphosis and proliferation of hybrid self. Neither Indian nor American culture actually interacts or develops, for they remain fixed in their respective insulated cocoon installed in memory. After multiple dislocations there is a metaphysical merger, steam rolled and accepted. As Amit has taught Dimple Western practices while they reside in India, he prepares for a future already distinct and defiant to alter away from the comprehensible boundaries of Dimple. Thus, she sets out for embracing some new norms alien to her for a new trajectory through a series of dislocations.

As the story progresses, the readers get to see how all the pre-marital illusions of Dimple get shattered one after another, soon after marriage. Dimple takes womanhood to be wifehood. She realises that playing the role of a wife in a joint family is an arduous task. When a woman turns a wife, she is expected to care not only for her husband, but also for all the other members of the husband's family. She has to simultaneously play the role of a caregiver and a pleasure-dispenser. Very soon, Dimple understands the discrepancy between the premarital dreams and the marital realities.

In her attempt to please Amit, she takes to wearing bright colours, reds, oranges, purples. She wears her hair up in a huge bun and lets along wispy curl dangle behind each ear, like Mrs. Ghose. She even tries to imitate the way Mrs. Ghose laughs and leaves sentences half-finished. Though she does not like Amit's habit of killing crows, she becomes a mute spectator to his sadistic pleasure. He has killed about two hundred and fifty three crows.

Dimple never thought that a wounded crow 'trying to raise itself on one good wing, then falling back could be so depressing.'²⁷ Amit's habit of killing crows and petting parrots has symbolic value. Dimple wonders at the excitement with which Amit kills crows. She says:

This was a new Amit, younger than Pintu, it seemed, his low voice tinny with excitement. This must be the real Amit the boy who lives with his mother and brother in the third-floor flat on Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road. What does he know of marriage?²⁸

Amit's ominous exhilaration in slaughtering crows proves his untrained self. The act of killing two hundred and fifty three crows proves his sadism. It manifests itself in various ways in his relationship with Dimple. His silent arrogance, total indifference to her desires, utter lack of interest in nurturing his relationship with Dimple are expressions of his sadism. But Amit loves pet parrots. While Amit is languishing at home after resigning his job, he feels very bitter about everything around him. At that time Dimple gets him a parrot in a rusty cage and sees his bitterness change. In the next two weeks, Amit buys nine more parrots from the same vendor.

Every morning after breakfast he took the parrots one by one out of their cages, stroked their soft green heads, let them hop on the bed-spread and leave droppings on the application forms and books.²⁹

Amit wants to stroke parrots because they are cute, harmless, caged birds which can be trained to mimic our words. Beautiful birds with clipped wings which can imitate human speech are agreeable companions to Amit. Symbolically, Amit is willing to show love and care to Dimple provided she imitates literally and metaphorically Amit's ways. He wants to see her imprisoned in the cage of matrimony. Conversely, Amit hates crows which are ravenous, frightful, scavenger birds. Crows are never reared at homes like parrots and pigeons. Moreover, they cannot be trained to imitate human speech. In other words, perhaps Amit wants a wife who can follow accepted patriarchal values without any independent thinking.

With the passage of time, Dimple starts getting dislocated after the realisation that she is deceived in marriage and a good-for-nothing husband like Amit will not cater for her dream-world. She cannot tolerate his snores any more and insomnia becomes her accustomed habit. She suddenly realizes that 'she hated the Sens' apartment, sofa-bed, the

wall to wall rug.’³⁰ Now she gets disturbed at those habits of Amit which she ignored at Calcutta:

In Calcutta she had trained herself not to see his hand (always the left) as it stopped carefully at each button, then slid up and down a few times before hanging limply at his side. But in New York these little gestures had begun to irritate her.³¹

Amit’s unemployment was the root cause of all troubles. He was not the man Dimple had wanted as husband: ‘She wanted Amit to be infallible, intractable, godlike, but with the boyish charm; wanted him to find a job so that after a decent number of years he could take his savings and retire with her to a three-storey house in Ballygunge Park.’³² She thinks that her marriage to Amit is a failure of her dreams:

She was bitter that 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.³³

Her confusion with the names of the places like Nebraska and Nevada, Ohio and Iowa is only an external manifestation of the confusion growing within her mind. She is equally unhappy with her physique, also because she sees herself now with the eyes of Ina Mullick. America underscores Dimple’s inferiority, and she contemplates ways of bringing an end with Amit getting a job and with their decision to move to Greenwich in Marsha’s flat.

The third and final movement is the climax marked by intense dramatic scenes punctuated with Dimple’s growing abnormality. She had always dreamt of a splendid apartment, fully furnished and accomplished with all sorts of appliances. Marsha’s flat is like a dream come true for her. However, the burden of responsibilities in terms of watering the plants and cleaning the kitchen, etc. is to her greatly annoying. Amit feels lonely and wishes if they could have shifted near the Sens. Quite often Dimple feels irritated even over trifles. One day while Amit is reading something she complains of exhaustion which he attributes to her meager diet. She loses her temper at this inference:

I feel sort of dead inside and what you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never listen; you’ve never listened to me. You hate me. Don’t deny it; I know you do. You hate me because I’m not fat and fair.³⁴

The furious outburst of Dimple shows her accumulated frustrations. She is suffering from inferiority complex and thinks that she is not able to win her husband’s love and affection. Amit may also be blamed for his ignorance of female psychology. He thinks that providing creature comforts is enough and hardly bothers for her emotional needs. He takes her out of four-walls very rarely and goes on admonishing instead- ‘You must go out, make friends, do something constructive, not stay at home and think about Calcutta.’³⁵ To be fair to Dimple it can be said that with her deficiencies in English she could have hardly conducted herself well in a city of such enormity like New York on her own.

Dimple is the embodiment of the transitional figure; she starts to question her traditional society's values and taboos, but she doesn't yet have the confidence to blend what she values in the two cultures and make that blended culture her own. Dimple's trauma of immigration and the pangs of dislocation express itself as insanity, madness and neurosis. Dimple's gloom deepens with every passing day. She starts realizing: 'Her life was slow, full of miscalculation.'³⁶

The problem with Amit is that 'he lacked extravagance; he preserved in the immigrant virtues of caution and cunning.'³⁷ He fails to mark the emotional destruction of Dimple, 'he never thought of such things, never thought how hard it was for her to keep quite and smile though she was vanishing and crumbling like a very old toy that had been played with, sometimes quite roughly, by children who claimed to love her.'³⁸ The trouble with Dimple is that she loses touch with reality. Guilt of seducing Milt and also of keeping everything a secret from Amit vexes her. She loses her sleep and ultimately kills Amit without actually thinking about its consequences:

She sneaked up on him and chose 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 because she did not want him to think she was the impulsive, foolish sort who acted like a maniac just because the husband was suffering from insomnia. She touched the mole very lightly and let her fingers draw a circle around the detectable 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 any more 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 [...] Women on television got away with murder.³⁹

The above description shows that it is a case of cold blooded murder. By stabbing seven times, it seems Dimple frees herself from the marriage tie. This is the only act of assertion she can make. It may not be very appropriate to view that Dimple's gruesome act has nothing to do with cultural displacement. She is trapped in the transit of culture and her vital Indianness is put to diasporic trial. She is not a victim of 'expatriation' alone, but is instead, a victim of her own neurotic sensibility fed on popular advertisement fantasies. K.S. Narayan Rao looks at it from a specific angle- 'The novel raises an important question: was the Indian wife happier in India with her limited freedom and greater docility, or does she achieve happiness in her painful search for more individual freedom and in the process of maturing?'⁴⁰

Understandably, this is a credible question and Dimple's neurosis can be explained as self explanatory of her ongoing mutation in to a lacerated subject of Diaspora. Unlike Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* or Jasmine she turns frenzied and doesn't wait for the mutation of an enlightened diasporic subject. She fails to negotiate with a series of displacement coming in quick succession.

She doesn't allow herself enough time to reconcile with her frustration. She neither becomes a traditional Indian wife fully devoted to her husband, nor fully Americanized to assert her independence and seek divorce, declaring boldly her liaison

with Milt. She instead, becomes a horrible creature of multiple contradictions. She becomes a conglomerate of ambition, fear, panic and neurotic anxiety and the obvious result is violence and morbidity. The violence that is passively lying in her spirit gets multiplied on coming to America where ‘talking about murder is like talking about the weather.’⁴¹ The pangs of dislocations pile heavy burden on her. She is an outsider in America, at the same time she too, an alien in her native terrain and fails to understand the American notion of freedom.

It is American notion of freedom for women which makes her question her own happiness and freedom. Her emotions which need outlet burst at last and she suffers feats of madness, nightmares, reveries, insomnia and a series of disjunctions, both mental and physical. Her dislocated and splintered-self asserts in murdering her husband. Thus, it is America which intensifies her confusion and turns the violence inside out and she ends up a murderess. On the issue whether Mukherjee’s protagonist in *Wife* manifests the bleak part of psychological transformation that negates the theory of assimilation, as a method of relocating oneself in the New World, Mukherjee has her words in an interview in the year 1990:

Dimple, if she had remained in Calcutta would have gone into depression and she would have found a very conventional way out for unhappy Bengali wives-suicide. But in the US she suddenly lives to ask herself “self” oriented question. Am I happy? Am I unhappy? And that to me is progress. So instead of committing suicide, turning the society-mandated violence inward, she, in a misguided act, kills the enemy. So, of course, I am not approving of murder. It’s meant to be a positive act, self assertive.⁴²

Dimple’s frenzied passion to do away with traditional taboos of a wife and her fission with her dream and her final hostility make her a code heroine of Mukherjee, earning her criticism from many corners. Mukherjee however, defends Dimple’s violence as a non-docile anger of essential femininity of an Indian woman, who is usually tailored and tutored to be nonresponsive to tortures:

There was only one problem, my problem; how could I explain this anger to critics in New York or Montreal who did not know that a young Bengali woman could rebel by simply reading a book or refusing to fast?⁴³

Dimple is an instance of the dislocated and ruptured self of an Indian wife finding herself out of depth in a foreign country with an alien milieu. This situation of cultural shock is too trite to new analysis, but essentially it is the agony of a voice struggling for identity and getting stifled repeatedly where, the female voice denied an equal status and force.

She is drawn into the fantasies of cosmopolitan plentitude. As a being she remains the same *edible* and a partial woman who desperately searches for an ejection out of her inadequacies and incompleteness. She resorts to violence and her sadistic craze is symptomatic of the prevalent turbulence in the American society. It is this pervasive ambience of crime that her feeling of guilt is mitigated. This insidious atmosphere of crime dulls the edge of her own guilt. Mukherjee puts her own sensibility in portraying the heroine of the novel that washed over the manuscript:

I was writing a second novel, *Wife*, at the time, 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. The anger that young wives round me are trying to hide had become my anger and that washed over the manuscript. I write what I hoped would be a wounding novel.⁴⁴

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¹*Ibid.*

² Kellie Holzer. "Bharati Mukherjee." *South Asian Novelists in English*. Ed. Jaina C. Sanga.: London: Greenwood, 2005.p.171.

³Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. *op.cit.*, p. 77.

⁴Bharati Mukherjee. *Darkness*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1975. p.115.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Jasbir Jain. "Foreignness of Spirit: The World of Bharati Mukherjee's Novels," *Journal of Indian Writing in English*, 13, 2(1985), p.13.

⁷Bharati Mukherjee. *Wife*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 1990. p.3

⁸*Ibid.*,p.3.

⁹*Ibid.*,p. 6

¹⁰*Ibid.*,p.3.

¹¹*Ibid.*,p.3.

¹²*Ibid.*,p.4 .

¹³*Ibid.*,pp.10-11.

¹⁴*Ibid.*,p.20.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.31.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁹*Ibid.*,p. 35.

²⁰*Ibid.*,p. 34.

²¹*Ibid.*, p.42

²²*Ibid.*

²³Rosanne Klass. "Indian Wife Lives Soap-Opera Life," *MS*, October 1975, p. 88.

²⁴Bharati Mukherjee. *Wife op.cit.*, p.30.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p.22.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.112.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p.29.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p.29.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 88.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 88.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 89.

³³*Ibid.*, p.102.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p.110.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p.111.

³⁶*Ibid.*,p. 178.

³⁷*Ibid.*,p. 195.

³⁸*Ibid.*,p. 211.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

⁴⁰K.S. Narayan Rao. "Review of *Wife*," Books Abroad, Spring: 1976, p.475.

⁴¹Bharati Mukherjee. *Wife. op.cit.*,p. 161.

⁴² Michael Connell, Jessie Gearson and Tom Grimes. (Spring 1990) 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee', Iowa Review 20, No. 3, 20.

⁴³ Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee. *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977.p.268

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*