

Chapter-III

Wife

THE MOVING METAPHOR OF DISLOCATION.

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel and a finalist for Governor General's Award, *Wife* (1975) takes up a more 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 county in 1973 and encountered an India which she had never anticipated, a world far less innocent than the one she remembered. There is an interesting episode about the genesis of Mukherjee's *Wife*. Mukherjee and her husband Clarke Blaise spent their sabbatical in Calcutta and worked on their joint non-fictional work titled *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. At that time, a professor from Columbia University asked Mukherjee, 'What do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one?'¹ Mukherjee replied that a Bengali girl had very few options except to get married. As Blaise explains in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, a young girl 'may end up for she cannot refuse to marry a lout who will not tolerate the slightest deviation from expectancy, or the most pathetic gestures towards self-expression.'²

Wife is about such a girl whose only available outlet, suicide, is transformed in her madness of migration to New York into murder.³ 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 'moving metaphor'⁴ 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.'⁵

Fundamental social changes in the post Globalised America necessitated re-doctrination of the relational logic with the nations across the globe to redefine itself culturally to accommodate its increasing contact with the population around the world. Modernization in transportation and communication technology connected America to the

world, expanding American culture to the globe but also bringing the world into America. 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*⁶ 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':⁷

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.⁸

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.

The Tiger's Daughter (1971), *Wife* (1975) and *Darkness* (1985) mark distinct phases in Mukherjee's life and career, There is a definite shift in Mukherjee's artistic obsession, from the 'aloofness of expatriation'.⁹ To be precise, *Wife* belongs to the period of transition from the 'expatriate' phase to the 'immigrant' phase in Mukherjee's own life. In *Wife* the novelist shows a common dream of some third world immigrants, who are obsessive of American glitziness and opportunities and are therefore, agile to 'settle' in the New World. The novel also depicts how very often such dreams turn nightmares leading to schizophrenic split and dislocations.

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.'¹⁰ 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.

Tara returns to Calcutta, her homeland, after a seven-year sojourn in the United States to retrieve her roots, her past. But, Dimple migrates to the United States in search of her future. There is a contradiction between cultural practice of tolerance and the compulsions of adaptation. Instead of isolationism and stagnation in an increasingly globalized world Mukherjee seeks to redefine the immigrant's status through constant negotiation between the individual and the nation and between the nation and the world.

The immigrants need to re-evaluate themselves and their nation in the process of returning to their mythological roots and through relocation of their national identity. Because of the ethno-religious cultural origins of Mukherjee's immigrant characters and their global movement, the relationship between the immigrant and the nation develops in the context of globalization. Its discourses on multiculturalism, trans-nationalism and the larger project of globalization enable to develop a multi-cultural matrix. In *Wife*, Mukherjee's protagonist struggle to negotiate her ethnicity within the environment of the American multi-cultural matrix.

Given the situation of fundamental shift in its ethnic composition, the United States shaped itself into a multicultural mosaic with the objective of signaling the norms of American Dream. In *Wife*, Mukherjee exposes and challenges the hardships of a multicultural society placed on an immigrant or a minority. She sets the novel in the United States to reveal both the nation's limitations in multiculturalism and the discrepancies between a policy of cultural difference and the American Dream of individualism and opportunity.

The simple opening line — 'Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon'¹¹ 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.'¹²

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.¹³

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.'¹⁴ 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.'¹⁵ She worries about her 'sitar shaped body and rudimentary breasts.'¹⁶ 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!¹⁷

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

At last Mr. Dasgupta finds a suitable match for Dimple. Amit Basu, a Consultant Engineer, is the match for Dimple. He has already applied for immigration to Canada and U.S. and his job application is also pending in Kenya. Dimple is all ecstatic about her marriage and does a lot of shopping for the occasion. She comes to Amit's residence at Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road after her marriage. Basus are good people but the house is not that spacious and attractive. From the very beginning Dimple does not feel easy there. She does not like Amit's mother and sister. Her mother-in-law dislikes her name 'Dimple' and wants to call her 'Nandini' instead which simply infuriates the bride. However, Dimple thinks that all these problems are temporary and with the confirmation for immigration they will eventually come to an end. She frequently talks with her husband about the anticipated and fantastic foreign trip though 'Thoughts of living in Africa or North America terrified her.'¹⁸

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.'¹⁹

Her friend, Paramita Ray, whom everybody calls Pixie, had brought her magazines in the days of waiting and she had seen in those magazines how young married women were always going to decorate and select their colours, especially their bed room colours. That was supposed to be the best part of getting married: 'being free and expressing yourself.'²⁰ Dimple thinks that marriage has robbed her of all romantic yearnings so tastefully nourished. Pixie is an important minor character, a foil for Dimple. Pixie, too, is steeped in *Bollywood* films and magazines. But she has the guts to stay in India, break the taboos, fall in love with a film star and marry him and claim happiness. For Dimple it is one of exasperation rather than freedom or emancipation.

One evening Amit takes her to Kwality's by taxi and orders chili chicken, chicken fried rice and chicken spring rolls. She feels uneasy handling the chicken pieces with fork and knife and thinks that it would have been better if Amit had taken her to Trinca's instead:

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 trip to

New York of Toronto. Or to the discotheque in the Park Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle.²¹

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.'²² 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 [...]'²³

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.'²⁴ 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.'²⁵

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.'²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.'²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.'³⁰

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.'³¹ 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.

When Amit's confirmation for migration to U.S. comes, Dimple's happiness is inexpressible. She prepares well and sees that nothing she misses which is necessary for a new life. She feels like being freed from the brazen fetters of servile domesticity. On the eve of their departure, Pixie organises a grand party at which she invites mostly the media persons. Dimple meets Ratna Das, a middle aged modern wife of a media brat there who does not give any importance to America. She says 'It might be fun to go for a vacation [...] But I would not want to settle there.'³² Pixie echoes the same sentiment 'I wouldn't want to feel foreigner all my life.'³³ But this hardly deters Dimple from her resolution. For her 'real happiness was just in the movies or in the West.'³⁴

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.³⁵ 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.'³⁶

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.

The long awaited day of migration comes and Mr. & Mrs. Amit Basu set their feet at the Kennedy Airport where Jyoti Sen, Amit's former classmate at the I.I.T., Kharagpur receives them. In the way, he talks about the triple-murder case which is the talk of the town. A man murders three persons including the ice-cream vendor just for the simple reason that the fellow doesn't have a chocolate ice-cream cone. On the way to the Sens Amit is unmindful of the scenes outside the car and is busy enquiring about job opportunities in America. Dimple feels excited and a little scared as well. She has never been to a city bigger than Calcutta and the magnificence of the city of New York terrifies her: 'She had never seen such bigness before; the bigness was thrilling and a little scary as well. She could not imagine the kind of people who had conceived it and who controlled it.'³⁷

The Sen apartment at Queens is all Indian inside. Dimple's searching eyes notice a framed batik wall hanging which shows 'King Ram and his court in splendid array.'³⁸ Sens are very conscious of their identity and they never try to come out of the ghetto, their 'little-India' which is around them. The Sens' disgust with Americans and English language is quite in keeping with the feeling of insecurity in an expatriate.

Thousands of professionals migrate to America or other European countries, mostly for the sole purpose of financial gain and social emancipation where they experience the same feeling of insecurity. After a considerable period of time they return to their native land and enjoy a life of prestige and comfort, while some stay back as immigrant. For many of them the country of adoption is a temporary abode and they are keen from within to preserve their own identity while upholding their own cultural and religious values. This is confirmed by the simple confession of Jyoti Sen 'If it weren't for the money, I'd go back tomorrow. This is too much the rat race for a man like me.'³⁹

Getting a job in America is not an easy task for an Indian. Should one get an opportunity, it is very difficult to sustain it. There one has to bear all sorts of mortification and exploitation without responses in protest to it. Jyoti Sen teaches Amit all tricks of the trade, the codes of conduct for an Indian professional in America to thrive 'Work twice as hard, keep your mouth shut and you'll be a millionaire in fifteen years.'⁴⁰

Realization of disjuncture and dislocations come thick and fast. She is too immature to learn the Sen's art of survival strategy. Dimple finds America neither easily adjustable, nor is a transformation possible without rupture. One day, Dimple goes to the

market with Meena Sen and wishes to buy a cheese cake. She is afraid to go to the shop alone but when Meena encourages her she goes there. She is rigid with fear and notices one by one inside the glass cake pickles salads, hanging salamis, pink roast beef, roast duck and turkey etc. At last she reaches the shop and asks for cheese cake and the shopkeeper starts staring at her to her great embarrassment. Everywhere there is stench of blood and it is getting intolerable for her nostrils to bear the stink of beef. Instantly, she fails to understand the shopkeeper and repeats her sentence. He asks whether she does not know the law and starts searching for something in his drawer. Dimple is so terrified that she thinks that the man is taking out his gun and she is left with no option but to be killed in no time. Here she realises the difference between Calcutta and New York.

She is horror struck; disenchanted and dispirited. This very first exposure to America leaves a traumatic effect on her mind. She fails to understand the reason why a man selling beef etc. cannot sell cheese cake. She runs from there for life and forgets to buy anything herself. Her bewilderment with America is due to her sheltered childhood. She had hardly ever been out of Calcutta. She did not know what might offend anybody there to cost her the precious life itself. How an innocent Indian wife can keep her nerves in a country where murder was like any common action. Dimple thought-‘She was caught in the crossfire of an American communalism. She could not understand. She felt she’d come very close to getting killed on her third mooring in America.’⁴¹

The party at Vinod Khanna’s place is splendid and Dimple sees Indian-Americans in flying colours. This is for the first time, Dimple happens to see so many Indians since she had left Calcutta. She realises, a little India had come alive. People like the Sens, Mehras, Khannas and Bhattacharyas, Miss Chakravorty all are talking in familiar language. Everybody is full of praise for Indian things — culture, food, habit etc, and strong disgust with the Americans. For them Americans are dirty people who bathe only once a week. Not only this they use a lot of perfume. This is just beyond Mrs. Bhattacharya’s understanding why they wash their clothes in the bathroom sink in which they spit and wash their dishes. Way back to Queens Jyoti is full of praise for the feeling of unity among Indians abroad. Jyoti says:

Wasn’t it wonderful that Indians abroad were so outgoing and open minded. They didn’t give a damn about communalism and petty feelings.

They personally counted a number of Punjabis and Gujaratis and South Indians among their friends.⁴²

Amit's lingering joblessness causes more frustration. As the days pass by, he becomes more impatient and his confidence starts shaking. This embitters his relationship with Dimple. On the other hand, Dimple helps Meena Sen in domestic works and spends her time in watching Television or reading newspapers. Dimple always lives under fear — everything terrifies her. All she hears about is murder, smuggling in the basement of the building and such others. She is afraid of the policemen 'they just did not look inoffensive, like the ones back home.'⁴³

The party at Mullicks (Ina and Bijoy) gives Dimple an opportunity to meet people. Both Indians and native Americans join the party. Here she meets Ina, the iniquitous wife of Bijoy Mullick for the first time. Sens and others are disgusted with this Indian lady because 'she wears pants and mascara'⁴⁴ and is 'more American than the Americans.'⁴⁵ She is a chain smoker, drinks, flirts and goes to night schools. She has a particular theory about Indian immigrants:

It takes them a year to get Indian out of their system. In the second year they've bought all the things they've hungered for. So then they go back, or they stay here and vegetate or else they've got to live here like anyone else.⁴⁶

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.'⁴⁷ 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?⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹

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.

Traditionally, Indian society is a patriarchal society and it hardly permits a woman to talk of liberation and equality. They require to behave like the caged parrot, tailored and trained and submit to the dominant male ethos. Here male members decide the fate of their female counterpart. Time and again the Sens have cautioned Amit to keep Dimple out of touch with Ina, otherwise she will get corrupted by the latter's crazy ideas. It is this caution which prompts Amit to restrain her from accepting Ina's drink: 'She does not like alcoholic beverages,' Amit said, 'she does not even like coke.'⁵⁰ It is at this party that Dimple and Amit met Marsha Mookerji and Prodosh Mookerji — their future benefactors. For Dimple Milt Glasser, brother of Marsha is like a riddle. She is instantly attracted to this tall and lanky personality and his courteous manners though 'Dimple could not follow the way he talked, the things he talked about and the amazing leaps between his conversations.'⁵¹ Later in the novel, we see how Milt plays a pivotal role.

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.'⁵² 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.⁵³

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.'⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

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.'⁵⁷ 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.

America has failed her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. It is just beyond her understanding 'How could she live in a country [...] where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator?'⁵⁸ Her whole world is limited to the four-walls of the apartment and media

becomes her only friend. She feels like writing to Pixie but drops the idea because she thinks 'Friendship was impossible through letters.'⁵⁹ In leisurely hours she tries to dream about Amit but fails to do so because:

Amit did not feed her fantasy life; he was merely the provider of small material comforts. In bitter moments she ranked husband, blender, color TV, cassette, tape recorder, stereo, in their order of convenience.⁶⁰

Dimple's equating of her husband with the electronic appliances evidences that Amit is just a robot and not an actual human being for her. Dimple's disgust with American English and American system gets accentuated even by small things. She is afraid to operate the self service elevators. Linda Sandler explains it in terms of her traditional upbringing:

*Dimple emigrates to the electronic age with her traditional values almost intact, only partly modified by the pop culture of modern Calcutta, she is unable to make the transition from Before to After and chooses violence as a; 'problem-solving' device.*⁶¹

Dimple finds life impossible 'with the people who didn't understand about Durga Pujah.'⁶² For Indians religion is an integral part of life and Dimple's failure at assimilation with America is due to a lack of shared-faith. An expatriate is tenaciously conscious of preserving his identity even in most trying moments of life. In America, she realises how easy it was to live, to communicate, and to share with people in Calcutta. She never felt frightened at the sight for the policemen whose faces were so friendly, but the scene has changed completely in the new environment:

She is scared of self-service elevators, of policemen, of gadgets and appliances. She does not want to wear Western clothes as she thinks she would be mistakenly taken for a Puerto Rican. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated, marginalised.⁶³

At Queens Dimple had a confidante in Meena Sen with whom she could share her private feelings, but at Greenwich she is all alone. Here her depression manifests itself in

different ways. She fails to write to Pixie, though in her imagination she begins many a time. The greatest alter ego of a girl after marriage is her husband with whom she shares her inmost heart, but Dimple cannot do that. She keeps everything secret from Amit:

She does not tell him about these imaginary beginnings. She didn't tell him about her immoderate day time sleeping either. They were unspeakable failings. She thought of them as deformities — sinister, ugly, wicked.⁶⁴

Dimple expected some trouble in the American set up landing into the city, because pain was part of any new beginning. But never in her wildest dreams had she imagined to be stressed like this beyond endurance:

She had expected pain when she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any new beginning, and in the sweet 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.⁶⁵

Asnani fittingly ascribes Dimple's mental state to the 'dilemma of cultures'- 'Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be submissive and self-effacing.'⁶⁶ At times when loneliness becomes unbearable due to such constraints, Dimple contemplates as many as seven ways of committing suicide. It seems as if she is in love with whatever is dark, evil, sinister, and gruesome. Murder, suicide and mugging are all fascinating words for her.

Even her ways of getting rid of life are fanciful like a television advertisement. She cannot trust anybody but media. Even 'Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne.'⁶⁷ Linda Sandler accounts for these feelings of 'emptiness' and frustration: 'She is uprooted from her family and her familiar world, and projected into a social vacuum where the media becomes her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustrations and unhooks her further from reality.'⁶⁸

The dinner party arranged by Amit and Dimple is appreciated by everybody. People enjoy delicious food and share jokes but Dimple is lost in her own world of reverie. Next day she sleeps till 4 o'clock and wakes up only when she feels hungry. She whispers to herself:

She would not discuss her dreams with any one. One must draw the line somewhere; one must stand on principle. After the fifth spoonful, she realised she was not hungry, was, on the contrary, feeling ill and had spilled milk and cereal flakes on her clothes.⁶⁹

Her mind is always full of news about mugging and rape; she always feels that someone is breaking her window. When Amit points out her foolishness as they occupy the 14th floor, she retorts: 'In America anything is possible. You can be raped and killed on any floor.'⁷⁰ In a state of nervousness she hurts Amit with knife when he comes from behind to embrace her. She is all apologetic and blames America for her timidity 'This wouldn't have happened if we had stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home.'⁷¹

One day Ina Mullick comes to her in an utterly disappointed mood almost gasping. Dimple fails to understand why Ina Mullick is so unhappy despite all her apparent fulfillments. At this moment she thinks herself lucky 'to be alone among Marsha's appliances, to explore the wonders of modern American living, unencumbered by philosophical questions about happiness.'⁷² In the meantime Dimple's mother Mrs. Dasgupta writes about Pixie's marriage to a 53 year old actor and this news makes her very happy.

Ina Mullick starts bringing her American friends to her apartment for a get together. 'To Dimple they all looked alike; even their clothes were similar. She felt too shy to talk to them.'⁷³ Milt and Lenin Anspach often come to her with Ina. One day Leni starts quarrelling with Ina and accuses her but she flings her rhinoceros shaped ashtray on the ground and breaks it. Dimple decides 'it was best to regard the broken ashtray as the end of an era in her own life.'⁷⁴ It seems as if the broken ashtray is symbolic of freedom from servile existence for Dimple.

She crashes out, metaphorically, of a glass menagerie and falls apart in two parts, first as a woman in American glitterati and next as an Indian wife in a glass palace owned by Amit. Dimple is now anxious to settle her scores with America. Her spirit rebels, she

starts going out with Ina and Milt, wears Marsha's pants etc. and enjoys all the prohibited freedom. She seduces Milt and keeps it a secret from Amit. She is dislocated and jerks out of her primordial identity. When she goes out, she puts on Marsha's tinted sunglasses because the purple-tinted sunglasses are perhaps the most typical index of American culture. For Dimple, they are a disguise, borrowed from the West, just like Marsha's cloths and the apartment in which she is living. This outing leaves her all the more confused. She is transformed from a 'migrant's boarding house'⁷⁵ to a 'wounded cosmopolitan.'⁷⁶ She turns neurotic and fails to differentiate between what she sees on T.V. and what she experiences herself in real life. She is now dislocated from the center of origin and undergoes the supposed after effect of alienation. She has numerous complaints against life:

Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries; he was unreal. She was furious, desperate; she felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster, some monster had overtaken her body, a creature with serpentine curls and heaving bosom that would erupt indiscreetly through one of Dimple's orifices, leaving her, Dimple Basu, splattered like bug on the living-room wall and rug. The cataclysm embarrassed her.⁷⁷

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.'⁷⁸ Amit could only envisage the external changes in Dimple and he explains it as a case of culture-shock. He even promises to take her to Calcutta. This does not prove helpful. Dimple starts contemplating the murder of her husband. The violence outside, rapidly turns inside. She now fails to differentiate between what she sees on television and what she thinks. The idea of slaughtering her husband fascinates her. She thinks: 'She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer. The extravagance of the scheme delighted her, made her feel very American somehow, almost like a character in a TV Series.'⁷⁹

The problem with Amit is that 'he lacked extravagance; he preserved in the immigrant virtues of caution and cunning.'⁸⁰ 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.'⁸¹ 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.⁸²

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?'⁸³

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.'⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵

Like a sadist as she is, she derives self satisfaction by harming her 'enemy.' We may interpret it in another manner. She inflicts pain upon others and wounds their feelings because she wants to assert her authentic self-hood as a woman and assert her identity. In Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and *Cry, the Peacock* too, we find this kind of self-assertion which culminates in a disaster. Violence here occurs as an expression of identity assertion. Maya pushes Gautama, her non-participating and callous husband over the parapet; Raka sets the forest on fire. Similar is Monisha's suicide in *Voices in the City*. Mukherjee's heroines, like Dimple and Tara too, assert the autonomy of their self through violence after dislocation. Mukherjee finds it necessary, perhaps inevitable in a female subjectivity negotiating dislocations. In her own words:

'My women are using tools at hand [...] I want to think that power is my central obsession.'⁸⁶

She encounters the horrific scenes of murder and violence in America where crime is the talk of the day, the rule of the land. It is in this pervasive ambience of crime that she becomes violent active, agile and reckless. She is glad that an elderly couple had been fatally shot on a fishing trip and for that she does not have to feel guilty about Amit. And even the mutilation of the dead body does not seem to jolt her.⁸⁷ As a pattern of behavior produced by the conflict within the personality, *Wife* portrays Dimple as a sensitive individual in her moment of intense struggle in her efforts to seek neurotic solutions to their problems.

Wife demonstrates what devastation a hostile culture can cause in a sensitive individual. Dimple suffers from the neurotic compulsion of indulging in abnormal acts in order to conceal her own sense of intrinsic weakness and failure. Her women characters are tantalized by the possibility of passion, which they mistake for love and self expression. America which appears to be a free land is in fact the enigma of existence of all Indian women. Here chances of survival depends on an immigrant's agility to embrace mutation before reaching out for an alternative space, translated transmitted and transmuted through violence and splitting.

Violence is the key word in Mukherjee's fiction, and the psychic violence that she thinks necessary for the transformation of character, is often emphasized by an accompanying physical conflict of some sort. For her 'murder evolves into an acceptable signifier for discarding nostalgia and starting over: It is neither the end nor even merely the means to an end it is a beginning.'⁸⁸ Dimple lacks adaptability, mutative readiness as

well as cultural grit of resistance. She is inert and caught in a suffocating inertia, dislodged from all valid space of survival strategies. Mukherjee says:

The kinds of women who attract me, who intrigue me, are those who are adaptable, we've all been trained to please, trained to be adaptable as wives and that adaptability is working to the women's advantage when we come over as immigrant. For an Indian woman to learn to drive, put on pants, cash cheques, is a big leap. They are exhilarated by that change.⁸⁹

With such exhilaration come fears, doubts, mistakes and violence, both psychological and physical. More and more through Mukherjee's novels, as the anxiety and uncertainties get overhauled in the frequency of action and activity, what is glossed over in terms of psychological torment is compressed into desperate violent acts. This enhances the stress of the aggressive moments when decisions and choices are made, and Mukherjee considers it a necessary experience for the remaking and replacement of the self in the changed domain of new immigrant aesthetic. When asked 'Do you see immigrant as an experience of reincarnation?' Mukherjee has answered, 'Absolutely! I have been murdered and reborn many more times, until she needs to murder in order to be reborn.'⁹⁰

The new births that are engendered by some violent fracturing of norms are accompanied by great pain, but Dimple is helplessly caught in the gripping quest for a new female American identity. That she finds another way out of her miserably married state is a comment on her new life as an immigrant woman in America, which moulds her personality into the shape of her future. It is possible, the murder itself may be ambiguous in many ways, but it is symbolic of Dimple's assertion of power at a critical juncture. It has freed her from becoming a prisoner of ghetto, unbearable to her free-thinking mind, and she descends into depression, madness and murder:

If "too American" signifies a politics and an ideology that affirms selfhood in particular, then it is quite certainly that Dimple is in the process of becoming. The violent transformations of her psyche are more dangerous because of these shrill protestations. There is simultaneous fracturing and evolving of identity going on here, in terms of both ethnicity and gender which is true of the experience of multiculturalism.⁹¹

Jasbir Jain, however, does not agree that *Wife* deals with cultural conflict. Dimple has never been able to relate herself to her tradition, or to understand it. All her actions are geared towards the future and this bespeaks of the main problem, the utter rootlessness of her life. For Dimple, there seems to be no way out; the distance covered cannot be retraced. She is an immigrant, both in place and mind, hers is the 'foreignness of spirit.'⁹² Bharati Mukherjee does say 'There isn't a rôle model for the Jasmynes' or the Dimples. They have to invent rôles, survive and revise as best as they can.'⁹³

While they survive and revise, they remain for a while suspended between two worlds, until they have to choose between them in order to find a space to inhabit. The New World, in which they must now 'intervene' and 'negotiate,' holds promise of a new selfhood as well as new battles against marginalization. Self-assertion, however, is a power that these women are only beginning to enjoy. The problem with the diasporic male is however different.

Amit's ideology and life-style confirm that he is a thorough-bred 'expatriate.' His mission in the United States is to earn money. He does not feel comfortable in the company of American guests in parties. So he often bounces back to the company of Meena and Jyoti Sen. But, Amit has a few strategies to survive in an alien culture. He has mastered the popular American catch phrases suggestive of challenge, crisis management and confrontation which help him to communicate with Americans very effectively. However, he does not show interest either in imbibing American culture or in contributing to American culture.

His dream is to return to India and settle down in a posh locality in Calcutta. Well steeped in 'expatriate' sensibility, he easily slips into the company of Indian 'expatriates' in Queens. From day one, Amit is worried about his job. He is quite oblivious of the culture in which he lives. His mindset has been well moulded by other 'expatriates' in Queens. Amit does not express any wonder or surprise at the enormity of America. He does not know how to interrogate or negotiate with American reality for cultural space.

Like any other Indian 'expatriate', he lives on the fringes of American society. Naturally, his experience in America is quite limited. It does not broaden his perspective and therefore it does not open up new avenues for him. He acts and reacts like an average 'expatriate.' He does not want to send Dimple for a job in Khanna's Emporium. As a male chauvinist, Amit snubs Dimple every time he gets an opportunity. Amit silences her whenever she expresses her curiosity about Americans. That is mainly responsible for turning Dimple inward.

Though Indian in origins, Ina, the prototypical American, does not typify blending or hybridity. Her Americanization is no longer a process but a practiced, negotiated and accepted fact. Her action is of pure balance between herself and America. Ina's theory replaces one with the other. According to Ina, total severance from the past is a precondition to assume an American identity. In the trans-cultural trajectory of the immigrants, the transformation is very often multidirectional. The immigrant's entry in to a foreign land is not to cause disruption; it is in another way to redefine one's nationness. She is terribly tossed in the conjunction of inclusion and exclusion, honour and humiliation. In a coercive condition of her being, her very existence is challenged. She does not know where she stands between respect and repudiation

And this process is not transgressive or corruptive; it implies post nation fluidity and change. As a new entrant from another culture, the conspicuous immigrant lands in to a conflictual space. This creates an existential stress highlighting the fissures in the process of assimilation. The patriarchy that Ina and Dimple experience is not simply that of the industrialized first world, they must also grapple with the ways in which they have been named by their own specific cultural context. Thus Mukherjee demonstrates the fact that women's subject positions are varied and multi-layered. So the Western feminist rhetoric cannot supply role models for 'Dimples' and 'Jasmines'.

Bharati Mukherjee concentrates on the individual eccentricities of her woman protagonists. While Tara Banerjee is more of an Indian girl, Dimple's character betrays an impatient and reckless trait. The end of *A Tiger's Daughter* leaves the reader guessing as to what might happen to Tara's fate, but in *Wife*, Dimple's mental abnormality leads her to kill her husband. 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?⁹⁴

In the U.S. she thinks of herself as some kind of non-human being like a 'bug'⁹⁵ after she has seen the screen of fantasy totally outraged. She feels as if she is instinctively

drawn towards some disastrous end. In the words of Linda Sandler she is a victim of the unanticipated inertia, exhaustion and the social void. Her subalternity is challenged and she strikes to unhinge it all:

Dimple suffers from a subterranean streak of violence. She is uprooted from her family and her familiar world is projected into a social vacuum where the media become her surrogate community, her global village. New York intensifies her frustration and unhooks her further from reality; she kills easily like a sleep walker.⁹⁶

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.⁹⁷

The act of killing Amit is thus, purely out of disappointment and dislocation from her imaginary world, it is out of her realization that she cannot achieve her American Dream either by having sex with an American or in marriage to Amit. By killing Amit she asserts her inner fury and the disappointments out of being neglected and

marginalized in a world dominated by phallic images and male endeavors —and her life had been devoted only to ‘pleasing others, not herself.’⁹⁸

Dimple’s predicament is not welcoming; it does not speak of any assimilation or acceptable chaos which Mukherjee may feel valid at her critical discourse on ethnicity and culture. Dimple is a maladroit immigrant and her world is a fragile one, a candle in the wind. She suffers from inertia out of several displacements. Her neurotic behavior is an expression of violence with sub-human components of her mirror image.

She is never Americanized, nor is she a thorough Indian. She is a victim of her own clumsy management of her grief. She is like a common Third World immigrant retaining her native components. By creating Dimple’s character Mukherjee probably insists that a passage to America is possible through assimilation and not by ethnic assertion to one’s root. Dimple’s sadistic upsurge reflects her disintegration into insanity. Janet M. Powers considers *Wife* and *Jasmine* as Mukherjee’s ‘sociopolitical critique’⁹⁹:

The multiple codes of Mukherjee’s novels expose both the paradoxical energy and emptiness of American society as well as the antithetical combination of flexibility and adherence to tradition displayed by Indian immigrants to the United States. Through dagger-like observations, Mukherjee’s characters comment on insanity of the lives they lead as Third World peoples adjusting to a fast-paced, mercenary society.¹⁰⁰

Neither coupled with a distinct culture, nor a hybrid one, Dimple is caged in an insulated isolation of such ‘mercenary society.’ She exists in the ambivalence of an unachieved transition, a middle ground between the fixed, disparate cultural identities of her immigrant community and the hybrid culture of the ideal America. Lacerated and agonized, Dimple has lost everything; she has only her fragmented and dislocated presence. She is neither of India nor of America but a bewildered drifter between these two worlds, not even in search of any identity which she may know herself. Neither does she belong to the TV world nor to the world of reality but keeps on shuttling between the two. She is yet to liberate herself from the world infested with vision. She is yet to get out of her schizophrenic self. A violent wandering nomad, repressed, out of joints and out of ethnic track, she is heading forward to no destination let alone the destination of her self-recovery: ‘The process of integration in *Wife* is the act of finding unity in the discursive indices of violence both within and exterior to Dimple, so that the final act of violence is seen to be isotopic.’¹⁰¹

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